

## Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era

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limited sources, Wood is less clear on the commercial aspirations of the Missouri Company, a Spanish "Syndic of commerce" (30) organized in 1794 to control the fur trade of the upper Missouri River. The company sent three expeditions up the river; the Mackay and Evans expedition was the third and by far the most successful.

Wood does an excellent job of placing the Mackay-Evans exploration in the context of the clash of empires between Great Britain and Spain on the Great Plains of the late eighteenth century. Iowa readers will be particularly interested in his discussion of the attempts by Spanish officials to stop British fur traders from using the Des Moines River to reach the Indians of the middle Missouri valley. By that route the British were able to secure the lion's share of the Missouri trade and frustrate Spanish merchants who labored up the Missouri River from St. Louis. In November 1795 Mackay built Fort Charles on the Nebraska side of the river with the specific intention of blocking the British traders coming across Iowa. Mackay abandoned that post in 1797, however, and, like the reputation of its founder, it was, in Wood's words, "left to molder" (133).

Wood has produced an interesting study of a pair of lesser known, yet significant, explorers whose experience and maps helped to prepare the way for Lewis and Clark. The value of Wood's book, however, lies as much in his account of the Mackay and Evans expedition's failures as in their cartographic contributions. Like Mackay and Evans, Lewis and Clark faced the economic blockades of tribes such as the Omaha and Sioux, endured the frustrations of trying to move a large group of men and supplies up the relentless current of the Missouri River, and aspired to the same goal, to reach the Pacific Ocean. That such competent explorers as Mackay and Evans failed to attain their goal only serves to highlight the remarkable accomplishments of the Corps of Discovery less than a decade later.

*Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era*, by Nicole Etcheson. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004. xiv, 370 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

Reviewer Christopher M. Paine is an instructor of history at Lake Michigan College. He is the author of *Slavery and Union: Kentucky Politics, 1844-1861* (forthcoming).

One reason Americans remain fascinated by the Civil War and its antecedents is the issue of the meaning of American liberty. The struggle over slavery extension in Kansas, Nicole Etcheson asserts, was the opening act of that drama, in which ideology, politics, violence, and

race combined to create a national crisis. In Kansas during the 1850s, just as during the Civil War, contested interpretations of freedom for whites evolved into a debate over the existence of slavery and the rights of African Americans.

Etcheson begins by recounting the story behind the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the introduction of popular sovereignty to the Kansas Territory. She asks, what did popular sovereignty mean? Ostensibly a way to resolve the issue of slavery in the West by allowing locals to decide on whether to allow it or not, the term, as Etcheson shows, quickly took on a variety of meanings, depending on who used it. Therefore, instead of resolving a divisive issue, popular sovereignty magnified it.

Southerners first viewed the Kansas-Nebraska Act as a gift because it opened the two territories to slavery (previously banned in 1820 as part of the Missouri Compromise). Indeed, proslavery Missourians began referring to Kansas colorfully as "the goose," likening it to the traditional Christmas meal (26). However, this feeling of fortune soon hardened into a determination to spread slavery into Kansas, whatever the cost. Southerners viewed popular sovereignty as a guarantee that rights to property (that is, slaves) would be respected in Kansas. Proslavery settlers, southern politicians, and interested Missourians all believed that slavery was too important to allow a debate over its existence. In their interpretation of popular sovereignty, the rights of the minority to own slaves trumped the rights of the majority to control the institutions of Kansas. To safeguard slavery, proslavery Kansans cheated at elections, tried to stop all discussion of slavery, and eventually turned to violence against and intimidation of slavery's opponents.

In contrast, settlers without a commitment to supporting slavery interpreted popular sovereignty to mean that the majority of voters would decide whether slavery would be legal in Kansas. Indeed, this is precisely what Stephen Douglas intended for the West; territorial residents ought to be free to shape their own communities and institutions. Etcheson shows that even northerners opposed to popular sovereignty in Kansas accepted its terms and set out to create a free-state majority in Kansas. At first, opponents of slavery concentrated on white men's rights rather than the morality of slavery. Claiming that proslavery men were enslaving them, free-state supporters fought election fraud by creating their own rival government, then complaining of oppression by local and federal authorities. When it came to violence, opponents of slavery gave at least as well as they got; northerners shipped hundreds of weapons into the territory—some fur-

nished by the taxpayers of Iowa—to help defend the liberty of white Kansans.

Because both sides strongly believed in liberty but had opposing conceptions of the term, violence soon resulted. Etcheson does well to recount specific incidents with supporting detail without losing sight of the broader issues involved. She also details the political side of the story, especially the multiple attempts to achieve statehood for Kansas. Because both sides believed they were fighting for their rights, each side could place its violent behavior in a moral context. Kansas quickly became a confusing, bitter, contested, violent political and military arena by 1856.

Although Kansas voters' rejection of the proslavery Lecompton Constitution made it clear that Kansas would not be a slave state, both sides continued their struggle. After 1858, the conflict began to involve not merely the rights of white Kansans but black ones, too. More free-state supporters began to attack the morality of slavery; some even went so far as liberating slaves from across the border in western Missouri and sending them through Iowa to Canada. Just as the Civil War would later evolve into a struggle over the freedom of slaves, the conflict in Kansas expanded to include blacks.

Etcheson's book is very well documented; she makes extensive use of primary sources, such as accounts, newspapers, and letters, to support her conclusions. Her interpretation of the importance of Kansas to the sectional conflict and the Civil War may not be news to most students of the era, but her explanations of the meaning of the issue are fresh and help explain why so many Americans cared about Kansas in the 1850s. This book helps to explain how the North and South were divided as well as how Kansas became a preview of the war to come.

*Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers: The Civil War Letters of the Remley Brothers, 22nd Iowa Infantry*, edited by Julie Holcomb, with an introduction by Steven Woodworth. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004. xxxii, 184 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$32.00 cloth.

Reviewer Patrick G. Bass is professor of history at Morningside College. He is the author of "The American Civil War and the Idea of Civil Supremacy over the Military" (*Proteus*, 2000).

Generally, educated Americans in the nineteenth century were avid writers, maintaining widespread correspondence that recorded their thoughts and experiences. Self-conscious and reflective, these Americans reacted powerfully to the stimulus of the American Civil War. This tendency is on display in *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers*, a collec-

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