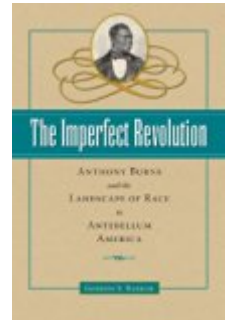
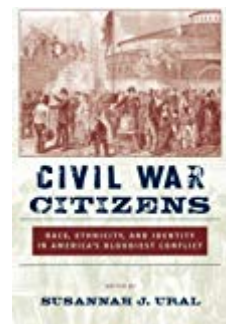


**Gordon S. Barker.** *The Imperfect Revolution: Anthony Burns and the Landscape of Race in Antebellum America.* Kent: Kent State University Press, 2010. 169 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-60635-069-0.



**Susannah J. Ural, ed..** *Civil War Citizens: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in America's Bloodiest Conflict.* New York: New York University Press, 2010. vii + 240 pp. \$23.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8147-8571-3.



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*The Imperfect Revolution* and *Civil War Citizens* aim to offer a more nuanced discussion of their respective subject matters. In *The Imperfect Revolution*, Gordon S. Barker introduces a host of complexities to the story of Anthony Burns, the fugitive who famously was returned to slavery after his recapture in Boston in 1854. Though the event has traditionally been used to highlight Northern ire about the Fugitive Slave Act, Barker surveys antebellum Boston and sees instead many elements at work in response to Anthony Burns's rendition. In 1860, 15 percent of the American population consisted of immigrants and non-whites, and *Civil War Citizens* recovers part of

their experience. The anthology of seven essays about underrepresented groups (ranging from German American Unionists to Jewish Confederates to Native Americans) focuses on how the experience of war was both like and unlike the broader Union and Confederate experiences. Like Barker with Anthony Burns, editor Susannah J. Ural insists that what is needed is not just additional information but more nuance and complexity. Taken together, these works succeed in challenging readers to expand interpretations of antebellum race relations and of Civil War-era identity.

Like Frederick Douglass, Burns--born into slavery in Virginia in 1834--learned to read as a youth and dreamed of escape. In early February of 1854, he stowed away on a ship bound for Boston. After nearly a month of hiding in a coffin-like space, he emerged to freedom there. But his freedom was short-lived. After his former master traveled north and facilitated his arrest, he was put on trial and ultimately marched through Boston in front of thousands of onlookers to a Virginia-bound ship. Burns did later find freedom, joining a vibrant African American community in Canada. Barker argues that Burns has been neglected, particularly in popular memory--his work opens with his story of trying to find out about Burns while visiting Boston and being directed instead to its Freedom Trail--and he clearly hopes to make Burns a more prominent, fully-rounded figure in African American and antislavery history. But Barker is also interested in the "landscape of race" in which his story played out, for even those who remember Burns, he feels, have erred in interpreting the significance of his story.

Barker takes issue with scholars who have pointed the Burns's return to slavery in 1854 as some kind of watershed moment where Bostonians, especially sensitive to their own Revolutionary heritage, were galvanized in opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law. Barker examines the responses of three main groups in the city: the Boston Vigilance Committee, the broader (white) community, and the African American population. He portrays the Boston Vigilance Committee (BVC) as divided over what course to take. Thomas Wentworth Higginson did indeed appear at the courthouse determined to free Burns, but some of the BVC were more concerned about the "socially disruptive, even anarchic" implications of their response (p. 32). African American leader Leonard Grimes's first attempt to collect funds to ransom Burns met with failure, and Barker derides Samuel Gridley Howe for not coming to Burns's aid but instead suggesting that Burns might have taken a stand against slavery by committing sui-

cide (p. 56). The broader community, too, was not entirely sympathetic. There were as many cheers as groans in the crowd that gathered to watch Burns being paraded through the streets of Boston, and newspapers like the *Boston Evening Transcript* advocated law and order instead of outrage about the Fugitive Slave Law. Boston's African American population, as well as the broader Northern black community, took note: the Burns moment furthered their sense that they needed "independent, unified action" (p. 61).

