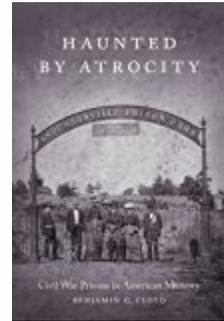


Benjamin G. Cloyd. *Haunted by Atrocity: Civil War Prisons in American Memory*. Making the Modern South Series. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010. Illustrations. xii + 251 pp. \$37.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-3641-6.

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## Struggling across the Deadline

As the Civil War drew to a close in 1865, thousands of prisoners streamed home from prisons North and South, victims of often haphazard systems that fostered both intentional cruelty and unintentional suffering. More than four hundred thousand soldiers endured captivity during the war, and nearly one-tenth of the soldiers who died during the war years breathed their last within the confines of a prison. Though most of the returning soldiers would mend physically, the question of what happened to them and their comrades, and how their experiences fit within the emerging interpretation of the colossal struggle, would weigh on their minds and those of generations after them.

Benjamin G. Cloyd's recent *Haunted by Atrocity* is a welcome and timely voice in the ongoing struggle to understand the memory of the Civil War. In a discussion that is dominated by models of either combat veteran memories transitioning into the postwar commemoration or ladies' societies navigating complex political waters through monuments to the fallen, Cloyd's book weaves a complex story that not only incorporates the difficulties of competing postwar narratives, but also adds the depth of a group of veterans that are frequently overlooked but whose often vitriolic responses had a lasting effect when other interpretations faded.

Focusing largely on Andersonville, *Haunted by Atrocity* examines the influence that the prison and its inmates' memories had on six distinct time periods. The

overarching story of the prisoner experience, ranging from the earliest weeks of the Civil War to the impending sesquicentennial, is one that remains controversial even as reconciliation movements dull the edge of post-war rhetoric. In addition to discussing an important yet often overlooked facet of the struggle to privilege certain memories, Cloyd's book also provides tangible evidence that some of the emotions generated by the Civil War remained extremely potent despite the passage of time.

Beginning with the genesis of the prisoner-exchange cartels, the author charts the prisoners' experiences in the first chapter. Cloyd shows that the burgeoning systems regarding prisoners of war quickly broke down under unanticipated pressures caused by the vast numbers of captured soldiers following the war's early battles. He also draws the reader's attention to the early charges of barbarism and atrocity, their uses in propaganda on both sides, and their effects on the psyches of the incarcerated soldiers.

Following this chapter on the war itself, Cloyd delves deeply into the growth of the memoir industry and its impact on the evolving interpretations of the conflict. During much of Reconstruction, virulent attacks on the South dominated the memory of the prisons, in particular with regard to Andersonville. The narrative was not completely one-sided, however, and Cloyd contrasts the overt vehemence of the Union veterans with their more quiet Confederate counterparts. The latter's recollections

ultimately set the stage for the drastic changes to the war's interpretation in the form of the Lost Cause narrative.

*Haunted by Atrocity's* next two chapters on the period between 1877 and 1914 differ significantly from the way many other treatises on Civil War memory interpret the rise of the Lost Cause. Whereas most works on this period emphasize a relative relaxation of the animosity that drove postwar politics, Cloyd shows that prisoner memoirs clung even more fervently to descriptions of barbaric captors and systems designed to torture or kill inmates. It was during this period, as well, that former Confederates began publishing prisoner-of-war memoirs. Equally as vehement as the accounts from Union veterans, the stories told by Southerners were also part of an effort to reclaim a status as equals within society and to lay claim to the memory of the war. As major commemorations occurred on former battlefields throughout the South that often featured former enemies coming together and posing for photographs, former captives from both sides joined in the telling of the Civil War by employing highly charged language and divisive rhetoric.

These chapters do conform, however, to the standard interpretation of the evolution of the war's memory in terms of the Emancipation narrative. Former prisoners often reacted violently to African American celebrations at sites like Andersonville. As Cloyd points out, these riots and physical altercations that broke out at numerous Memorial Day celebrations in the South as African Americans gathered to remember the sacrifices of Union soldiers who had languished and died in prisons eventually all but silenced the Emancipation narrative.

A final point discussed by Cloyd in these two chapters examines the question of commemoration at the prison sites. Veterans' groups placed thousands of monuments on fields stretching from the wilds of Texas to Gettysburg, yet few were met with such hostility as those of contested figures at former prison sites. Cloyd uses major points of controversy, such as the proposed monument to Henry Wirz, and the monument to the Confederate dead at Camp Chase, as bellwethers throughout the second chapter. He employs those monuments to show that the viewpoints of former prisoners had become increasingly disparate as the limits of reconciliation were stretched in that era, and living veterans of the war became even more firmly entrenched in maintaining the memories of their departed comrades. Since the general feeling of reconciliation and "shared recognition of what it meant to be a soldier" did not encompass the experiences of the pris-

oner of war, "the same factors that encouraged national reconciliation continued to promote discord in the specific instance of Civil War Prisons" (p. 109).

