

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**James J. Broomall.** *Private Confederacies: The Emotional Worlds of Southern Men as Citizens and Soldiers.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019. 240 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4696-5198-9; \$90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4696-4975-7.

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James J. Broomall brings a new form of analysis to Civil War historiography by drawing on methodologies of emotions history and gender history in order to better understand the mentalities and experiences of Confederate soldiers during the American Civil War. *Private Confederacies: The Emotional Worlds of Southern Men as Citizens and Soldiers* details how Confederate men, raised in the culture of the antebellum South that demanded men control their emotions and restrain themselves, struggled to comprehend the overwhelming emotional experiences of the Civil War. Broomhall argues that Confederate soldiers learned to cope with difficult wartime experiences through the creation of “emotional communities” of fellow soldiers on whom they could rely for support (p. 2). When the war ended with the defeat of the Confederacy, these Southern men recreated the emotional communities they had forged during the war through veteran reunions and paramilitary groups. Broomhall contends that Confederate veterans’ emotional responses to the Confederacy’s loss—their anger and resentment toward the Union victory and their nostalgia for the past—fueled their desire to restore a Southern social order that would reinforce white supremacy.

Chapter 1, “Words,” begins before the onset of the Civil War in order to establish how Southern men expressed their emotions and thoughts during the antebellum era. Broomhall relies heavily on diaries as a means of understanding the feelings and identities of his subjects. He contends that diaries are an important source for this research because they provided Southern men an avenue for free thought and expression. However, some readers may find Broomhall’s reliance on diaries problematic

due to his assumptions about the honesty of expression in these writings. Broomhall does acknowledge some of the shortcomings of his source base, and the examples he provides are compelling. Ultimately, the first chapter does an excellent job of setting up the narrative of the monograph.

Chapter 2, “Soldiers,” discusses the new environments Southern men faced when the war began. Broomhall argues that few historians have paid proper attention to the relationship between soldiers and their uniforms; he also argues that scholars have not fully considered the effects of the camps and fields on soldiers’ mentalities. He contends that uniforms, camps, and new living quarters all affected the emotions and identities of Confederate soldiers. The shared experiences of messes and regimental companies bonded soldiers, helping to create the emotional communities that would help Southern men survive the challenges of camps and battles.

Chapter 3,” details how Confederate soldiers responded to the battles of the war. There was no universal Confederate response to the horrors seen on the battlefield. Records of soldiers’ responses to battle, injury, and death demonstrate a mix of depression, anxiety, and uncertainty mixed with expressions of duty, honor, and ideology. This chapter provides numerous examples that demonstrate soldiers’ various attempts to capture the details of their experience. Broomhall highlights how some took on a detached tone to try to explain situations, while others expressed the impossibility of explaining what they had witnessed. As one soldier wrote, “You cannot imagine my feelings” (p. 83). Broomhall argues

that historians have paid far more attention to soldiers' behavior as a means of understanding how they reacted to battle, but he believes that more attention needs to be paid to expressions of emotion.

Chapter 4, "Demobilization," and chapter 5, "Reconstructions" discuss the end of the war and the transition Southern men went through as they grappled with the end of the Confederacy and changes in Southern society. Broomhall considers three entwined points, "soldiers' personal traumas, veterans' initial shift from soldier to citizen, and fluctuating notions of manliness seen at the war's close," as well as how men attempted to resolve these difficulties (p. 11). Broomhall discusses how the end of the war left Southern men feeling emotionally depleted and frustrated. Some returned home to resume their prewar lives peacefully while others lashed out, but the emotions the soldiers felt and expressed during the war did not simply vanish when it ended. The emotional communities created during the war remained strong, as seen in the creation of veterans' communities. Broomhall demonstrates that these communities became essential to veterans and provided them with a means of solace. These same communities also gave rise to the Lost Cause mythology.

Chapter 6, "Violence," discusses white Southerners' reactions to the collapse of the antebellum South's social

and racial order. The Confederacy's loss coupled with the possibility of black equality presented an enormous threat to white Southerners who wanted to reestablish the prewar Southern order. Broomhall argues that the Ku Klux Klan represented a new emotional community comprised of terror, fear, and anger. Analyzing the KKK as an emotional community provides a new means of understanding how members of the emotional communities of soldiers transitioned to new communities of enraged, violent men. Similar bonds of brotherhood that bound soldiers of the Confederacy together also brought members of the KKK together. The members of the KKK then used their hatred and racism as a means of regaining political power and control over labor.

Ultimately, *Private Confederacies* makes a strong case for the need to incorporate analyses of soldiers' emotions into the history of the American Civil War. Broomhall's discussions of the emotional communities of soldiers, veterans, and members of the KKK demonstrate how emotions history can provide greater insight into the bonds Southern men forged throughout the Civil War era. His analysis of the transition from citizen to soldier to veteran shows the wide variety of emotional responses to the war. These responses provide new depth and complexity to scholars' understanding of the culture of the Civil War and its aftermath.

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