

The Sacred Cause of Union: Iowa in the Civil War

William B. Feis
Buena Vista University

ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

Feis, William B. "The Sacred Cause of Union: Iowa in the Civil War." *The Annals of Iowa* 76 (2017), 350-352.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.12412>

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their actions. The author suggests that we need to increase our understanding of the guerrilla's world, for "only then will our fears of this killer subside, allowing us to see him as something other than just a curiosity and specimen" (13). But it is never clear, considering the brutality of some of their actions, that fear is not the appropriate response.

One is not likely to find a more comprehensive examination of the cultural lives of the guerrilla soldiers of Missouri. For scholars working on any local history topic, Beilein provides a model of using census and other official records to take a deep dive into any particular segment of a community. *Bushwhackers* allows readers to see every aspect of how these men lived, loved, fought, and ultimately died.

The Sacred Cause of Union: Iowa in the Civil War, by Thomas R. Baker. Iowa and the Midwest Experience Series. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016. vi, 285 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$27.50 paperback.

Reviewer William B. Feis is professor of history at Buena Vista University in Storm Lake, Iowa. He is working on an anthology of interpretive work on Iowa's role in the Civil War.

In *The Sacred Cause of Union: Iowa in the Civil War*, Thomas R. Baker examines the complex and, in many ways, unique wartime experiences of a key state in the so-called New West (2). Baker argues that a "one-state approach" can deepen our understanding of how Iowans dealt with the burdens and horrors of war at the front and at home by examining "demographic background, local enlistment trends, battlefield participation, gender conflict, election results, and the politics of dissent" (1). The Civil War also brought other critical issues to the surface in Iowa, including slavery, racism, equality, and the nature of citizenship. The author skillfully weaves together these many threads to explain how and why Iowans responded to the events that shaped the state and its future. Baker also demonstrates the value of the "one-state approach" in his revealing discussion of how the state recruited, organized, armed, equipped, fed, cared for, trained, and paid for its men-in-arms at a time when the Federal government exercised minimal control over those matters. Additionally, he deepens the reader's connection to the story by expertly weaving into the narrative the experiences of six Iowa families from diverse economic, social, geographic, racial, and political backgrounds, including the families of humanitarian Annie Wittenmyer and civil rights pioneer Alexander Clark.

Most chapters are well-argued, engagingly written, cohesive, and even enlightening, although the first encounter with the book—the introduction—is somewhat cumbersome because the subtopics discussed

do not flow together seamlessly. Moreover, some of Baker's assertions require clarification and a more solid evidentiary footing. For example, he contends that the fact that most Iowans were farmers somehow made them better suited for the rigors of war. "Frontier farmwork," he writes, provided "ideal physical training for many recruits," and the "arbitrary nature of frontier life" gave them "critical coping skills" (6). Yet he offers no further analysis, supporting evidence, or a citation for this debatable and overgeneralized statement. More troubling, however, is his even more dubious assertion that "defending their farm livestock from bears, wolves, and rattlesnakes prepared them for the task of rooting out insurgents in hostile territory" (6). Again, no objective evidence or citation accompanies this claim, leaving readers to accept on faith that fending off wild animals on the farm somehow readied Iowa soldiers for encounters with William Quantrill and "Bloody Bill" Anderson.

The main theme of the book is Iowans' devotion to the "sacred cause of Union," a commitment grounded in the belief that their future prosperity was inextricably linked to the survival of the Union. That belief, in turn, inspired an almost mystical reverence for the Founders' creation but also an intense fear of its destruction. To Baker, this deep and abiding Unionism is key to understanding Iowa's role in the sectional conflict and the Civil War. Before the war, he argues, Unionism led Iowans to denounce abolitionism and reject "Free Soil" arguments so as not to antagonize the South and push it toward secession. Thus, in the name of sectional harmony, Iowans terrorized abolitionists, rejected the Wilmot Proviso, and embraced the Compromise of 1850, including the widely condemned Fugitive Slave Act. By choosing the "sacred cause of Union" over human rights, Baker concludes, Iowans accepted slavery's existence as "a price they were willing to pay to avoid permanent political disintegration" (9). Interestingly enough, during the war that same Unionism led Iowans to embrace emancipation, not as an end in itself, but as an effective means to defeat the rebellion and restore the sacred Union.

Unfortunately, Baker's focus on the predominance of Unionism downplays the influence of prewar racial attitudes on Iowa politics and reactions to sectional confrontations. He does acknowledge that Iowa's "long tradition of racism" had bred "violent antiblack attitudes" across the state by 1861 and that many Hawkeyes supported measures like the deportation and colonization of freed blacks (8). Nevertheless, his focus remains squarely on the primacy of Unionism in the minds of Iowans during the crises of the 1840s and 1850s. Needed is more analysis of the racial hostility toward blacks that spawned those fanciful colonization

schemes but also led to a series of very real antiblack territorial and state statutes aimed at preventing black immigration to Iowa. Beyond a desire to avoid antagonizing the South, that racial imperative to keep blacks out also helps explain why Iowans terrorized abolitionists and supported the Fugitive Slave Act. Moreover, Iowans rejected the Free Soil position in the name of sectional harmony but also because they could afford to, since the Missouri Compromise had long ago banned slavery in Nebraska Territory and ensured that only white farmers and laborers would occupy that vast region west of the Missouri River. When the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) repealed the Missouri Compromise, however, the chilling thought of masters and slaves invading Nebraska Territory and sullying the “White Man’s West” overwhelmed their dread of disunion and drove many toward Free Soil politics. More attention to the role of racism would have strengthened Baker’s overall approach and provided a solid grounding for his later discussions of emancipation and postwar struggles over racial equality.

In one of the most original, engaging, and insightful parts of the book, the epilogue focuses on how Iowans struggled to define the meaning of citizenship, civil rights, and equality after Appomattox and how they came to terms with the new biracial Union they helped create. Overall, *The Sacred Cause of Union* is a solid, well-written, and engaging work that provides an updated, more inclusive, and more nuanced portrait of Iowa’s role in the Civil War. We may hope that the book will spur more interest in the Hawkeye State’s important role in safeguarding the sacred cause of a *more perfect* Union.

Thomas R. Baker won the State Historical Society of Iowa’s Benjamin F. Shambaugh Award, recognizing *The Sacred Cause of Union: Iowa in the Civil War*, as the most significant book on Iowa history published in 2016. —Ed.

Jews in Wisconsin, by Sheila Terman Cohen. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2016. 121 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, index. \$12.95 paperback.

Reviewer Sonja Wentling is associate professor of history at Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota. She is a coauthor of *Herbert Hoover and the Jews: The Origins of the “Jewish Vote” and Bipartisan Support for Israel* (2012).

“In my experience all people who have been born in Wisconsin always seem to come back,” Louis Heller, descendant of German Jewish immigrants, nostalgically noted in a 1948 journal entry (104). Heller’s state-