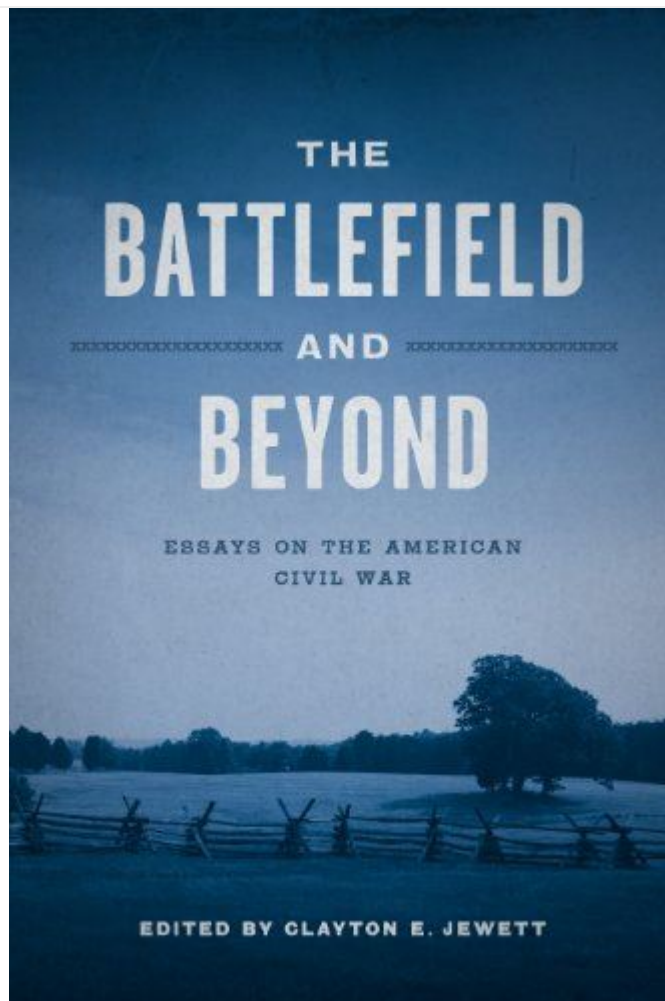


{essays in history}

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The Battlefield and Beyond: Essays on the American Civil War



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Reviewed Work(s)

The Battlefield and Beyond: Essays on the American Civil War. Edited by Clayton E. Jewett (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2012). Pp. 341. Cloth, \$47.50.

Over the century and a half since the Civil War began, scholars and lay writers have examined seemingly every aspect of the conflict. They have studied the careers of the war's famous figures, the perils faced by the ordinary soldiers of both sides, and the wider sociopolitical and economic factors of the struggle. Authors have debated the causes of the war, the reasons why the Confederacy lost, and the ultimate meaning of the Union's victory. Despite this voluminous scholarship, many aspects of the Civil War still remain unexplored altogether.

In *The Battlefield and Beyond: Essays on the American Civil War*, fifteen scholars provide insightful essays on topics ranging from the immediate racial, social, military, and political aspects of the conflict to the popular memory of the war in the postwar period. The essays are helpfully arranged by general topic, and while they disagree on some minor points, they still provide readers with cohesive, yet contrasting perspectives. As a whole, the collection reveals that certain topics related to the Civil War have yet to be adequately addressed, and that other subjects once thought to be exhausted perhaps need to be reexamined in the light of new sources and scholarship.

For example, the essays contain new insights on the oft-examined, crucial role of race in the Civil War. Orville Vernon Burton's and Jewett's articles allow readers to view the conflict from the perspective of two white slave owners, revealing that these slaveholders convinced themselves that their "property" was happy and content, and that the war was being waged over white liberty and constitutional principles, and not slavery. Leonne M. Hudson's essay shows that the extreme attachment whites felt to the slave system rendered General Lee's support for black troops problematic, and even when the Confederate Congress narrowly passed a bill that allowed enlistment of black soldiers, it failed to emancipate them. Bertram Wyatt-Brown demonstrates the role of

radical proslavery ideology and its accompanying code of honor in encouraging Booth to murder the president. Kenneth Nivison claims that Gettysburg emerged as the popular symbol of war and reconciliation precisely because no black troops participated in that battle. Finally, Emory Thomas explains that the Museum of the Confederacy's somewhat mistaken identification with racism and slavery has contributed to its current, bleak economic and political circumstances.

Similarly, the essays offer valuable arguments regarding Confederate leaders. Donald Sutherland stresses the tension within the southern high command, as some politicians joined with their constituents in calling for guerrilla warfare only to be denied by West-Point-trained leaders who abhorred the allegedly amoral nature of partisans. Herman Hattaway reveals the quiet competence of Lieutenant General Stephen D. Lee, Paul D. Escott offers a fair and balanced assessment of President Davis' leadership, and Judith F. Gentry shows that Kirby Smith was largely responsible for holding the Trans-Mississippi Department together and keeping its armies in the field.

The book's contributors also shed new light on northerners' relationship with the South. Michael J. Connolly demonstrates that there were southern sympathizers as far north as Maine, many of whom had profited from the slave system. David E. Kyvig argues that the South might have escaped without allowing black suffrage if it had quietly accepted the end of slavery and granted freedmen their civil rights, but that the former Confederates' intractability infuriated the North and helped encourage the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution. Finally, Alan M. Kraut shows how two famous Jewish immigrants identified with, and attempted to alleviate, the poverty and marginalization of the South's population.

Despite its considerable strengths, the book has some weaknesses. A few essays contain minor errors in detail; for example, one essay refers to "Lieutenant General Robert E. Lee" and "Lieutenant General Joseph E. Johnston," even though neither officer ever held that rank. Another essay mistakenly refers to Judah P. Benjamin as "the last Confederate Secretary of War." Benjamin was actually the last Confederate Secretary of State; John C. Breckinridge was the last Confederate Secretary of War. Even though numerous essays mention the extensive powers Jefferson Davis

delegated to Kirby Smith, none of them mention the fact that Smith appointed his own general officers when he felt that Richmond was not sending him enough qualified men to lead the army units he could barely maintain. A few of these alleged “generals” were later confirmed by the Confederate Congress, while most were not, and many received their fictitious rank shortly before the Trans-Mississippi troops surrendered. The book also has a few minor typographical errors, but these are surprisingly scarce, given the work’s large number of authors and wide variety of topics.

Although the book is fairly comprehensive in scope, like all essay collections, it is still limited in its coverage of certain aspects of the war. For example, almost none of the essays directly examine the role of gender during the war or the postwar period. Additionally, none of the works deal directly with the experiences of ordinary soldiers. While the book covers both sides of the war, it devotes more attention to the Confederacy and the postwar New South than it does to the North, Union leaders, or the United States as a whole. None of the authors examine the roles played by the opposing navies in the struggle. Finally, none of the essays directly discuss any aspect of the Reconstruction period beyond the pivotal political struggle over the Civil War Amendments.

These limitations notwithstanding, *The Battlefield and Beyond* is a valuable scholarly contribution to the knowledge of the American Civil War. It demonstrates the current state of scholarship on the conflict, explores the hidden depths behind the war’s primary sources and the public’s memory, and leaves fertile ground for further research. This accessible, well-organized collection is worth reading for students both of the Civil War period and the New South, as well as history students in general.

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