



**Lawrence A. Kreiser Jr.** *Marketing the Blue and Gray: Newspaper Advertising and the American Civil War*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2019. 256 pp. \$47.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8071-7082-3.

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For decades, historians have rummaged newspapers to gauge how Civil War Americans reacted to wartime events. Yielding insights into the texture and rhythms of daily life, period newspapers have also furnished scholars with a rich archive of soldier correspondence, political speeches, election returns, and regimental resolutions—fodder for scholarship on loyalty, dissent, and soldier motivation. But while newspapers have long been a staple of our bibliographies, historians have paid virtually no attention to the advertisements that annexed pages of newsprint and column inches throughout the war. In Lawrence A. Kreiser Jr.'s able hands, newspaper advertisements are no “idle curiosity”; rather, they constitute a compelling new genre of evidence for historians seeking to illuminate how ordinary Americans lived, negotiated, and made sense of the nation's defining conflict (p. 16). In their tireless and often clever appeals to consumers, advertisers not only promoted “common bonds and national loyalty” but also “broadened participation in the contest” (pp. 163, 171).

With thousands of titles in print, newspapers were the “primary means of advertising during the mid-nineteenth century” (p. 1). Newspaper notices were ubiquitous, and “references to advertisements permeated the popular culture” of the mid-nineteenth century (p. 10). Based on a sample of

550 newspapers, trade journals, and periodicals that span the political spectrum as well as sectional, regional, and racial lines, Kreiser's book analyzes “how the Civil War influenced the practice of advertising,” as well as “how advertising influenced a particular aspect of the Civil War” (pp. 15-16).

The war's influence on advertising is the subject of the first two chapters, which make several salient points. First, the public's insatiable appetite for news from the front prompted some enterprising merchants to hawk their wares with war-related headlines—some real, some embroidered, and some invented from whole cloth. That advertisements often crowded the same columns as actual reporting made it all the more difficult for readers of nineteenth-century newspapers to distinguish fact from fancy.

Second, Northern and Southern merchants apprehended that good consumerism was good citizenship; they admonished readers to support “the cause” by supporting their businesses. Though “often overshadowed in the popular memory by the creation of a consumer culture during the late nineteenth century,” the advertisers recounted in Kreiser's book “influenced, and commercialized, the most turbulent domestic crisis in the nation's history” (p. 172). Touting the alleged “superiority” of regionally manufactured products, marketing

campaigns perpetuated stereotypes about the enemy even as they amplified sectional pride and patriotic expression.[1] Historians continue to debate whether secession and rebellion produced an authentic Confederate nationalism, but the author contributes a heretofore overlooked body of evidence to the conversation.[2] “Appeals to support regional merchants” not only reinforced notions of Southern independence but, much like Confederate iconography, also outlived the war itself (p. 43). As the proslavery exponent George Fitzhugh observed, advertisers “were in the vanguard of the effort to establish a Confederate nation” (p. 18).

The remaining chapters index the prodigious work of newspaper advertisements throughout the war. The appeals of marketing men “helped to expand American democracy by offering their readership access to almost every aspect of the Civil War” (p. 13). Advertisers recruited regiments and sold war bonds; hawked pills, purgatives, and prosthetics; and peddled the histories, lithographs, and maps that “helped northerners and southerners to visualize the sweep of the war and the role of their loved ones” in it (p. 53). Advertisements likewise did important political work: engaging the electorate, rallying support for candidates, and compelling “the parties to reduce their platforms to easily remembered slogans” (p. 87). Chapter 5 considers slavery and race, engaging with important scholarship by Jonathan Martin, John Hope Franklin, and Loren Schweninger, among others. The domestic slave trade persisted during the war; indeed, the raw commercialism put on display in notices for enslaved persons plied reformers with important evidence of slavery’s inhumanity.

Above all else, Civil War era newspaper advertising betrays the extent to which the conflict was a “shared experience” (p. 140). Nearly all professional historians acknowledge the mutual dependence of military campaigns and happenings behind the lines, but scholars have been sharply divided over the extent to which the war and its combat estranged soldiers and civilians. Gerald F.

Linderman (*Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* [1987]) and Steven J. Ramold (*Across the Divide: Union Soldiers View the Northern Home Front* [2014]) insist that a “gulf of experience” yawned between those who served and those who stayed, while others promote the idea that soldiers reflected their communities and remained connected to their families at home throughout the conflict (see, for example, Jonathan W. White’s *Midnight in America: Darkness, Sleep, and Dreams during the Civil War* [2017]). Advertisements, Kreiser insists, “blurred distinctions between the battlefield and the home front” (p. 139). They invited families to shield, comfort, and even insure their soldiers; to collect bounty claims and attend war lectures; and to make statements about the war and their patriotism through consumption. Notices for life insurance agents, manufacturers of prosthetic limbs, and undertakers alike ensured that the war’s human costs remained in full view of Civil War Americans (p. 156).

I routinely admonish students working on research projects to read period newspapers in their entirety; keyword searches yield a bounty of articles, but always unmoored from any context. After reading this most original book, I will humbly remind them that reading newspapers in their entirety also means combing the advertisements and commercial notices.

Kreiser leaves to other scholars a full accounting of the role played by advertising in sectional reconciliation and Civil War memory. One wonders, for instance, what a survey of advertising in veterans’ newspapers, periodicals, and reunion souvenirs might reveal. Nonetheless, he has identified a new category of sources and demonstrated how those materials might open new vistas on many old questions.

#### Notes

[1]. Kreiser’s book adds to our emerging understanding of how Civil War belligerents constructed

and maintained notions of the “enemy.” For important work on this subject, see also George C. Rable, *Damn Yankees! Demonization and Defiance in the Confederate South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015).

[2]. For an introduction to these debates, see Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War: How Popular Will, Nationalism, and Military Strategy Could Not Stave Off Defeat* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

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