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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Noel C. Fisher. *War at Every Door: Partisan Politics and Guerrilla Violence in East Tennessee, 1860-1869*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. ix + 239 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-2367-5.

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Noel C. Fisher abandons the more typical emphasis on conventional operations during the Civil War to open our eyes to an uglier side of the fighting. His book focuses on what he calls the second face of war, or the unorganized conflict between unionist and secessionist partisans who waged battles for dominion over East Tennessee. The book sheds light on the brutality endured by civilians in occupied zones and the frustrations of leaders on both sides who unsuccessfully tried to maintain order. The work also reflects a trend to re-examine the stereotypes of mountain people. And despite being a micro-study, its conclusions contain relevance for the broader Union and Confederacy, adding insight into an area that President Abraham Lincoln considered vital strategically and politically.

*War at Every Door* perhaps performs its biggest service in rooting violence in politics. Instead of treating bushwhacking solely as the product of mindless criminals for whom brutality may have been a way of life, Fisher links this activity to underlying political differences and internal squabbles that had plagued the region. In fact, much of the conflict grew out of antebellum roots between rival leaders and families. It may mislead to portray all violence as political or to define its patterns so that any act wears a rational face. To avoid this pitfall the author takes pains to distinguish among military, political, and criminal spheres of violence, although these definitions raise problems of their own. It is not easy to separate a political crime from a venal act. This is, however, a concern endemic whenever assessing the nature of crime and violence as political action. On the whole, Fisher is persuasive in his analysis and exercises due caution in pushing his evidence.

Fisher has organized his study in three chronological parts that span from the late antebellum period through early Reconstruction. First, he dissects the nature of unionism and roots it in the social-economic characteristics of East Tennessee. He then spends the next four chapters telling the story of the wartime occupations of Confederate and Union authorities. The book concludes with a chapter on the immediate postwar years, indicating how the war shaped the nature of the conflicts in Reconstruction. Its appendices include examples of his method, as well as a historiographical tour of interpretations of unionism in East Tennessee.

In the first section, the author advances familiar themes for understanding unionism yet does so with updated techniques and deep research that gives this study a fresh feeling. Men remaining loyal to the United States tended to be Whigs who survived the national breakup of their party. Studies of the Upper South lean on two-party politics as one of the key factors in keeping secession at bay. Daniel W. Crofts has taken this approach in his well researched *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (1989), which examines unionism in Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina. The two books are also close methodological cousins. Like Crofts, Fisher employs quantitative analysis of characteristics such as property ownership, slave owning, acreage of farms, and other census data to test their influence on voting patterns for Union and secession.

When revealing the complex character of the region, Fisher fits snugly with historians of Appalachia who are overturning notions of an isolated mountain folk struggling with poverty while resisting the lure of a market economy that brings outsiders into the region. East

Tennessee was an agriculturally diverse region featuring wheat, corn, hay, and silkworms. A majority of the household heads, or 57 percent, owned their own land in 1860. Manufacturing was on the increase and railroads had begun to penetrate the area. There were even slaveholders, although they constituted only one-tenth of the population. Preventing the area from resembling the Confederate states was a lack of staple crops, large-scale farms, and slaves. This depiction of the region as less isolated and more economically vibrant mirrors the conclusions of recent works, such as Kenneth Noe's *Southwest Virginia's Railroad: Modernization and the Sectional Crisis* (1994) and his edited volume with Shannon Wilson, *The Civil War in Appalachia: Collected Essays* (1997).

Thus the vote on secession brought into conflict two groups of people within the region who had long-standing, often hostile experiences with each other: Whigs who sought ties with the nation and a minority of slaveowners and their followers who favored the Confederacy. Fisher wisely resists explaining unionism as the result of a single cause, concluding that location of residence (town versus country), political party, and slaveowning played greater factors than class in forming the loyalties of civilians. Ultimately, they resisted joining the Confederacy because they resented the domination of planters, who seemed out to enslave all white men. Unionists in East Tennessee, for instance, did not appreciate that slaveholders tried to decide secession through the planter-dominated legislature rather than an elected convention. They also had lost their prominence in the state as the central and western sections developed. That unionists did not share the economic profile of the South made them suspicious of their plantation brethren.

