

Review: Review

Reviewed Work(s): What This Cruel War

Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War by Chandra Manning

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These qualms aside, *Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War* has several obvious strengths. It includes the drama of the period, especially when the homefront and military front converged. Moreover, it is an informative work that whets the appetite—a high compliment—for similar scholarly studies of Anabaptists and military service, especially prior to the twentieth century. Likewise, although the authors claim that the Civil War had no lasting impact on Mennonite identity, their book nevertheless sparks curiosity about Anabaptists during the period immediately after the war, about which very little has been written.

Thus, Lehman and Nolt contribute significantly to the growing body of scholarship on the homefront and religion during the Civil War and to increasingly sophisticated and scholarly Anabaptist studies. The book will be a great read during the coming Civil War sesquicentennial for all those interested in the homefront in general and the Anabaptist experience in particular.

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Chandra Manning. *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007. Pp. 350. Illustrations, notes, index. Cloth, \$26.95; Paper, \$15.95.)

Chandra Manning investigates what “ordinary soldiers thought about the relationship between slavery and the Civil War” (4). But in one of the most important recent books on the Civil War—it draws from the letters and diaries of over 1,100 Civil War soldiers, both U.S. and Confederate, and the regimental newspapers these soldiers edited—Manning shows us how slavery mattered in ways that have previously eluded scholars. Historians have long discussed the lives and minds of the Civil War’s common soldiers but have disagreed regarding the extent to which ideology and patriotism motivated these soldiers. In contrast to those historians who argue that community and group cohesion influenced the Civil War’s common soldiers more than ideas, Manning counters that the soldiers were “intensely ideological” (18). She also finds that soldiers

from both sides expressed fervent patriotism in the letters they wrote, but reports important differences between Union and Confederate patriotism.

Manning challenges historian Gary Gallagher's position that enthusiasm for the Confederacy transcended class divisions, as well as Paul Escott's contention that class conflict and Confederate patriotism worked at cross-purposes. In contrast, Manning asserts that soldiers' allegiance to the Confederacy derived from their belief that the Confederacy could better defend their families, which in turn depended upon protecting the South's hierarchical and slave-based social order. Slavery "served as the cement that held Confederates together," even among nonslave-holding Southern whites who held a very deep commitment to slavery (6). Despite becoming greatly dissatisfied with their government, soldiers proved willing to support the Confederacy so long as it could prevent white Southerners from being subject to a national authority headed by an antislavery president. The Confederacy, in short, was a union of self-interest.

Union soldiers' patriotism took them beyond self-interest, as they saw themselves as the world's stewards for "liberty, equality, and self-government" (6). Northern soldiers conceived of liberty in collective, rather than in individualistic, terms. They quickly recognized slavery's role in the struggle and embraced emancipation before their political leaders did. Union soldiers' distinctive patriotism stemmed from millennialism, which Manning sees as characterizing the antebellum North rather than being a religious doctrine confined to narrow bands of enthusiasts. African American soldiers responded to different ideological impetuses than did whites, as black soldiers saw in the war the possibility of a transformed nation that would recognize their humanity.

Manning places the development of Confederate and Union patriotism, and soldiers' attitudes toward slavery, within a broad Civil War narrative. White Union soldiers believed that the Emancipation Proclamation showed that the government finally recognized what they had known all along. Meanwhile, the Proclamation forced white Northerners to confront their complicity with slavery. And even as Confederates increasingly disliked their government's orchestrating of the war, Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation intensified Confederates' contempt for the Union. Confederate and Union soldiers' hopes of imminent victory waxed and waned in response to battlefield victories and defeats. When the war persisted longer than most contemporaries expected, soldiers on both sides confronted demoralization. Union soldiers survived demoralization better than Confederates did because

their self-transcending patriotism proved more resilient than Confederate patriotism. Yet Confederate soldiers' fear of emancipation countered their discouragement. Rebel resistance, for example, reasserted itself on the eve of Confederate collapse after the U.S. Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment in January 1865, with Confederate troops threatening desertion if blacks enlisted in the Confederate army. Accordingly, after the Confederate Congress enacted black enlistment, Confederate soldiers concluded that "the surrender of the war's purpose had already happened" and made Confederate defeat just a matter of time (211).

Manning builds her argument atop a historiographical structure that seldom enters her narrative but can be easily followed in her footnotes. She is most convincing regarding slavery's centrality to Union and Confederate soldiers' understanding of the war and of the differences between the two sides' opposing patriotisms. More open to contention, though, is her explanation of Union and Confederate differences, one rooted in a historiographical tradition that sees the pre-Civil War societies of both sections separated by a broad cultural gulf. To take one example, Manning depicts antebellum Southern revivalism as emphasizing personal conversion and salvation. In contrast, antebellum Northern revivalism spawned the belief in human perfectibility and launched radical reform movements, such as abolitionism and women's rights, which, Manning argues, characterized the North. White Southerners rejected such radicalism, which they expected would undermine slavery and the section's patriarchal social relations.

In depicting the antebellum North and South with broad strokes, Manning dismisses another historiographical tradition that looks beyond antebellum sectional differences and toward Americans' common past, language, constitution, and political system, and widespread embrace of Protestantism. Manning does not resolve this longstanding scholarly dispute, but interested readers can follow her thoughtful commentary in the footnotes. Readers less inclined to follow specialists' debates can enjoy her engaging narrative at no loss. This is a rare book that will long be required reading in graduate seminars while also enjoying a broad and popular readership.

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