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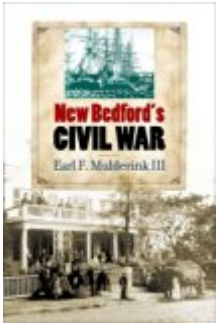
Earl F. Mulderink III. *New Bedford's Civil War.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2012. xii + 306 pp. $55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8232-4334-1.



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On the eve of the Civil War, leading residents of New Bedford, Massachusetts, viewed their city with pride as an example of New England's traditions of political democracy and religious freedom. Further, these elites claimed that as the capital of America's global whaling business, as well as a haven for one of the largest and significant African American communities, New Bedford was unique. These notions were born from a history of economic enterprise and racial toleration, which would go on to shape this community's civic identity of "patriotism, optimism, and egalitarianism during the Civil War" (p. 2). Earl F. Mulderink III's book, *New Bedford's Civil War*, is an insightful survey of the networks of capitalism and municipal organizations, the opportunities of antebellum African Americans, wartime patriotism, white citizen soldiers, African American wartime participation, social welfare practices, economic disruption, the rise of manufacturing, and finally the process of constructed collective memory after the Civil War.

The author's thesis, though not explicitly stated, details how historical memory is forged through private citizens' civic pride and commemoration of their city's contributions from the antebellum to the postbellum era. Through this thesis, Mulderink describes three aims of this study. First, he aims to contribute to the burgeoning field of "Civil War cities" and "city biographies" coined by historian J. Matthew Gallman.[1] Second, he strives to "connect the city's wartime experiences with longer-term patterns" in nineteenth-century American history, as suggested by historian Peter J. Parish in his work *The North and the Nation in the Era of the Civil War* (2003) (p. 3). Third, he wants to better understand the process that shaped wartime and postwar memory and subsequently saw the marginalization of the role of African Americans at home or on the battlefield, as discussed in David W. Blight's *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (2009) as well as Barbara A. Gannon's *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic* (2011).

This work follows in the wake of social historians who heeded the call of Maris A. Vinovskis by bringing greater focus to the Civil War's effect on local communities.[2] To accomplish this task, the author borrows from Thomas O'Connor's work, *Civil War Boston: Home Front & Battlefield* (1997) to look at "broadly construed communities within New Bedford," which he identifies as "economic elite," "political leaders," and the city's "African American residents" (p. 4). To best get at these groups, Mulderink looks at "four interrelated issues that remained central in the Civil War era," these being "economic change and challenge," "politics and policies," "racial dynamics," and "New Bedford's multiple [wartime] contributions" (p. 5). The book's introduction lays out his focus and inspirations while setting up the subsequent ten chapters that form five neat chronological/topical categories.

The first and second chapters describe the city's antebellum history, divided between white elite "enlightened governance" and the experiences of African Americans--both native free born and former fugitive slaves. Economic prosperity from whaling ventures, manufacturing, and capitalist networks allowed abolitionist leaning city leaders to undertake "enlightened governance" through public relief programs, benevolent institutions, free public libraries, and municipal infrastructure and welfare systems designed to aid the poor. As part of this enlightened governance, African Americans found economic opportunities, a church role in the community, and interracial support for increased antislavery agitation and militancy. While New Bedford's governance allowed for a degree of autonomy, tolerance, and opportunity, Mulderink points out that, "when viewed as a labor market, New Bedford was not appreciably better than other northern cities for black workers, despite its reputation as a haven for fugitive slaves" (p. 41). Despite this problem, New Bedford possessed one of the largest and politically significant African American communities in all of New England. This prominence and the agency of the African American community in New Bedford would follow through the Civil War into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The book's third and fourth chapters outline initial wartime mobilization and volunteerism among white citizen soldiers of New Bedford. Patriotism among New Bedford's citizens allowed the city to meet its manpower quotas with volunteers and bounties for substitutes. This is proven with ample statistical tables that detail the number of men and money that flowed into federal service. Like scholars W. J. Rorabaugh and John Robertson, Mulderink illustrates the diverse backgrounds and occupations that made up New Bedford's soldiers.[3] Based on this analysis, he confidently asserts that "New Bedford's soldiers reflected the society from which they came" (p. 85). Despite the patriotism of city leaders and volunteer soldiers, tension arose from conscription that was met with substantial preemptory actions on the part of the city's leaders. These efforts safeguarded the city's property and African America residents, which the author argues illustrates "the continuing solicitude by white leaders towards the city's African Americas" (p. 61).

