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Tom Taylor's Civil War (review)

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(Review)

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Inscoc acknowledges that the collection will leave readers with regrets. Reflecting the uneven research coverage of the African American experience in Appalachia, the book says little about important aspects of the black experience such as the lives of women, the urban experience, and the Civil War. The essays also present primarily a white perspective, which Inscoc rightly attributes mainly to white domination of both Appalachian society and the recording of its history (due to black illiteracy in particular). The inability of Appalachian studies to attract adequate interest from black scholars, however, has meant that the writing of its black history has also been dominated by whites. Finally, given the overall quality of the essays, one wishes that Inscoc had chosen to continue past World War I, a period that has not been served well. These regrets, though, are far outweighed by the collection's strengths; it is a major contribution to our understanding of the African American experience in Appalachia.

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Tom Taylor's Civil War. By Albert Castel. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000. Pp. xv, 256. \$29.95.)

The sharp increase in publication over the past few years of personal accounts, including diaries, letters, and memoirs, has provided a much-needed perspective for understanding the motivation, moral beliefs, and other psychological dimensions of those who fought in the Civil War. These studies, however, are not without their shortcomings. Personal accounts can be difficult to follow, mainly for reasons having to do with the limited perspective of the author, who rarely had access to the larger picture. Editors attempt to make up for this by adding footnotes to fill in important gaps in the accounts or to render the account intelligible in some broader context. Though helpful, these editorial notes can be distracting, especially when placed at the end of the book.

The publication of Tom Taylor's letters, edited by Albert Castel, provides a novel solution to this problem. Castel provides a continuous narrative of the events, which Taylor experienced and wrote home about to his wife Netta. The result is a unique blend of first-person narrative, biography, and military history.

Tom Taylor enlisted in 1861 and served primarily with the 47th Ohio Volunteer Infantry, in western Virginia and the western theater. Taylor saw action during the siege of Vicksburg, Missionary Ridge, the Atlanta campaign and some of the March to the Sea, rising from lieutenant to brevet brigadier general. Taylor's letters, some of which run several pages, provide detailed coverage of these campaigns as well as more personal concerns, such as the frustration of not being promoted early on in the war and the possibility of missing the action on the battlefield altogether: "I feel more like entering the cloister, turning monk and having nothing more to do with my fellow men."

At a time when historians are working towards a synthesis of what motivated soldiers on both sides, Taylor reminds us that loyalty to the cause fluctuated due to pressures from within the army and from without. Though Taylor eventually received promotions and was acknowledged by superiors for bravery on the battlefield, in August 1864 he described himself as an “American Slave” due to the belief that his enlistment with the army had expired. His continued forced service caused him to complain in letters to Netta: “Abraham Lincoln is my master and John A. Logan the man with the lash.”

Castel’s inclusion of letters from Netta, a peace Democrat, to her husband provides a unique perspective for understanding the fragility of wartime relationships and Taylor’s fluctuating intellectual and emotional outlook. Her letters—which were an important source of emotional support—implore Taylor to resign, and illustrate the difficulties of maintaining the family without her husband. Most importantly, his wife’s letters bring Taylor’s own priorities and values to the forefront. Though Taylor expressed a desire to return home in letters to Netta, his real hopes and dreams lay on the battlefield: “I am now twenty-six and what have I accomplished? Am I worthy of my age, do I merit these years?” The war gave Taylor a chance to address these existential worries, by providing him the opportunity to enhance his reputation in his community and shake off any concerns that he might repeat his own father’s failures.

Castel’s editing makes this book a pleasure to read. Taylor’s observations of key commanders and events, including Sherman’s March to the Sea, Lincoln’s second inaugural, and the city of Washington after Lincoln’s assassination are brought to life in great detail. The structure of this book sets a new standard for those editing personal accounts of the Civil War.

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The Union Must Stand: The Civil War Diary of John Quincy Adams Campbell, Fifth Iowa Volunteer Infantry. Edited by Mark Grimsley and Todd D. Miller. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000. Pp. xxiii, 267. \$38.00.)

All too often, wartime diaries suffer from hurried and brief entries that either lack valuable tactical detail or fail to offer much insight into the individual’s awareness of the Civil War’s larger themes. Fortunately, this is not the case with the diary of John Q. A. Campbell of the 5th Iowa Infantry. With this volume, historians Mark Grimsley and Todd D. Miller have brought to print the writings of a man who recorded his regiment’s movements and engagements and expressed his personal views on the war’s ultimate purpose with remarkable clarity.

An outspoken abolitionist and churchgoing reformer, Campbell was employed on the staff of his hometown newspaper in Newton, Iowa, when the war began. He left little doubt as to his decision to enlist in the 5th Iowa in the summer of 1861. In his initial diary entry, the new recruit justified his desire to serve his country as