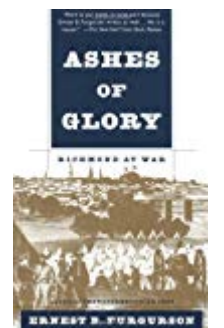


Ernest B. Furgurson. *Freedom Rising: Washington in the Civil War.* New York: Vintage, 2008. 496 pp. \$16.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-375-70409-3.



Ernest B. Furgurson. *Ashes of Glory: Richmond at War.* New York: Vintage, 2008. 464 pp. \$16.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-679-74660-7.



Reviewed by Michael Taylor

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Commissioned by Matthew E. Mason (Brigham Young University)

Within the pages of American history, there is not a story either as brutal or as noble as the Civil War. Throughout the country, families revel in the near-legendary tales of those who participated in famous battles, or who served with a notable commander, or who gave their lives either to the cause of independence or the preservation of union. Its battlefields have taken on the veneer of sacred places, a holy land in a civil religion where a country purged itself of evil and forged a cohesive destiny. On a scholarly level, it is a saga of ideals cut asunder by familial bloodletting, as well as being the one event that has spawned more in-

tellectual contemplation and interpretation than any other in the national collective conscience.

One of the scholars who has contributed to this body of work is Ernest B. Furgurson, whose two social histories covering the capital cities adds a new component to the study of this cataclysmic event. His bold narratives craft vivid pictures of two communities in desperate times fighting for their very survival and the political ideals their nations represented. With every turn of a page, the economic hardships, divided loyalties, and the ever-present threat of both humiliation and destruction at the hands of the enemy is made painfully real. When read in sequence,

these volumes tell a chilling tale not only of the death throes of a nation as envisioned by its founders but also of violent communal fratricide that would be long in healing.

In the first of the two books, *Freedom Rising*, Furgurson paints a portrait of the Union capital in a persistent state of tension, intrigue, and distrust. As with later historical periods when the United States was at war, during this conflict, xenophobia was pervasive, and loyalty was a badge of honor as well as a visceral weapon of sectional hatred from which no one was spared. The communal threads of this portrait are of intrigue and suspicion, woven together by ever-present military threat and vituperative political repercussions. It is this eerie presence that is ubiquitous throughout nearly every page. Perhaps, as the author explains, this was due to the fact that across the Potomac River lay the Confederacy, whose spies and sympathizers were numerous.

Yet the work of a national capital continued. The construction of the Capitol building, the symbol of the American nation and home to both the Senate and the House of Representatives, had begun during the Franklin Pierce administration under the supervision of Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, and continued throughout the war. Work was often stopped due to either the lack of manpower or the necessary building materials. After the calamitous Union loss at the first Battle of Bull Run, and with it the perception that a Confederate invasion was imminent, General George McClellan was convinced of the need to both arrest spies and to protect the commander in chief. As such, it was he who initiated the Secret Service and hired detective Alan Pinkerton as its initial chief. Finally, conducting a national election during wartime, especially during one of a fraternal nature, presented such a myriad of logistical and organizational difficulties that Washingtonian Francis Lieber remarked that if the country survived it, "I shall set it down as the most wonderful miracle in the whole history of events" (p. 333). The nation

not only endured the ordeal but also reelected its commander in chief Abraham Lincoln to a second term by a comfortable margin. But these are but a few fascinating stories among the many within this volume.

The most significant drawback in Furgurson's narrative of Civil War Washington is that there are two individuals who are left out of its tapestry: Associate Justice of the Supreme Court James Moore Wayne and Tennessee Senator Andrew Johnson, both Southerners who disagreed with their home states on the issue of secession and, when their states left the Union, remained at their posts within the Union government. The tale of Johnson during this period has been well documented, particularly in a 1989 biography by Hans Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography*. Johnson was later appointed military governor of Tennessee; and, as a demonstration of unity between Republicans and Democrats during wartime, was personally chosen by President Lincoln as his running mate in 1864. Yet few details of Johnson's exploits are mentioned in Furgurson's text.

The plight of Justice Wayne is a captivating story, the details of which are found in Alexander A. Lawrence's biography (*James Moore Wayne: Southern Unionist* [1943]), yet left out of this volume. Justice Wayne was a native of Savannah, Georgia, who had served the Court for over a quarter century when his state seceded. When the Confederate government was formed, other Southern justices, such as John Archibald Campbell, resigned, and it was believed that Wayne would follow suit. When he did not, the justice was reviled as a traitor by those of his home state and his property was subject to state seizure. When his son Henry Constantine Wayne was offered a high commission in the Confederate army, it was refused and further condemned the family in the eyes of fellow Southerners. However, Northerners remained suspicious and criticized the justice for having not "stood up for his state in her hour of trial."^[1] The fact that Wayne had rela-

tives on both sides of the conflict made him a suspect for espionage throughout the war. In the end, Justice Wayne kept his composure: "I expect to be misunderstood and misjudged, but I shall leave posterity to do me justice." [2] This was a fascinating story that belonged within the pages of any study of the federal capital during wartime.

