

Empire and Liberty: The Civil War and the West. Edited by Virginia Scharff (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015). Pp. 264. Cloth, \$34.95.

Virginia Scharff's edited collection of essays *Empire and Liberty* discusses two of the most important themes in nineteenth-century U.S. history, the American Civil War and westward expansion. In her introduction, Scharff argues that historian cannot fully understand the Civil War without addressing the important role the West played in the conflict. Likewise, they cannot understand the West without addressing the long-lasting effects the conflict had on the region and its peoples. The driving force behind the anthology is how "the problem of slavery and freedom" played out in the American West. "The nation's defining debates and battles over freedom, race, land, and the rights of individuals," Scharff writes, "took place amid, and because of, the territorial expansion of the American empire" (2).

Empire and Liberty is intended to serve as a companion piece to "The Civil War and the West" exhibit, which Scharff co-curated, at the Autry National Museum in Los Angeles. The book contains dozens of photographs including a handsome illustration section of seventeen objects from the exhibit in color plates. It is fascinating to get a taste of the Autry Center's extensive collection of visual and material culture which consists of territorial maps, sabers, rifles, cavalry bugles, Bowie knives, hand-stitched dresses, Navajo blankets, and paintings of Chinese railroad builders and Mexican laborers. The eleven essays collected in the volume employ primary material culled from the Autry Center in order to explore the Civil War and its complex legacy from the perspective of the nineteenth-century West. Taken together, they represent a concerted effort to place the American West into the larger national history of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras.

The essays in *Empire and Liberty* are loosely organized, using the books twin titular themes as a general framing device. Chapters two, three, and four analyze the neglected convergence between western empire-building and efforts to limit the expansion of slavery. John Mack Faragher contributes an insightful examination of the multi-faceted John C. Frémont. In his essay, Faragher reveals how Frémont, as a western pathfinder, declarer of emancipation in California, as commanding general of the Department of the West, and Republican presidential candidate who promised "free soil" and "free labor" in the western territories, served as both an agent of empire and an agent of liberty. In a similar vein, Jonathan Earle's excellent chapter on Bleeding Kansas gives a vivid account of the violent conflict between proslavery Missourians and antislavery advocates like the infamous John Brown. Earle effectively shows that although Brown and other antislavery zealots were willing to fight to the death for the cause of freedom, they cared little for the indigenous peoples they were displacing in order to establish permanent settlements along the Kansas frontier. Likewise, Durwood Ball presents a broad overview of the Union's western campaigns, demonstrating that the West offered a space for both the imperial conquest of indigenous peoples and the defeat of the Confederacy.

Kent Blansett's "When the Stars Fell From the Sky: The Cherokee Nation and the Autonomy of the Civil War" is one of *Empire and Liberty*'s true standouts. With care and

precision Blansett delves into the complicated relationship between slaveholding Cherokee leaders and the Confederacy. Examining the actions of chief Stand Watie, he shows how Watie and others decided to fight for the South in the hopes of defending both the institution of slavery and their right to exist as a sovereign nation. Along these same lines are essays by Daniel Lynch and Adam Arenson. Lynch examines the divided loyalties of Spanish-Mexican soldiers who used the Civil War as a way to demonstrate their newfound patriotism to the United States, while Arenson provides an in-depth reading of John Gast's famous 1872 painting *American Progress*, seeing it as a cultural artifact that projects both American freedom and American empire across the continent, while simultaneously picturing the West as a space of sectional reconciliation.

Chapters one, eight, nine, ten, and eleven offer more intimate stories, examining in detail how individuals and groups navigated the murky political, social, and cultural landscapes that defined the post-Civil War West. Brenda Stevenson uses bills of sale to recover the lives of slaves forced to move west with Southern slaveholders bound for Texas, while Maria Montoya explores the persistence of unfree labor practices in the Southwest into the twentieth century. Virginia Scharff tells the story of a Scottish immigrant named Janet McOmie Sherlock Smith who, despite losing both of her husbands, remained committed to carving out a life for her family in the mining boomtown of South Pass City, Wyoming. In their respective chapters, William Deverell and Jennifer Denetdale show how individuals invested emotional attachment in material objects as a means of both coping with the tragedies of the Civil War and maintaining their indigenous cultural heritage.

If there is one flaw in *Empire and Liberty* it is organization. While each piece addresses in some way how empire and liberty functioned in the West during the Civil War era, subheadings would have been useful in highlighting the thematic connections between essays. Still, each chapter presents its own rewards, telling engaging stories and presenting fascinating original source material from the Autry Center. As such, the anthology represents another effort in the broader scholarly project to reorient our spatial understanding of the nation's most brutal conflict.¹ In this sense, the volume achieves its intended goal of "creat[ing] a more capacious and complicated American story, told across a broader battlefield, moving in many directions, an ongoing story in which all Americans can find a place" (8). Lively and engaging, *Empire and Liberty* will be useful to experts, students, and lay readers alike.

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¹ See, for example, Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Stacey L. Smith, *Freedom's Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); and Adam Arenson and Andrew R. Graybill, eds., *Civil War Wests: Testing the Limits of the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