When war came, it was inevitable that the two groups continued to confront each other as they pursued their separate ideological paths. The attempts by Confederate and then Union authorities to pacify the region only increased the conflict. The Confederacy entered the region first, with troops under Gen. Felix Zollicoffer. The general attempted to win over unionists to the Confederate cause by protecting property and limiting contact with soldiers. The conciliatory gloves came off, however, during the first elections, with repression growing as unionists helped Federal soldiers in a covert operation that burned bridges in the region in November 1861. Southern authorities responded with martial law and by executing four men whose bodies were left hanging by the bridges they helped to burn. This only resulted in chasing the violence more underground, with hangings, shootings, and robberies growing in intensity. In short,

nothing tamed the unionists, even when the Confederacy suspended the draft to calm tensions.

In this chaos, Fisher establishes order, indicating that the violence was neither shapeless nor senseless. East Tennessee guerrillas, he argues, fought for control of their homes and communities. They responded with any means they had to preserve these precious commodities. He also takes the mystery out of the bands by giving a composite of these partisan fighters. Groups were organized by community leaders or daring, ruthless people. Most of the men who participated were in their late 30s, married with two or more children, and owned either a farm or business. Union partisans tended to be a little younger, as well as small farmers, artisans, and laborers. More substantial landowners favored the Confederacy. To compile this profile, Fisher consulted records from provost marshals and arrests of political prisoners housed at the National Archives in Washington. He also provides detailed accounts of the murders and destruction of property that characterized this war of neighbors, as well as the nonviolent economic pressure applied by requiring loyalty oaths to conduct business.

When the Union army entered the region in 1863, with Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside in command, order remained elusive. Federal authorities used absolutely no conciliation with secessionists and the heavy hand prompted partisans to fight back. They had to. The Union had selected for national guard units the loyalists who in turn used their new-found power to commit reprisals on former secessionists. Revenge sparked revenge. The limited number of national officials assigned to the area ensured that violence could not be eliminated. After the war, the pattern continued. As Confederate soldiers returned home, they found themselves targets of unionists who used the courts to punish their neighbors.

Interestingly, Fisher concludes that the Union exercised less restraint than the Confederacy in administering East Tennessee. He bases this judgment on the lack of concern for moderation on the part of Federal authorities, indicated through the arrest records of political prisoners. It is murky whether Fisher believes the South deserves a better assessment for its treatment of civilians. If so, the timing of occupation may have been more crucial than any sensibilities of Confederate leaders. Federal authorities took over later in the war, long after conciliation had been abandoned as a valid policy with the Confederacy. The South tried to establish dominion over the area in the first twenty-eight months of the war, when many issues were still in doubt. Its leaders also

understood that they operated in a more hostile environment that required other approaches than force. Circumstances, more than attributes of decision-makers, likely contributed to the pattern of administration that Fisher observes. If the situations were reversed, it is hard to imagine Confederate officials acting any differently than their Federal counterparts.

Overall, this is a good, thorough analysis that leaves room for more study. The data that Fisher employs leads toward findings that suggest nonslaveholding, residency, and political participation formed the foundation of unionism. If voting records are one of the elements analyzed, it is hardly surprising that party activity will appear as an influence. The author did not factor cultural variables into his equations (something he recognizes) or treat class analysis as anything more than a rather wooden view of one's economic status, as opposed to the ideological components that support a certain kind

of identity and consciousness. The emphasis here remains more on traditional political activity—voting and party politics—than on political culture, religious identities, community traditions, or the pull of family. These are less major faults with the book than an indication that it performs one of the tasks of a fine first foray into new terrain: It suggests future areas to explore.

Persons interested in the war should add this book to their shelves. It is written with enough clarity to make it a possible selection for undergraduates in courses on the Civil War. And it helps round out our view of the nation's great tragedy.

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