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In a posthumously published study of her medical career, the famed founder of the American Red Cross, Clara Barton, described how her fellow American Civil War administering sisters toiled “in the rain and darkness ... with no thought of pride or glory, fame or praise or reward; hearts breaking with pity, faces bathed in tears and hands in blood” as they cared for the wounded, sick, and dying from the conflict's battlefields and in its hospital wards. “This is the side which history never shows,” she concluded (p. xvi). Ronald S. Coddington’s *Faces of Civil War Nurses* uses this key Barton quote to highlight precisely why this specific history, and female nursing experiences, deserves attention in wider Civil War studies. He does so by using a unique publication style, in keeping with his previous microscopic analysis of individual wartime groups. Following his “companion volumes—about Union soldiers, Confederate soldiers, African American soldiers and other participants, and sailors who served in the Union and Confederate navies”—*Faces of Civil War Nurses* seeks to answer Barton’s call by humanizing the conflict's bloody realities “through the stories and images of women who served, and, through their lives and military experiences” on the front lines, in field hospitals, and in health organizations between 1861 and 1865 (p. xi).

The result is an engaging outcome yet a difficult book to review academically. After a detailed preface laying out the remits of the monograph’s study, Coddington’s work is composed of seventy-seven mini-chapters, or "Profiles," centering on individual wartime nurses. Each profile chapter is a snapshot of their early lives, wartime service, and any postwar family and ongoing medical careers they had. Profile chapters range from a couple pages to sometimes six pages in length. This organization creates an effective book of biographies that the reader can dip in and out of rather than read conventionally. There are also clear methodological boundaries established; all those studied “attended to a wounded soldier on at least one occasion” (p. xxii). It goes without saying that they were all very brave women. As Coddington states, “no matter how any ... came to be part of
the military, all of them blazed their own trails to major seats of the war and, in some cases, the front lines” (p. x). Moreover, the reader is able to see these selected seventy-seven women, as “every story is illustrated with an original wartime photograph of the subject” (p. xi). Thus, being able to look at the nurses included in this work certainly adds a different and evocative layer of context.

However, there are immediate, and admittedly self-acknowledged, issues with this approach. Despite the preface informing the reader that the personal narratives are “representative stories of these intrepid women,” this book really should be titled *Faces of White Union Civil War Nurses* (pp. x-xi). Only three women come from the Confederacy, “underrepresented,” Coddington stresses, because “finding relevant photographs proved extremely challenging” (p. xxi). Furthermore, though the women “hailed from a variety of backgrounds” of class, education, family life, and age, and a majority lacked formal nursing and medical knowledge prior to their war service, they are all white. One unnamed Black nurse appears in the book’s frontispiece, described as “the only African American woman pictured in this volume.” While Coddington is honest in his acknowledgment of the book’s failure in this regard, and notes that he could not find any named images of Black wartime nurses, this “unrealized goal ... [to] include women of color who were documented as having cared for soldiers and sailors” is a noteworthy disappointment (p. xx).

Perhaps even more of an issue is Coddington’s admittance that, beyond the preface, he does not include references to two prominent African American female figures who also engaged in nursing alongside their other abolitionist and wartime actions: Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. To counter this, Coddington implies that he also does not reference Barton (save from the quote mentioned above). His reasoning is that these more famous figures pull focus from the individual, and mostly forgotten, figures under the book’s attention. On the other hand, this position is weakened by the fact that he does draw on the prominence of Superintendent of Army Nurses Dorothea L. Dix, who seemed to be an unavoidable figure on the nursing path that several of these case studies crossed. For instance, Melissa Catherine Vail Case was “brought ... back into action in the spring of 1864” by Dix, who requested Case’s nursing aid directly to help the war medical effort (p. 231). By its very nature, this omission of non-white figures—and even Confederate figures —does thus limit the overall biographical and analytical scope Coddington attempts. It also raises a question of whether the publisher could have pushed for more chapters and case studies, regardless of whether contemporary photograph images could be included, to rectify these shortcomings. At the very least, the book’s title is not fully representative (quite literally) of its content.

Beyond this limitation, the figures who do appear in *Faces of Civil War Nurses* are remarkable individuals and offer captivating primary source case studies that would be great for students to use in projects addressing wartime nursing realities. As Coddington makes clear at the start, “the dominant personal narratives” featured in the book are “stories of the caregivers” (p. xxiv). Elmina Maria Oltz Pierce Brainard is one such example, described as being “Michigan’s Florence Nightingale.” She earned the moniker from one of the state’s political leaders who spoke of her “ministering to our falling and fallen braves; speaking words of home, comfort and consolation to the dying soldier.” She was “eminently a Florence Nightingale” in her approach to her nursing duties (pp. 32-33). Dr. Arabella Loomis Macomber Reynolds was likewise compared to the famed British “Lady with the Lamp” nurse of the Crimean War, described by one contemporary as being “Our Nightingale” through her service (p. 93).

