

The Long Civil War: New Explorations of America's Enduring Conflict. Edited By John David Smith and Raymond Arsenault. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2021. Pp. 246. Hardcover, \$40.00.

In this new volume from the University Press of Kentucky, an arsenal of Civil War historians take on the challenge of defining (and re-defining) the boundaries of the “Long Civil War Era.” Editors John David Smith and Raymond Arsenault dedicate the work to Randall M. Miller, whose contributions to the field have ranged from histories of slavery and Reconstruction, religion, and the home front. Matching Professor Miller’s dedication to examining the depth and breadth of the field, volume contributors explore such diverse topics as abolition and colonization, soldier motivation and political rhetoric, the war’s historical legacy, and the memory of the conflict-- stretching as far as Dwight David Eisenhower and Walt Disney in their effort to show just how expansive the long Civil War era can be.

Alongside their desire to broaden the chronological scope of the Civil War Era, Smith and Arsenault seek to “chart the variety of uses of the Civil War in contemporary culture” (3). Their project, they argue, reflects how expanding the war’s temporal range helps historians to see “the maturation of its historiography” (50). The resulting ten essays therefore add historiographical significance to topics that were previously considered outside of the Civil War era framework. Summaries of three of the ten essays will serve as representative of the larger volume and its relevance to multiple, ongoing debates in the larger field of Civil War history.

Raymond Arsenault’s essay on Walt Disney’s historical films from 1946 to 1966 expand the history of the Civil War era into the realm of American Studies. In this twenty-year period, Arsenault writes, Disney hoped to gain some financial solvency for his ailing studio by producing films that presented an “imaginative form of popular history” (198). Eschewing historical complexity for

stories that imagined history as a boyhood adventure, and in pursuit of narratives that sounded notes of triumph, Disney avoided assigning winners and losers, leaving films such as *The Great Locomotive Chase* to depict both Union and Confederate soldiers as heroic and fighting for equally noble causes. Arsenault's work thus adds a new layer of understanding to the relationship between Civil War memory and popular culture, especially as they relate to ideology of reconciliation.

Paul A. Cimbala's essay on the officers who served in the US Army Veteran Reserve Corps (VRC) should be essential reading for military historians. Cimbala's treatment of the corps, which was composed of men who could not serve as enlisted soldiers due to injuries sustained in battle but were healthy enough to provide auxiliary support to Union armies, highlights the complicated politics that surrounded Civil War military service. Cimbala reveals an intriguing facet of the corps' duties that deserves further study: many of the VRC's officers remained in the army after the war and transitioned to work in the Freedman's Bureau during Reconstruction. These soldiers, Cimbala writes, "understood the war would not be over until they secured the fruits of victory" (66). This commitment to Reconstruction and emancipation set such officers apart from most of their comrades in arms, who did not embrace abolition readily (beyond its usefulness as a war measure) and identifies the VRC as a cohort to be taken seriously in studies of soldier politics and motivation.

In her timely essay on the political rhetoric of suicide in the antebellum South, Diane Miller Sommerville adds a new dimension to scholarship on the politics of disunion and the degree to which Americans experienced secession as a visceral and wrenching trauma. The essay is a reminder of the degree to which nineteenth-century Americans viewed their nation as an exceptional symbol of democracy and liberty—a topic receiving just consideration in a variety of new works. Sommerville, however, reminds readers that understanding how words functioned, and became freighted with extreme emotion, is critical to how historians explain how they were deployed. Suicide, Sommerville writes, connoted "irrationality," and emphasized the degree to which

Americans believed secession was an “illegitimate” response to Lincoln’s election (79). The fact that Confederates then chose to cast their eventual defeat as a martyrdom, rather than a suicide, Sommerville explains, contained the seeds of the Lost Cause ideology that proliferated after the conflict.

Essay collections present a unique challenge to readers and editors; achieving coherence of theme and quality across a range of authors is easier said than done. *The Long Civil War’s* broad and welcoming approach to what Civil War history has been, is currently, and can be in the future makes the volume worthwhile for almost any historian of the era. The collection celebrates the continued richness of a field undergoing a transformation in methodologies; for example, the era of memory studies (still well represented here) is giving way to histories of emotion, rhetoric, and trauma, while new studies of the war’s geographic boundaries, international aspects, and temporal scope continue to grow.

Though, on their surface, *The Long Civil War’s* contents do not immediately seem to cohere, the volume succeeds because of its breadth. Each essay can be read as an important stand-alone piece that has specific stakes in a particular historical conversation, and each of the volume’s authors should be commended for their clarity and concision. Taken as whole, the collection more than meets its defined objective: stretching the temporal boundaries of the Civil War and proving that when historians take a capacious view of Civil War history, the field is truly a vibrant and expanding intellectual space that can welcome an array of methodologies and perspectives.

Cecily N. Zander is a postdoctoral fellow at Southern Methodist University’s Center for Presidential History.