

Practical Liberators: Union Officers in the Western Theater during the Civil War

Robert Wooster

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

Wooster, Robert. "Practical Liberators: Union Officers in the Western Theater during the Civil War." *The Annals of Iowa* 78 (2019), 92-94.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.12552>

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The overall importance of this collection lies in its effort to connect the experiences of women in Civil War America across the sectional divide. In many cases, however, the paired essays make few such connections, so it is not clear how reading the essays together would facilitate scholars' thinking across regional boundaries more than would reading existing scholarship on both regions. Many of the essays—especially in the topic areas of politics, wartime mobilization, wartime relief, and one of the emancipation essays—have substantial topical overlap. The separation of wartime mobilization and wartime relief was particularly puzzling: as the editors themselves note, the distinction between them “seems rather a fine one” (xiv). Combining existing topic areas could have also created space for additional topics in the collection, such as sexuality and masculinity. Nonetheless, having all these essays in a single volume is a convenience. The book should be of interest to scholars and graduate students working on women in the Civil War era. Readers of the *Annals of Iowa* may be particularly interested in Nichole Etcherson's essay, “Women and Family at Home in the North,” because of her use of primary sources from Iowa and other midwestern states.

Practical Liberators: Union Officers in the Western Theater during the Civil War, by Kristopher A. Teters. Civil War America series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. 225 pp. Notes on methodology, notes, bibliography, index. \$32.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Robert Wooster is Regents Professor of History at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi. His books include *American Military Frontiers: The U.S. Army in the West, 1783–1900* (2009) and *The Civil War Bookshelf: 50 Must-Read Books about the War Between the States* (2001).

Since the 1950s, scholars have devoted considerable attention to the attitudes and actions of the Union Army regarding the confiscation and emancipation of slaves. In this first study to focus exclusively on Union officers in the western theater, Kristopher A. Teters concludes that “pragmatism, far more than morality, motivated western officers to support emancipation” (2). In so doing, Teters positions himself firmly in the camp of historians Bell Irvin Wiley, Louis Gerteis, Mark Grimsley, and Gary Gallagher, all of whom have said much the same thing. Thoroughly researched and entirely convincing, *Practical Liberators* surely establishes this interpretation as representing the consensus among professional historians.

As the author explains, most western officers initially insisted that they were fighting to save the Union, not to end slavery. Following the

hesitant actions of the Lincoln administration and Henry Halleck's General Order No. 3, which instructed local commanders not to allow slaves to enter Union camps, in the first year of the war, with a few notable exceptions, they "adopted conservative policies toward slavery" (24). The Second Confiscation Act, which permitted the seizure of slaves owned by rebel masters, combined with a growing realization that slaves could help the Union Army, encouraged more sympathy for confiscation in the second half of 1862. Government policy, concludes Teters, was especially significant in convincing generals as diverse as the moderate Ulysses S. Grant and the arch-conservative Don Carlos Buell to become less likely to return bondsmen to their masters.

Even as many remained reluctant to embrace the morality of emancipation, practical-minded western officers became increasingly convinced that ending slavery would hasten the bloody conflict's conclusion. Even critics recognized that former slaves provided useful military intelligence, built fortifications, served as pioneers, and cooked and cleaned in military camps, thus freeing more white troops for front-line duty. As emancipation became official policy, officers did their duty and obeyed the commands of civilian authorities. Others came to join the cause as a result of having witnessed the brutality of slavery firsthand. Associations with black servants sometimes tempered racial prejudices. Still, "it was pragmatism more than principle that had gotten them there" (66). Such pragmatism was particularly important in shaping army activities in Missouri and Kentucky, which were covered by the Second Confiscation Act but exempt from the Emancipation Proclamation.

Resistance to using black troops remained strong, however—even more so than in the case of emancipation. Teters gives high marks to Adj. Gen. Lorenzo Thomas, who spearheaded efforts to arm former slaves in the Mississippi valley. Still, the racism that permeated most of the North only rarely wavered. "The war," concludes Teters, "never radically altered racial attitudes of most Union officers. It represented no moment of enlightenment or transformative experience" (104). Teters thus devotes an entire chapter to assessing the views and actions of William T. Sherman, whose marches through Georgia and the Carolinas served to liberate tens of thousands of slaves. Taking their cue from their conservative commander, most of Sherman's officers saw the multitudes of freedpersons who flocked to their advancing armies as a military impediment. But, as Teters points out, former slaves could be just as pragmatic as Union officers in the western theater. "Regardless of what army officers thought," he notes, "many slaves viewed them as liberators and would not pass up an opportunity to gain freedom" (152).

Midwesterners dominated the ranks of most units in the Union's western armies and constituted 77.7 percent of the 410 officers included in this study. Several were from Iowa, including Col. John Edwards of the Eighteenth Iowa Infantry, who in August 1862 secured the assistance of Governor Samuel Kirkwood in his efforts to remove his unit from the authority of Missouri militiamen, who insisted that they expel fugitive slaves from their camp. Capt. George C. Burmeister, Thirty-fifth Iowa Infantry, whose diary is housed in the U.S. Army Military History Institute (Carlisle, Pennsylvania), also features prominently in Teters's analysis. Perhaps most poignant were the experiences of Dr. William Vermilion, an officer in the Thirty-sixth Iowa. A self-described abolitionist, his published letters to his wife indicate that his father and brothers ostracized him for his beliefs. Lamented a rueful Vermilion, "They don't want to correspond with an Abolitionist I suppose" (69).

Dodge City and the Birth of the Wild West, by Robert R. Dykstra and Jo Ann Manfra. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017. 236 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, index. \$22.95 paperback.

Reviewer Mark R. Ellis is professor of history and chair of the History Department at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. He is the author of *Law and Order in Buffalo Bill's Country: Legal Culture and Community on the Great Plains, 1867-1910* (2007).

When Americans think of Dodge City, a number of images come to mind. Some might remember fictionalized television characters from the long-running television series *Gunslinger*: Marshal Matt Dillon, Miss Kitty, and Festus. Others might think of historical figures who have become entwined in American popular culture such as Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterson who, during brief periods of their careers, policed the streets and vice industries of Dodge City. The iconic image of "Boothill," where victims of gun violence and vigilantes reportedly lay buried with their boots on is a popular frontier image and one closely associated with Dodge City. Most Americans have heard and perhaps used the phrase, "Get outta Dodge," which refers to a speedy escape from a dangerous place or situation. In *Dodge City and the Birth of the Wild West*, authors Robert Dykstra and Jo Ann Manfra explore this popular cultural fascination with Dodge City and its purported disorderly frontier period.

Dykstra is an expert on frontier communities. His influential book *The Cattle Towns*, published 50 years ago, forced historians to rethink the nature of personal and extralegal violence in frontier America. For decades he has used his research on frontier-era Dodge City and other