Helen Louise Gibson Osgood also no doubt suited this moniker. Coddington presents quotes from Sanitary Commission donor and fundraiser
Horace H. Furness, who described her field hospital care despite believing that “the battle-field is not the place for women” (p. 253). Gibson's demeanor was “never flustered, never complaining, always acting with impartiality, decision and promptness, she moves about ministering to all wants, introducing order and method where all was confusion; her hands never idle, her mind never resting, and her eyelids scarcely ever closing” (pp. 253-54). In particular, Gibson helped oversee medical wards at City Point, Virginia, including making it her personal “business to bring this hospital camp up to the same standards” as others, introducing “new policies to improve conditions” (p. 254). This was especially vital for the United States Colored Troops she administered to in their own segregated hospital wings, bringing down comparative mortality rates and guarding against attempts at medical discrimination. Described as “working by the flicker of candlelight,” she could easily be likened to Nightingale's approach (p. 255). This also echoed the image of a nurse depicted in Charles Graham Halpine's 1864 ballad “Our Lady of the Hospital,” written in praise of Civil War nurses administering care in the Union.

Other figures went beyond the field hospitals and tents, such as Dr. Mary Jane Safford, nicknamed “The Cairo Angel,” whose moniker was depicted on a carte de visite that called her one of “The Heroines of the Civil War” around 1864 (p. 64). In Belmont, Missouri, in November 1861, she was described as “a lone woman, holding aloft a makeshift flag of truce fashioned from a stick and a handkerchief,” and was seen distributing “supplies to the wounded and made them as comfortable as possible until medical personnel arrived to treat them” (p. 63). Despite being called “a one-woman relief agency,” at Belmont she was “accompanied by a man of color;” though Coddington is not clear if this was an enslaved man, nor does he dwell on this figure (pp. 63, 65). According to one eyewitness, Safford (and perhaps her accompanying figure) “came up with boat-load of sick and wounded soldiers who were taken to hospitals,” and she followed, “cooking all the while for them, dressing wounds, singing to them, and praying with them” (p. 67).

Before reading these case studies, it would be tempting to assume that all Civil War nurses were more like Mary Morris Husband. Her carte de visite image smiles out kindly at the reader on page 200. It fits with her description two pages later, from a contemporary medical journal writer, who described Husband as “blond, with fair hair and sunny laughing blue eyes” (p. 202). These gentle eyes looked on soldiers after Gettysburg (1863), the Overland Campaign (1864), and the fall of Richmond in April 1865. Likewise, Elizabeth B. Watton Smith, wife of President Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of the Interior Caleb B. Smith, was “known for extreme acts of kindness.” By using her own political influence, separate from her husband's, she organized “an ambitious plan” of relief effort to gather food and funds needed to feed Christmas dinner to twenty-five thousand Union sick and wounded soldiers and sailors (p. 139).

Yet the benevolence and generosity of these nurses are counterbalanced by the darker reality; for all the care they gave, these nursing and health relief workers also suffered personally and greatly. Safford is one of several women Coddington focuses on whose work took a significant physical and mental toll. Due to the war and what she witnessed, she suffered “a complete breakdown,” and the last thirty years of her post-conflict life remained affected by what she experienced in her mid-twenties (p. 67). Rosanna Moore Billing operated throughout the war-torn theater of Virginia, including being present for the infamous Union loss at the Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862, before going to work in the Navy School Hospital at Annapolis, Maryland. While there, “the long hours and emotional and physical strain” took a toll on her health, and she caught typhus by the Civil War's final months (p. 315). Billing suc-
cumbed within a fortnight after New Year’s 1865 at the age of thirty-two, showcasing that the conflict had many female victims too. Her death warranted commentary from Walt Whitman, who called Billing “a practical friend of soldiers, and nurse in the army” (p. 316). Coddington reports that Whitman also made a note of how one of her final requests was carried out upon her death: she was buried with the soldiers she had cared for with full military honors, and now rests in the Congressional Cemetery in Washington, DC.

While there is no broader historical and critical analysis of Civil War nursing in this book, and it lacks any concluding chapter, one could argue that this is not the central point of what Coddington presents here. This is more of a coffee-table book study of primary source examples, with any one of these women highlighting some of the overall themes and realities of American Civil War nursing through their own individual stories. As “the profiles are arranged according to a key date in which each woman’s central story revolves,” the profiles are accessible no matter which page the reader—or student engaging in some case study work—selects (p. xxiv). And the lack of a conclusion is not to say the book is devoid of overall arguments entirely; its culminating thoughts are just left to the reader to make using the example character profiles.

Nonetheless, one of the overarching themes is that of duty. Coddington observes in the preface that many of the seventy-seven women in the book held strong religious and faith beliefs, in keeping with how Christian commitment “anchored [transatlantic] nursing practices” and sanitary health commissions in the nineteenth century (p. xii). The postwar pen of nurse Sarah Elizabeth “Sallie” Dysart, who served principally in hospitals with the Twelfth Army Corps in Pennsylvania and Tennessee in the 1860s, sums up this mentality and conviction to administering service well: “Without courage one cannot be strong and without strength one cannot be courageous.”

Faces of Civil War Nurses is a testament to many engaging, selective examples of this history and the women’s bravery nursing in a conflict-ridden context.
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