

from the capitalism of a later era.

Wenger makes additional and major contributions with chapters on the iron industry and Rex's market trips to Philadelphia. She demonstrates that iron-furnace villages depended heavily on nearby storekeepers both to supply their workers with goods and to purchase meat for food; she also shows that the iron bars the iron works produced passed through the economy as a commodity currency. She sketches out more fully than any other scholar the way hinterland communities traded with Philadelphia. She follows Rex on a ten-day buying and selling trip to the city. Wagoners had to be hired, over two dozen city merchants dealt with to put together a return cargo, and agents employed to assure the sale of country produce (especially meat). In emphasizing the importance of butter to the city trade, Wenger reinforces our sense of the role of women as producers in the market economy.

Why was Rex, who retired a gentleman farmer, successful? His success was the result of help from his family, fluency in German and English, the security of the market at the iron furnaces, cultivation of personal relationships, attention to detail, and an ideal location. The moment did not last. Bypassed by the railroad, Shaefferstown retains even today some of the look of an eighteenth-century village.

Rutgers, *The State University of New Jersey*      PAUL G. E. CLEMENS

*Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789–1859.* By ELIZABETH R. VARON. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. 472 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$30.)

In *The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861* (1976), David Potter's magisterial treatment of the political events leading up to the Civil War, the author identified a "sinister dual quality" in American nationalism that reached a crisis in the 1850s when American expansion into Mexico came at the expense of American ideals. The issue that lay at the heart of this duality was slavery, of course, which for Potter emerged abruptly as a political issue only in the 1850s. In her book *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789–1859*, Elizabeth Varon picks up where Potter left off, extending his analysis backward and, significantly, expanding it outward to consider the social context that created a generation of Americans who had reached a linguistic consensus about the threat of disunion. In the half century leading up to the war, Varon argues, "Americans with rival political agendas . . . honed the art of casting their opponents as traitors bent on destroying the Union" (337–38).

In this very important book—the first in the Littlefield History of the Civil War series—Varon, professor of history at Temple University, explains that from

the nation's founding, Americans understood that the federal union was fragile; because of that, citizens engaged in a discourse of disunion, expressed as a fear as often as it was a threat. This war of words was always about slavery, and it reached a crescendo in the decade preceding the Civil War when Republicans began echoing the abolitionists' disunionist rhetoric and fire-eaters' dire predictions of the North's aggressive designs began to drown out the voices of Southern Unionists. By 1861, the "vocabulary of treason" had indeed become the "vernacular of the country," as one newspaper put it (14). Secession and the Civil War offered "linguistic clarity," among other things, to disunionists on both sides and brought an end to a half century of accusation and recrimination (337).

Or did it? Varon suggests that black leaders such as Frederick Douglass continued to employ disunionist language to express their anger over the betrayal of black civil rights. I would have liked to have seen this idea developed more, as it speaks to Varon's point about Southern nationalism, or the notion that white Southerners, nurtured as they were in U.S. civic religion, harbored a "deep ambivalence" about disunion—an ambivalence that was not as easy to shake off as fire-eaters would have liked (344). African Americans, too, negotiated an ambivalent nationalism, one that sought to keep alive the disunionist spirit until the nation could be remade in accordance with its own moral principles. The war did not resolve the dualism of black national identity, but what did it do for white Southerners? Perhaps the language of the Lost Cause did not *replace* disunionist talk so much as cover it up, for the latter occasionally resurfaces. On the day I began reading this book, for instance, Governor Rick Perry called on Texas legislators to consider whether the state should secede from the Union rather than accept money from the federal stimulus package. No one—least of all Perry—seems to have given the matter serious thought, but when reading Varon's book it's hard not to take words seriously.

Varon's is a balanced account, lending equal time to Southerners who stoked the fires of disunion as to Northerners. William Seward, for instance, shoulders his fair share of the blame for escalating the war of words, particularly in his 1858 Irrepressible Conflict speech, in which he dared Southern disunionists to live up to their words. When he later regretted having done so, his wife, Frances, set him straight. Indeed, women are never tangential to Varon's account. Her previous books focused on the South, but for *Disunion!* Varon immersed herself in local sources, weaving together the women of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, such as Sarah Mapps Douglass and the Forten sisters, local civil rights activists William Still and Robert Purvis, and Southerners such as Elizabeth Van Lew, the subject of her last book.

The book is well-written and carefully documented and will be imminently useful in undergraduate and graduate classrooms alike.

Villanova University

JUDITH GIESBERG