Whatever Boston's actual response, Virginia did not see ambivalence. Instead, its newspapers looked to the Burns affair as proof of the antislavery threat. Barker argues that many in the crowd had turned out merely to observe or participate in the spectacle, but Virginians did not see it this way. The *Enquirer* even published an outraged editorial titled "The Boston Riot--Southern Riots" while Burns was still at sea, bound for jail and ultimately the auction block (p. 70). Much was made of Garrison's burning of the Burns decision, but the lack of action by many in the Boston Vigilance Committee went unremarked upon (p. 81).

It is noteworthy that in regard to Virginians, Barker highlights *perception* rather than *reality*. His argument that Boston was not as much of an antislavery stronghold as we sometimes believe is quite compelling, and his work to resurrect the complicated response to the Burns affair is much needed. The Boston Vigilance Committee does indeed look lukewarm in its response to Burns--but some of these same folks would soon begin backing John Brown in his determination to make war on slavery, first in Kansas and then Virginia. Howe, who had refused to act for Burns, would become one of Brown's most important backers. The evolution of this admittedly small group of Bostonians is also a topic of interest, and I wonder if some of them like Howe later claimed that the Burns moment had been formative. Their perception of this moment's meaning, as much as the re-

ality of their response, may well have mattered in the growth of their antislavery militancy.

Perception as well as reality of group participation also continually appear in the rich essay collection *Civil War Citizens*. Stephen D. Engle highlights how the war context acted as a catalyst for Northern German Americans, raising their ethnic consciousness while also creating a stronger desire for inclusion in American life in the face of nativist derision. Andrea Mehrländer looks at Germans in the Confederacy. In addition to describing the military work of German Americans in Richmond, New Orleans, and Charleston, she focuses on how they conducted business with the Confederacy; desire for profit as well as patriotism drove many laborers, craftsmen, and merchants.

The anthology then turns to the Irish--their participation as well as its memory. Susannah Ural describes the diverse motivations of Northern Irish American Catholics for serving and *not* serving, particularly as the years passed and the Irish, despite widespread enlistment that produced high casualties (the Irish Brigade at Fredericksburg suffered a staggering 45 percent loss), continued to suffer prejudice and now also faced fears of labor competition with free African Americans (p. 116). Fears and resentment led to widespread Irish participation in the New York City draft riots, and Ural notes how counterproductive this proved, reinforcing negative assumptions about the Irish. David Gleeson, too, is interested in both Irish war effort and its memory. He describes how some Irish immigrants saw their own history as mirrored in the struggle of "Southern rebels." Despite the fame of some Irish recruits like Pat Cleburne (the "Stonewall of the West"), high desertion rates and a quick acceptance of Union occupation by Irish immigrants fueled prejudice against them (p. 136). Gleeson argues that the Irish devoted themselves to the Lost Cause in part to resurrect their own contribution to the war.

The final three essays shift focus somewhat away from immigrant communities to look at other "outside groups." Joseph Reidy traces the broader uphill battle that African Americans waged for citizenship in the context of the war. Robert Rosen highlights how Jewish Confederates accepted slavery and, as a result, were generally accepted by Southerners--more so than in the North, he argues. Judah Benjamin, the Jewish senator and slaveholder who ultimately served Jefferson Davis as secretary of state, demonstrates the ability of some Jews to hold high rank and gain prominence--though anti-Semitic slurs were employed holding him accountable for the Confederacy's failings. William McKee Evans looks at Native Americans in the war, particularly the wartime histories of the eastern and western Cherokee and the Lumbees of North Carolina; each chose accommodation or resistance to white power as they struggled to survive. One-fourth of the Cherokee population perished as the western Cherokee supplied forces to both sides. The eastern Cherokee--who sided with the Confederacy--fared only slightly better. They did not sustain such loss of life, but at war's end were not granted citizenship.

Particularly as it covers a diverse group of subjects, this anthology is much enriched by Susannah Ural's succinct introductory essay. She outlines two themes of the book as a whole--citizenship and the complexity of loyalties felt by each group--and her vision guides the reader to cull these from the collective work. In many cases the narrative is sad but familiar, as the groups struggled to claim citizenship in the face of prejudice, nativism, and even outright denial of citizenship rights. Like Barker's work on Anthony Burns, *Civil War Citizens* exposes the limits of nineteenth-century tolerance and commitment to equality.

(Ural, p.1)

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