The last three chapters of *Haunted by Atrocity* explore the legacy of the prisons as their roles shifted in the twentieth century. One of the greatest changes that Cloyd explores is the decline of subjective, first-person accounts of the prisons in favor of more objective, historical analyses of the prison experience, as well as the rise of Civil War prisons in fiction. Historians came to use the prison experience, from both the small, firsthand accounts to commandants' and politicians' reflections, to exonerate numerous individuals and to portray many captors as average human beings, rather than as barbarians. Fiction could blur that line to an extent, as Cloyd illustrates through post-World War II stories that drew light parallels between such Civil War prisons as Andersonville and concentration camps. Largely, however, the discussion of captivity during the war, as well as the political machinations that influenced policies, entered a new phase in the twentieth century, which opened the door to new interpretations that precluded simplistic notions of cruelty for cruelty's sake as had been a hallmark of the discussion for decades.

As early as the late nineteenth century, prisons evolved into tourist sites as opposed to purely commemorative sites. Long before the last of the former prisoners of war died, sites such as Andersonville were included in local tourism schemes, and even Libby Prison was bought, dismantled, and reassembled in Chicago in the 1880s. Increasing exposure through more evenhanded media also helped spur the commodification of the former prison sites, which was crucial to generating mass exposure of the topic. But, after the twentieth century began, tourist attractions took on new meaning as many Americans grew increasingly more able to consume history via vacations. Even highly publicized and organized events, such as the Civil War Centennial, made attempts to create commodities associated with the sites. As the author points out, "a host of souvenir items, including tumblers, ashtrays, flags, cufflinks, cigarette lighters, key rings, bags, and cushions appeared during the Centennial" (p. 147).

This familiarity through novels, film, and historical works, coupled with deliberate efforts to woo the average tourist to heighten the understanding of the prisons, created a space where the traumas of the prisoner-of-war experience could be explored. With the vast numbers of men and women captured during combat in the twenti-

eth century, it became only logical that Andersonville, the most famous site on American soil, play host to the building of a National POW Museum and the creation of what the author calls the “triumph of patriotic memory” (p. 164). For Cloyd, the creation of the National POW Museum at Andersonville is the natural and logical “consequence of our accepting the objective memory of Civil War prisons,” and has transformed a site with a divisive past into a place and memory that is malleable enough to be used for true reconciliation and healing (p. 177). As the author explains in his conclusion, the memory of the war in terms of prisons and the experiences of captives was often divisive and brutal, much more so than the contests over the interpretation of the war as a whole. For Cloyd, the memory of Civil War prisons seems to be one that is currently less contested and more coherent, but the author acknowledges that, due to the transitory nature of memory, it will naturally change again.

The only problem that arises from Cloyd’s treatment of prisons in the Civil War and their memory worth mentioning is his seeming bias regarding some of the more modern descriptions of the various sites. While the author very clearly points out the traumas and political agendas motivating the writings of veterans, he has less patience for treatments of the subject that have come in the past approximately fifty years, particularly those that seek to exonerate or glorify the South. While it is clear that there are many amateur historians or

even simple “pro-Confederates” who attempt to rally behind maltreatment of Confederate prisoners in the North and to explain away the sufferings of Union prisoners in Southern prisons, Cloyd’s treatment of more recent books designed to capture the interest of a broad base implies a larger discomfort with some aspects of the site as a commodity. Compilations of prisoner-of-war stories are painted as sensationalistic and simply “crass opportunism” (p. 160). Although this may be true, Cloyd’s clear distaste for these works as well as other media seems to contrast with his general acceptance of the veterans producing similar materials.

Despite focusing largely on Andersonville, a fact acknowledged by the author in the introduction, *Haunted by Atrocity* succeeds in weaving context and complexity into a topic that needs more voices. Cloyd’s use of Andersonville as a case study provides an intriguing backdrop for the study of Civil War prisoners and their relationship to the contested memories of that conflict. This setting, both in terms of physical location and current monographs, makes this work an excellent tool for effectively comparing and contrasting the evolution of memories as they pertained to various aspects of the war. *Haunted by Atrocity* offers much food for thought regarding the way historians interpret the war’s effect on prisoners, soldiers, civilians, and society, and will surely cast a long shadow on the field of Civil War and memory.

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