Chapters 5 and 6 detail the role of New Bedford's black soldiers in the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts regiment and their attempts to obtain social welfare as a result of their sacrifices. Mulderink takes great pains to provide a near-complete telling of the experiences of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts, touching on other secondary sources, while also providing new insights into how wartime experiences would inform postwar behavior of black soldiers and their families. The author even notes that during the war, "New Bedford's enlistees in the Fifty-Fourth Regiment would acquire fame greater than the city's white solders as they fought for the Union" (p. 98). This fame was earned through heroic acts on the battlefield, as well as the barracks, where African American soldiers fought for equal pay and equal rights. These struggles for equality would also be

repeated on the home front, where the families of black soldiers sought to receive social welfare provisions equivalent to those of white soldiers' families.

The seventh and eighth chapters delve into economic change and municipal governance in the city during the war. The whaling industry, which had suffered from some instability during the antebellum period, suffered greatly during the war years, a victim of both Confederate raiding and Union naval policy. Capital naturally flowed into other industries, like manufacturing, that was spurned by antebellum capital networks. Municipal governance adjusted to new economic realities while also dealing with the strain imposed on it by social welfare practices. Public schooling, overseeing the poor, and fresh water programs were all forced to become more frugal, though they continued to operate relatively effectively during and after the war.

In chapters 9 and 10, Mulderink delves into the city's postbellum experiences. The transition from a whaling economy to that of an industrial manufacturing center changed the city's appearance, demographics, and economic prospects. Though new economic opportunities brought new fortunes, they also led to the worst aspects of industrialized centers: pollution, slums, and native/foreign-born conflicts. In the wake of these industrial growing pains, New Bedford's citizens sought to capture their city's antebellum and wartime glory through public and private commemorations. Typical of this era across the North, New Bedford staged many segregated celebrations to honor citizens' sacrifices. Veterans took it upon themselves to create a memory of their efforts in the war through the creation of private organizations, like the Grand Army of the Republic. This organization, though containing interracial members, usually staged segregated events and meetings. Over time, African Americans increasingly found themselves regarded as second-class members, requiring the black community to step forward and carry on the remembrance of its participation in the Civil War in its own way.

With the epilogue, the author takes the story up to the present with New Bedford's recent public commemorations that highlight the role of African Americans in the Civil War era. Mulderink points to these commemorations, "memory work," and other recent events to show optimism that the public memory of the war is beginning to gain an appreciation for the interracial sacrifices that won the war and ultimately agrees with Barbara A. Gannon's argument that the "won cause finally won" (p. 222).[4]

The author's methodology is effective in weaving together this complex tale of varying local communities, the home front, and the creation of postwar memory. Mulderink's work draws on the quantitative methods of New Social History that were pioneered by the works of Stephen Thernstrom (***Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City*** [1964]) and Theodore Hershberg (***Philadelphia: Work, Space, Family, and Group Experience in the 19th Century: Essays toward an Interdisciplinary History of the City*** [1981]). These quantitative methods allow the author to draw on diverse primary sources, such as newspapers, diaries, census figures, city directories, R. G. Dun credit reports, mayoral addresses, itemized budgets, Overseers of the Poor and military pension files, and other municipal documents. These primary sources are combined with an impressive bibliography of secondary sources that amply cover every topic the author references.

This book is clearly intended for a scholarly audience, with its broad primary and secondary source material, refined methodologies, and ample statistical analysis arranged in several tables. While some of the general public may be interested in the city's history and the diverse topics covered, the book's academic tone, pace, and intellectual rigor does not lend itself for widespread consumption. The only negative thing about this book

is that while the author is forthcoming about his methodology, aims, and sources, he never specifically spells out a central thesis to the work. The reader is thus left searching the footnotes and interspersed sentences to understand the author's thesis of the process of memory creation. That being said, this work will serve as a defining work on the history of New Bedford and will be invaluable for scholars and graduate students of the Northern home front, urban history, and postwar memory.

Notes

[1]. J. Matthew Gallman, ***Mastering Wartime: A Social History of Philadelphia during the Civil War*** (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); and J. Matthew Gallman, "Urban History and the American Civil War," ***Journal of Urban History*** 32, no. 4 (May 2006): 631-642.

[2]. Maris A. Vinovskis, "Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War? Some Preliminary Demographic Speculations," in ***Toward a Social History of the American Civil War: Exploratory Essays***, ed. Maris A. Vinovskis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1-30.

[3]. W. J. Rorabaugh, "Who Fought for the North in the Civil War? Concord Massachusetts, Enlistments," ***The Journal of American History*** 73, no. 3 (December 1986): 695-701; and John Robertson, "Re-enlistment Patterns of Civil War Soldiers," ***The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*** 32, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 15-35.

[4]. Barbara A.Gannon, ***The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic*** (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 200.

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