

Gender and the Sectional Conflict. By NINA SILBER. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. 144 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95.)

In a January 1863 letter to her soldier-husband, Sophia Buchanan demonstrated her support for the Union cause. Buchanan wrote that the American Civil War was “a matter of life & death, to the most glorious nation, the sun ever shone upon” (57). In *Gender and the Sectional Conflict*, Nina Silber considers the wartime experiences of individuals like Buchanan and analyzes the ways that the Civil War altered Union and Confederate women’s and men’s gendered relationship to the nation-state. This succinct synthesis of the current scholarship is a product of three lectures that Silber presented at Penn State’s Richards Civil War Era Center. Silber expands on LeeAnn Whites’s assertion that the Civil War precipitated a “crisis in gender relations” to examine further how distinctly sectional gender ideologies informed the ways that Southerners and Northerners imagined, prosecuted, and remembered the war (xii).

According to Silber, while white Confederates fought on their native ground to defend tangible homes and womenfolk, Unionists fought for abstract notions of “country” and “nation.” She argues that the Southerners’ melding of home and nation flowed from the slaveholding model of the agrarian patriarchal household, in which white men controlled women and white and black dependents. By contrast, Silber maintains that the Northern market-based gender ideology that distinguished the female domestic space from the male workplace set the stage for both male and female Unionists to “separate the private and the political” and to prioritize the nation over home (13). Thus, Southerners maintained traditional gender roles, while the separation of nation and home allowed Northerners to perceive women as being accountable for their own patriotism rather than simply following the politics of male kin.

Silber notes that Southern white women were central to the war effort, first as the focus of male protection and later because of their alleged unflagging patriotism in spite of hardships on the home front. When Union war boosters criticized Northern women for lacking their counterparts’ self-denial, Northern women asserted their personal allegiance to an abstract nation. As in her previous book, *Daughters of the Union*, Silber demonstrates that Northern women expressed their patriotism by participating in aid societies and nursing work, yet their relationship to the paternalistic nation-state remained ambiguous. In the war’s aftermath, Silber maintains, white Southern womanhood symbolized a reimagined genteel and benevolent prewar South, which helped to erase the brutality of slavery as both sides sought reconciliation.

Although the bulk of Silber’s argument rests on the experiences of literate white Northerners and Southerners, she does consider ways that African Americans mobilized gendered arguments to assert their patriotism and worthiness of citizenship. While she agrees with historians who place slavery at the cen-

ter of the sectional crisis, Silber believes that gender ideologies were also critical factors in creating sectionalism and in facilitating reconciliation. Silber discusses a wide range of subjects concisely, but her book's brevity leaves unanswered questions regarding topics like Confederate nationalism. Silber's informative footnotes, however, point the reader to key works for further perusal. This slim, readable volume is an excellent introduction to gender and the Civil War for scholars, students, and general readers.

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Nickelodeon City: Pittsburgh at the Movies, 1905–1929. By MICHAEL ARONSON. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008. 320 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$35.95.)

It has been a long time since I have so thoroughly enjoyed a work of film history. Film historians have a knack for either overtheorizing or overdetailing their books so as to render them virtually unreadable. Michael Aronson, who did his graduate work at the University of Pittsburgh and is currently an assistant professor of English at the University of Oregon, is intent on reaching a larger audience than the professoriate. That is not to say that there isn't a whole lot here for the scholar, but rather that the specialists aren't the only audience for whom this book is intended.

Nickelodeon City: Pittsburgh at the Movies, 1905–1929 works on several levels at once. It is one of the best local histories of Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania. But it is also a history of early twentieth-century urbanization and commercial amusements. By placing the nickelodeon in the larger context of accessible, affordable entertainments, Aronson enriches film history by extending its boundaries. We learn a great deal about the connections between nickel film theaters and dime museums, penny arcades, live theater, and vaudeville. We meet the entrepreneurs and the audiences. We see how films were advertised and stars were made. We are witnesses to the long, complicated battle between censors and exhibitors. We understand the critical interconnections between real estate transactions and the expansion of popular entertainments. And, through it all, we watch as a city—and its commercial amusements—grow together in the first decades of the last century.

Aronson is that rare creature: a prodigious researcher who knows how to write. There is neither an undocumented assertion nor a dull sentence in the entire book. Time and again, Aronson makes connections: between the local and the national, between exhibitors and distributors, between the entrepreneurs and their audiences. Each connection deepens and complicates our understanding of city life and of the history of film exhibition. The illustrations and graphics only