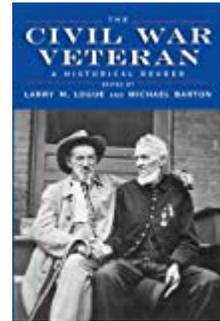




Larry M. Logue, Michael Barton, eds. *The Civil War Veteran: A Historical Reader*. New York: New York University Press, 2007. ix + 457 pp. \$26.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8147-5204-3; \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-5203-6.



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The Difficult Road to Peace

When the guns fell silent at Appomattox and other sites of Confederate surrender to the Union Army, the Civil War was technically over. The Confederates were paroled and headed home, penniless and hungry in their threadbare clothing. The Union Army was hastily marched to Washington, D.C., to parade in the Grand Review. But the vast majority of those men were broke, some not having been paid for more than one year. The Union Army had a plan to muster out its soldiers; the Confederates did not even have a government, much less a plan to return surviving soldiers to peaceful civilian life. It is at that point that Larry M. Logue and Michael Barton pick up the fate of the Civil War veterans.

The editors have collected a wide range of essays from various disciplines to allow the reader to understand the “rich variety of attitudes, circumstances, and behaviors that historians and other scholars have found among the Civil War veterans” (p. 2). As Logue and Barton explain, “the veterans shared a profoundly important event, but the rest of their lives followed courses determined by a host of circumstances” (p. 5). It is the host of circumstances that *The Civil War Veteran* explores. The book is

divided into five parts, each focusing on a particular stage in the readjustment to civilian life. Many of the essays could be placed in more than one part, but the arrangement that Logue and Barton chose works well and creates a flow into the next stage of veterans’ experiences.

The first section, “Transition to Peace,” reviews the means and methods used by returning soldiers. The systematic method used by the Union Army is well presented in Dixon Wecter’s “By Rail and Boat.” Barton in “Did the Confederacy Change Southern Soldiers?” and Gaines M. Foster in “Ghost Dance” trace the dangers and psychological fears of Confederates on the trek home and the months following the war. Foster focuses on the fear that the “Confederate dead were more powerful and awesome than the survivors of the war” (p. 51). Both Barton and Foster emphasize the psychological aspects of the losing side, a problem that received little or no attention at the time. Only William B. Holberton in his “Confederate Demobilization” seems to miss the point. His essay would have contributed a much more valid portrayal of the event if he had used more diaries and contemporary newspaper sources.

The second section, "Problems of Readjustment," presents some excellent research into the physical, social, and psychological problems returning veterans experienced. The scourge of drug addiction, alcoholism, mental instability, criminal activities, and posttraumatic stress are seen through the eyes of the prevailing means of treatment in the context of the late nineteenth century. Additional problems faced the United States Colored Troops (USCT) when they applied for assistance; problems that reflect the dehumanization of slavery, such as name changes, lack of documentation, racism, and opposition or apathy on the part of white Union and Confederate veterans.

The next section, "Governments Provide Aid," looks more to the North than the South, reflecting the movement in the North to provide a safety net for veterans. While native born white veterans in the North received more aid with fewer hurdles, the section also looks at the problems facing immigrants and African Americans. Racist and nativist politics played an important role in determining the relative ease with which Union veterans received social, financial, and occupational aid. In the South, honor was considered more important than charity, a guise used by the Democratic Party in the South to avoid expending large sums of money to aid veterans.

The fourth section, "Veterans Fight Their Own Battles," is the most interesting part of the book. Union veterans were not long in realizing that organizing as a united front was to their advantage in finding jobs, receiving needed medical treatment, and dealing with other aspects of their return to civilian life. The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) provided that political leverage for countless veterans, even for those Southerners who had fled behind the Union lines to join the United States Army. Yet, the GAR was class oriented and local groups were formed on the basis of social standing. Racism entered into the picture as the USCT tried to join the GAR. Once again, specters of class and racism raised their ugly heads. In the South, the United Confederate Veterans were late in organizing but quickly made up for lost time. David H. Donald adequately covers the so-called Southern trauma created by the experience of defeat and the ending of slavery leading to Jim Crow laws that by 1890 had pervaded not only the South but had crept into the North. His summary of white supremacy and its negative

connotations should be required reading for all students studying the history of the late nineteenth century.

The fourth section blends well into the last part, "Veterans Shape the Collective Memory," an interesting account of the beginning of many patriotic customs so venerated by the conservative right movement of the early twenty-first century. These essays focus on the memory that white Union, USCT, and Confederate veterans wanted to leave for their descendents. Each group insisted that their memory of the events at mid-century be correctly recorded, even though the three sides were never in agreement. It was the Union movement that encouraged avid patriotism and memorials for white soldiers, regardless of rant. It was the Confederates that insisted on an educational curriculum that recorded the legitimacy of secession and negated the emancipation of slavery. And it was the African Americans who faced the most adversaries and hurdles to their memory. W. Fitzhugh Brundage sums up the importance of memory when he writes that "the fleeting character of memory demands the continuous creation and re-creation of a sense of the past; no enduring social memory can be entirely static" (p. 436).

The book lacks in few areas. One is a more thorough examination of Reconstruction-era violence that occurred in the South ushering in Radical Reconstruction by Congress. It was this violent period that predicated the Southern trauma that Donald so capably describes. Another area that seems to always be forgotten concerns the Unionists of the South during the war and the fate they met after the war. Large numbers of Union sympathizers were scattered from Virginia to Texas and fled to areas where they could join the Union Army. It was the unparalleled violent treatment and abuse that they received even after the war that needs to be told.

The Civil War Veteran: A Historical Reader presents the origin of many longstanding problems in the United States today. In addressing the issues of class, racism, and nativism in the context of the late nineteenth century and Civil War veterans, the authors and editors have shown that many of the problems following the war remain unresolved. As the title suggests, this is a very readable choice for the lay person as well as the undergraduate student.

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