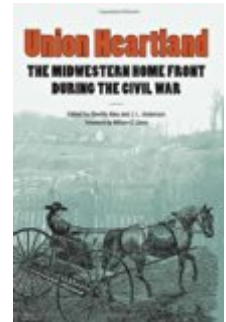


**Ginette Aley, J. L. Anderson, eds..** *Union Heartland: The Midwestern Home Front during the Civil War*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013. xiv + 196 pp. \$39.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8093-3264-9.



**Reviewed by** Lindsey Peterson

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**Commissioned by** Margaret Sankey (Air University)

In the foreword, William C. Davis states that “Rocky Mountain Civil War history remains largely an unplowed field,” but Ginette Aley and J. L. Anderson have progressed toward cultivating the rich Civil War history east of the Rocky Mountains (p. x). *Union Heartland* is an edited collection of seven essays on the war’s economic, social, and political impact on the lives of those living in the Midwest. The essays, varied in subject matter and approach, speak to the importance and uniqueness of the midwestern home front experience during the war.

Midwestern Civil War history, once overshadowed or altogether overlooked in the past by the tendency of historians and the public to focus on events in the eastern and western theaters of the war, has recently become a growing field. This is especially true concerning studies of the Northern home front. Previous scholarship has constructed a principal narrative in which regions in the North are undifferentiated, but the authors in *Union Heartland* convincingly present several counternarratives to this claim. They work from

the premise that “multiple Norths” with multiple experiences, one being the Midwest, existed during the war, and their assertion that these differences are worth studying is persuasive (p. 2).

Editors Aley and Anderson effectively establish the basis for the Midwest’s distinctiveness in the introduction, and the contributors reinforce this perspective throughout the essays. They argue that the Midwest was regionally different because it is where “North met South” (p. 4). Northerners and Southerners permeated the region, especially in such places as Indiana, bringing with them their past regional identities, cultures, and ideas. Additionally, it was overwhelmingly rural compared to New England and the mid-Atlantic states (88 percent rural-urban ratio to 63 percent). Furthermore, agricultural production in the Midwest was on the rise, exemplified by R. Douglas Hurt’s essay on the agricultural might of the region. In addition, several states within the Midwest, such as Iowa, achieved statehood relatively recently, and therefore residents had to struggle

to support the Union cause while simultaneously trying to develop and settle their own states.

One of *Union Heartland*'s strengths is its natural inclusion of midwestern women's voices. Three authors expressly focus on women's experiences on the home front. Aley's essay, "Inescapable Realities," is a counternarrative comparing rural women's wartime experiences with other Northern women's experiences on the home front. Aley finds that as Northern men left home and enlisted in Union armies, rural women became consumed with preserving their family unions as their husbands fought to preserve the federal Union. Family unions were not always maintained in the ways wives had hoped, however. Nicole Etcheson's essay "No Fit Wife" explores the overlooked issue of women's relationships with their mothers-in-law during the war. She argues that some husbands were able to maintain a level of control over their wives and families by requesting they move in with the husband's parents despite their wives' wishes. In his essay "The Vacant Chair on the Farm," Anderson, however, finds that women who remained on farms exercised tremendous control as farm managers, regardless of receiving aid from hired hands, in-laws, and neighbors.

Other essays likewise demonstrate the collection's diverse topics. Michael P. Gray, in "Captivating Captives," addresses local perceptions and treatment of Confederate prisoners being held at Johnson's Island in Ohio. Julie A Mujic, in "Ours Is the Harder Lot," explores University of Michigan students' defense of their decision not to enlist, which they described in sometimes more heroic terms than the soldiers actually serving. Finally, "Limiting Dissent in the Midwest" by Brett Barker examines the pervasive political dissent that occurred in the Midwest.

Aley and Anderson present a compelling collection of essays that introduces the Midwest as the "heartland" of the Union and further expands the historiographic discussion of the Northern

home front during the war. The *Union Heartland*'s emphasis on place signifies a shift in the way historians examine the Civil War, and more attention should be paid to the rich history of this region in the future. The diverse topics are well contextualized, and accessible, and will appeal to undergraduate and graduate students, as well as anyone interested in midwestern and Civil War studies.

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