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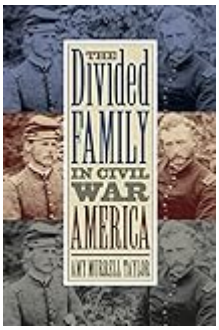

Amy Murrell Taylor. *The Divided Family in Civil War America.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. xiv + 319 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2969-1.

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More than Brother against Brother

Amy Murrell Taylor's study of the image and reality of divided families in Civil War America deals with profound questions: the sources and meaning of "loyalty," the connections between "public" and "private," and the knotty problem of "reconciliation." At the same time, Taylor deals with ordinary people confronting everyday concerns: generational tension, romantic conflict, and uncertain communication. This represents a pathbreaking academic study of the tremendously popular notion of a civil war that pitted "brother against brother." Taylor brings together literary images of "a house divided" and careful case studies of 166 white families in the border region whose gendered, generational, and racial divisions were cast into sharp relief–and often exacerbated–by opposing viewpoints on slavery, secession, and civil war. The end result is an extended meditation on the powerful metaphor–and the painful reality–of divided families during the American Civil War.

The family has long served as a metaphor for the nation. During the American Civil War, the image of the divided family became a metonym for a nation at war. Both in popular rhetoric about "a house divided" and in military policies that restricted the movement of family members (and even their letters) across sectional lines, Unionists and Confederates recognized the intimate connection between family relationships and political questions. The Civil War thus forced nineteenth-century Americans to see the distinction between the "private" sphere of the family and the "public" sphere of politics for what it was: a cultural construction rather than a lived reality. But, at the same time, Taylor argues, the Civil War only increased Americans' need to believe in this artificial dichotomy. Divided families, in particular, tried desperately to reify and reinforce the boundaries that separated private (familial) from public (political) matters. This served both practical and ideological purposes. By denying the connections between familial love and political loyalties, members of divided families defended their desire (and, in the case of "flag of truce" letters, increased their ability) to maintain kinship ties across military borders. In addition, as Taylor shows, casting political differences in "the more familiar lens of family conflict" (p. 5) both eased the divisions of the war years and enabled the reconciliations of the postwar era. By viewing secession and war in terms of generational

and gendered conflict, white Americans in the Civil War era managed to contain the explosive political divisions of the age, overlook the importance of race, and ignore both the presence of African Americans and the issue of slavery.

White Americans may have been successful in creating a "selective memory of the war ... that celebrated the reunion of a divided white population at the expense of a serious engagement with the status of African Americans" (p. 10), but they were unable to avoid dealing with divisions within their own families. One of Taylor's signal contributions is to call attention to the many forms of intrafamilial conflict that characterized the war years. The Civil War not only pitted brother against brother on the battlefields of the nation's first total war, it also set fathers against sons, husbands against wives, and brothers against sisters within the supposedly harmonious family unit. In one of the strongest chapters of the book, Taylor demonstrates that the political conflicts of sectionalism, secession, and civil war exacerbated the "generational fault lines" within families (p. 15). As Taylor astutely observes, "the Confederacy's call for independence meshed well with [young men's] desire for autonomy" (p. 20). While hotheaded border-region sons conflated Confederate loyalty with male coming-of-age, their overwhelmingly Unionist fathers attempted to downplay their Rebel offspring's political dissension as mere adolescent rebelliousness. Taylor explains: "If they accepted their sons' defection as an independent act of political conscience, then they would be acknowledging the outright rejection of their own political views. But if they attributed it to reckless and defiant behavior, ... it would be much easier to remain secure in their own position as fathers. The sons' action would still represent a serious betrayal, but a more familiar and manageable one: it was just another coming-of-age struggle set against the dramatic backdrop of war" (p. 19).

Taylor's analysis of divisions between lovers and siblings, while equally fascinating, is less convincing, perhaps because such conflicts involved both gendered and generational differences. While the most common pattern of conflict in romantic relationships seems to have involved Unionist men and Confederate women, Taylor does not discuss whether (or why) women, like young men, may have found Confederate ideology especially attractive. Likewise, while her discussion of sibling sectionalism offers fascinating insights into the strategies that family members used to reconcile political differences with familial affection, she does not address the question of age in this context, leaving it unclear whether the generational tensions between fathers and sons also existed between older siblings and younger siblings, or between mothers and daughters. Taylor focuses either on gender or on generation, rather than addressing the intersection of these categories. Using this approach, she finds that women frequently acted as mediators of conflict rather than representing "independent political views" (p. 41) and that (young) men were able to reconcile "brotherly affection" (p. 67) with oppositional politics.

Taylor's concluding discussion of African American families in the literature of reconciliation (both familial and national) likewise is less than fully satisfying, in part because the bulk of her sources (both published and unpublished) were written by whites who intentionally downplayed the importance of slavery and subordinated African Americans' family ties and political interests to their own. As Taylor remarks, "African Americans are a part of these stories of national reunion, but only as slaves, as willing and loyal enablers of the reconciliation of white people. They make reunion possible, but they are not reunited themselves" (p. 201). Nonetheless, in their own writings, black authors made use of the nation-as-family metaphor, calling for black Americans' "full and complete adoption in the great national family of America," a divinely ordained institution in which "there is no discrimination" (p. 207).

Amy Murrell Taylor's *The Divided Family in Civil War America* may not be the last word on this topic, but it is an important and insightful study of a frequently invoked but often oversimplified subject. It is essential reading for scholars of nineteenth-century America, southern history, and the Civil War.

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