

Ronald S. Coddington, *Faces of the Civil War: An Album of Union Soldiers and Their Stories*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004. Pp. xxiv, 251, notes, references, index, acknowledgements. Cloth \$29.95)

In this handsome and humane Civil War book, Ronald S. Coddington, a “visual journalist,” presents from his collection 77 *cartes de visites*—playing card-sized photographs for which soldiers posed and then gave to their families, friends, and sweethearts. He includes with each image a biographical sketch as affecting as the soldier’s pose. Altogether, the results can be compelling.

In his Preface, Coddington tells the story of his life-long interest in these photographs. In the accompanying foreword, Michael Fellman provides a brief and instructive context for the collection that explains the beginnings of the “democratic, cheap, and popular” card picture and its development during the Civil War (xii). What follows are the images and the biographies. For example:

First Lt. Amos Rhoads, Company B, Seventh Pennsylvania Cavalry, in a photography by Matthew Brady, stood next to an ornate chair while his right hand held on to the back and his body slightly turned to his left. The sketch concentrates on Rhoads’ actions at Shelbyville, Tennessee. He and his men “advanced at a steady gallop . . . with sabers high in the air,” making no sound, according to a Confederate observer, “beyond the rumbling tattoo which their horses’ hoofs played upon the ground” (95). They drove the rebels out of their entrenched position and into a railway station in town. Rhoads pursued them, and was shot and killed. In the *Official Records*, his commander reported that Rhoads and his men “yielded up their lives as gallantly as ever soldiers fell in a cause” (97). Coddington opens and closes this narrative with a description of Rhoads’ wife, Anna, who accompanied his body back to Williamsport for burial. She was short of cash and stranded in Nashville, so Brig. Gen. Walter Whitaker arranged free transportation.

The book’s last *carte de visite*, also by Matthew Brady, shows Capt. George Decker, Company H, 143<sup>rd</sup> New York Infantry, seated proudly at an angle in his chair, with his left arm resting on the chair’s arm and his right hand fist planted on his right hip. His facial hair is a copy of Gen. Ambrose Burnside’s. He led his men valiantly in fourteen engagements, as the war “brought out the best in him” (209). But he also began drinking while in uniform, and continued after he returned home. In 1875, as his wife was about to leave him, he shot her in the head. He tried to shoot himself but the pistol failed,

so he cut his throat. She survived, but he was “determined to die” (210), and did. In such ways the photographs lead to stories not only about the war but to its after-effects.

Technically, the population of artifacts that Coddington found in flea markets and kept in an old cigar box does not constitute a random sample or a representative collective biography. He describes it as a “great diversity in war experience,” and asserts that his photographs are of men “wealthy and poor, educated and unschooled, American-born and immigrant, city slicker and country boy” (xviii). Those differences are present in his collection, but it should also be noted that nearly all the men were Union officers from eastern states who survived the war.

Coddington has worked from the photographs to track down the facts about the men. His sources are mainly disability pensions and military service records, regimental histories, and the *Official Records*. He quotes amply from pension applications that might contain debatable claims about war-related injuries or illnesses, but these applications probably contain the only first-person testimony that is recoverable.

As for the evidence in the photographs themselves, a scholar of Victorian visual culture and body language may draw inferences from the soldiers’ poses. One might think studio poses would have a limited range, but in this collection no two are exactly alike. Alan Trachtenberg did not take up *carte de visites* in his “Albums of War” chapter in *Reading American Photographs* (Hill and Wang, 1989), so perhaps, in addition to Coddington’s accomplishment here, we have an idea for another book.

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Joseph J. Ellis. *His Excellency: George Washington*. (New York: Albert A. Knopf, 2004. Pp. xiv, 320, notes, index. Cloth \$26.95.)

There has been an acute interest in the multidimensional career of George Washington since the 1980s. Unlike other acclaimed biographies of Washington, Ellis’s study presents a penetrating portrait and a synthesis of Washington’s lengthy and complex career. Chronologically and topically arranged, this pensive and fascinating biography contains a preface and seven detailed chapters. Ellis demonstrates how major themes concerning military