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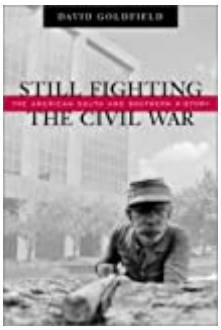

David Goldfield. *Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern History.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002. xiii + 354 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-2758-2.

Reviewed by Bruce E. Baker (Department of History, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

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Are We Still Fighting the Civil War?

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The title of David Goldfield's latest book leaves little question as to its subject: *Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern History* takes off from the perennial question of why southerners care so much about history–at least that portion between 1861 and 1865–and how that has affected them and their region. To address this question, Goldfield leads the reader through a good synthesis of much of the best recent work on the history of the South from 1865 to the immediate past. As the author of a U.S. history textbook, Goldfield is well prepared for the task. He moves easily from summaries of the secondary literature on a variety of topics and expository paragraphs explaining how these works fit into his framework of southern history. Goldfield's summaries do an admirable job of boiling down complex works to their essence and retelling them in a very readable style without obscuring the arguments at stake.

The first chapter of *Still Fighting the Civil War* lays out briefly the history of the Civil War and Reconstruction and the rise of the Lost Cause interpretation of those events. In the second half of this chapter and in chapters 2 and 3, Goldfield explains the stranglehold that the Lost Cause quickly gained on white southern minds in terms of religion and orthodoxy. This approach follows one of the landmark works in the study of the Lost Cause, Charles Reagan Wilson's 1980 *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920.*[1] The broad sweep of chapter 2, moving from the original antislavery stance of evangelical denominations in the South through their support for slavery to their interpretation of the Civil War as a "blessed defeat" all the way to the role of the white and black church in the modern civil rights movement, provides a context for Goldfield's more detailed discussion in chapter 3 of how religion and historical orthodoxy worked hand-in-hand. Goldfield argues effectively that once southern history got tangled up with religion, changing one's views about history involved also changing one's views about religion. This insight is not entirely new, but Goldfield argues and explains it particularly well here.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are about women in the South. Chapter 4 traces the effects of the Civil War and Reconstruction on women's lives and gender relations in the

South, touching on the ways that women's expanding roles began to include taking care of historical matters. Chapter 5 follows women's public activities from church work to the Women's Christian Temperance Union to a whole constellation of reform activities. Chapter 6 begins after World War II and discusses women's roles in the civil rights movement and the women's liberation movement, going all the way up to the controversy over female cadets at The Citadel in South Carolina.

Chapter 7 turns from gender back to race, giving a quick summary of racism from slavery through the nadir period to the beginning of systematic attacks on Jim Crow by the NAACP. Two chapters are devoted to the civil rights movement and what it accomplished. Chapter 8 casts the civil rights movement as a moral crusade by which African Americans, and a few enlightened whites, saved the South from the effects of its misrepresentation of its history. The deep changes in southern politics and society that unfolded after the mid-1960s, however, have often been stalled, detoured, or hijacked by reactionary forces still mired in the old understanding of the South's history. Two final chapters survey the contemporary South and draw conclusions. Chapter 10 quotes polling data and newspaper stories to assess the current state of race relations in the South. The book's final chapter turns from relations between the races in the South to relations between Southerners and Northerners in the South, the rise of neo-Confederate groups, and the potential for the South to eventually tell its own history better.

The huge quantity of information covered in this book makes a certain level of generalization necessary, but specialists may get a bit queasy as they hurtle past some of these statements without the intellectual reassurance of some sort of equivocation or qualification. To state baldly that "It is still difficult to dissent in the South, and being outside evangelical Protestantism is a *de facto* dissent" (p. 86) or "Southern women have been feminists all along; they just have shown it more discreetly" (p. 186) may convey a certain truth in an economical form, but it is unfortunate that some of the author's cogent discussions are tagged with statements such as these. While memorable, they do a disservice to the wealth of excellent secondary literature being synthesized and diminish the effectiveness of that synthesis.

A more serious problem has to do with the role of the Civil War itself in the book's narrative and explanatory framework. On the one hand, the Civil War is everywhere. If I may make a generalization of my own, it seems that Goldfield posits the Civil War as not so much a "Lost Cause" as a "first cause" of southern history: everything that has happened in the South since 1861, and the ways in which those events have been incorporated into history, spring from the Civil War. With this foundation, it becomes possible for Goldfield to discuss anything and everything without needing to demonstrate in any specific way how historical memory of the Civil War is important. A discussion of feminist messages in contemporary country music is interesting, but the author does not explain how this shows that the Dixie Chicks, much less Southerners in general, are still fighting the Civil War (pp. 178-80). Likewise, explaining the resistance to teaching evolution in Alabama by referring to the "rebellious spirit" that "still prevails in the Old Confederacy" is not convincing (p. 83). This approach reduces all historical memory in the South to redactions of the Civil War and impoverishes our understanding of the many things Southerners have considered worth remembering about their past.

But all these objections are the kind that historians would make, and as Goldfield specifically points out in the introduction, "Professional historians may derive some enjoyment and, I hope, some insight into southern history from these pages, but I am writing primarily for my neighbors, not my colleagues" (p. 14). Taking this into consideration, the problems described above seem much less significant.

It is in the final two chapters that we see the real purpose of *Still Fighting the Civil War*: to use southern history as a diagnostic and therapeutic tool for the South itself. In order to reach the more inclusive southern community promised by the civil rights movement but not yet achieved, "we need to display, acknowledge, and debate southern history in all its variations, as painful as that might be" (p. 305). Goldfield goes on to describe a few of the sorts of discussions that have happened in the past few years in the South, including several remarkably frank discussions about racial violence, but he also notes the bitter battles over the Confederate flag. His book certainly has the potential to fulfill its purpose and bring more people in the South beyond the ranks of professional historians into meaningful and helpful discussions of southern history and its hold on the South's present and future.

Notes

[1]. Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980).

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