Southern loyalists were consistently suspect as spies and continued to serve their adopted nation with dedication. Because of their heritage, they faced an unceasing barrage of insults, both in the press and behind their backs, and yet bore the burden of their decision with strength and character. The most potent examples of this circumstance were those of Justice Wayne and Vice President Johnson. Unfortunately for the reader, it was an aspect that Furgurson touched on only slightly without examples as commanding, and, as a result, the book is not as effective without them.

In the second of the two books, *Ashes of Glory*, Furgurson recounts a lurid and desperate tale of a proud community under the pervasive duress of economic hardship, shortages of essential items, and, later, a long military siege. With eloquence and sympathy, the author constructed a portrait of a community akin to a venerated dowager: in her youth a vibrant patrician with the world at her feet; at the close of her life, robbed of her riches, keepsakes, and memories; and, through it all, retained her elemental poise. More than the cause of independence, it is Richmond's pride in her traditions and her history that is at the heart of her survival, even after her citizens faced starvation and her buildings were reduced to rubble.

Again, through it all the necessary business of both a national and state capital continued. As a dual-capital in the midst of a large-scale war, the administration of both the Confederacy and the state of Virginia was omnipotent within the city limits. With every issue came long and heated debates in the Congress: keeping the military equipped, the manufacture of arms, the mainte-

nance of a navy, the management of several prisoner-of-war camps, and several others. There were also the domestic problems that come with shortages during wartime, the most acute being the shortage of comestibles, which led to the 1863 food riots, and to intense hostilities between the president of a nation and the mayor of a community. There was always vitriol concerning the deployment of human chattel, especially near the end of the war, to fight on the side of the Confederacy. With regard to this issue, Secretary of State R. M. T. Hunter wrote, in a searing note in protest, which in many ways got to the heart of the conflict itself: "This Government assumes the power to arm the slaves, which involves also the power of emancipation" (p. 308). And, finally, when General Robert E. Lee's defense of the capital city had weakened beyond effectiveness, there were the city's residents to evacuate, all refugees with little left to return to once the hostilities had ceased.

The most significant drawback in Furgurson's work on Civil War Richmond is that the narrative is inattentive toward what the author states is the primary subject. In the volume on the Union capital, the focus is so intense on the subject that the reader can envision the bustle of wartime Washington, replete with government officials doing the nation's business, soldiers defending the city and the country, spies inquiring for any and all information, and all of the other citizens plying their trades. With Richmond, perhaps due to it being the vital center of the Confederacy's fight for survival, the focus is scattered between the operation of government business, Union troop movements, the battles, and the political interplay of the commanding officers and politicians who wanted to be generals. Though filled with interesting stories well told, as a complete narrative the book lacks a strong thread to hold all the anecdotes together.

When the narratives of these books are placed side by side, the comparisons could not be more obvious: These two American capitals could

not coexist. As the result of fraternal war, Richmond faced the brutal realities of war in a manner unknown to the citizens of Washington who, though inconvenienced at times, maintained a certain level of similitude. Because the Union was forced to reshape and remake its military to the changing timbre of the war, its capital city remained flexible to changing winds of war; whereas Richmond, the proud bastion of Confederate civility, was as staid and proud as its president. Yet the hard hand of war leveled the city and forced the Confederacy into extinction because of its unyielding penchant toward chivalry as Ulysses S. Grant's army drained it of its lifeblood. In retrospect, perhaps it was the Union's early demoralizing losses that prepared the city for a long and brutal struggle, which, in turn, assured its survival. In tandem, the string of Confederate victories during the first two years of the conflict had created an air of invulnerability that ultimately made the shortages of the final two years so acute as to tear the sinews of the community apart.

Together, these two volumes only touch the surface of their shared subject; however, they provide a respectable introduction to the real cost of fraternal brotherhood. The American nation must be often reminded that the sinews that hold the country together were wrought through sacrifice of not just those on the battlefield but also those who survived on the home front and lived to tell the tale. It is their descendants who are the richer for the experience.

Notes

[1]. Alexander A. Lawrence, *James Moore Wayne: Southern Unionist* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943), 181.

[2]. *Ibid.*, 170.

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