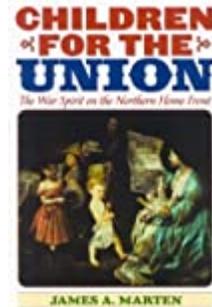




James Marten. *Children for the Union: The War Spirit of the Northern Home Front.* Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 2004. xi + 209 pp. \$26.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-56663-563-9.



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The Civil War and the Lives of Children

“The pain of leaving you here alone Is the sharpest pain I have; For I know you will never smile again, And no little boy will be nigh To wipe the tears on your cheek away, And whisper—’Dear mother, don’t cry!’

For the fear of death is past; But mother—oh, mother, you must not grieve, We’ll meet again by and by—. Where every tear shall be wiped away—Father, you, and I” (p. 62).

Using poetry, diaries, letters, games, and play, James Marten shows that the Civil War took its toll on everyone it touched, including children. As the above poem illustrates, the war left many children feeling responsible for the household while their fathers, uncles, and brothers were away fighting. Indeed, Marten points out that many of these men told their children that they were now in charge of the household and in some cases even wrote from the battlefield that not helping around the household made the rebels’ bullets come all that much closer. The poem also shows that great tragedy struck many of these households when not only the adult men of the house died, but also the young caretakers. Marten reminds us, “Northern children often had their first per-

sonal encounter with the death of a loved one during the Civil War” (p. 61). It is their reaction to these first encounters with both death and war that Marten addresses in this well-written installment in the American Childhood series that he edits.

Although the title of this work is *Children for the Union*, Marten also includes some supporting and contrasting examples of Southern children and their lives during the same period; however, by and large Marten sticks to Northern children because, like everyone else in the Union, they were not able to avoid the “war spirit” (p. 7). This was especially true as children received lessons about the war and their own behavior during the conflict everywhere, from letters home from their fighting relatives, to their schoolbooks, which incorporated lessons about the battles and the righteousness of the war. They even learned this from their churches and children’s magazines that “promoted the principles of hard work, obedience, generosity, humility, and piety; trumpeted the benefits of family cohesion; and furnished mild adventure stories, innocent entertainment, and instruction” (p. 17).

Racial lessons also played a large part in children's lives during the war. Marten points out that "[e]ven children's literature that was expressly abolitionist in outlook painted blacks as submissive and none too bright; they were nearly always caricatured victims rather than flesh-and-blood people" (pp. 19-20). Marten also shows how those in slavery, even in Border States like Missouri, suffered when their fathers and husbands went and fought for the Union while those they left behind were whipped, punished, and treated worse as a de-facto punishment for the service provided the Union by their male kin. White children watched and African-American children were included as African-American residents of southeastern Pennsylvania, "including the two or three hundred living in Gettysburg," were rounded up by Confederates and forcibly marched to Virginia as runaways even though many of them were not runaways but free. Marten argues convincingly that this took yet another psychic toll on all during the Civil War (p. 79).

Beyond these emotional lessons, Marten also focuses on children's direct service to the Union, both on the battlefield and through fundraising. Marten explores some of the child soldier stories, especially the Drummer boy myths, reminding readers of the filth, toil, and hardships, including death, that these young men faced. He also recalls for readers the sacrifices and work of children to help ensure that those fighting had the resources to do so. Most impressively in the list is the \$16,000 raised by "Sewell's army" by selling pictures of the Eagle "Old Abe" (p. 111). Likewise, through "Sanitary Fairs," chil-

dren and their adult counterparts raised funds for medical aid and supplies. These fairs were events in which the entire community participated, making everyone both acutely aware of the ongoing war and a direct participant in the relief efforts for the Union.

In his last and best chapter, "All Quiet Along the Potomac," Marten shows the extreme hardships children faced as a result of the war. A large number of children were orphaned, and many social programs were created to care for them. A great number of homeless children were shipped to asylums as there simply were not enough places to house them during the war. Finally, Marten reminds us that while children played war games with each other, or with paper dolls, or even with Milton Bradley's Myrioptican—the war was not a game. It left a scar on the entire population and, as Marten claims, set the psychological stage for many Americans, including future war hero and U.S. president Teddy Roosevelt, for many generations to come.

The book's greatest weakness is also what makes it such a compelling read: the lack of quantitative analysis. Marten does a good job with the cultural and social history of the era and even provides examples of the war's conspicuous absence from some children's diaries, but the reader is left wondering about the number of children not affected versus those who were clearly affected. Ultimately, this is a small concern, as the wealth of research in this work and the engaging narrative style make this work an exceptional reminder of the sacrifices and effects of the Civil War on the home front.

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