

Illinois History: A Reader

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Illinois History: A Reader, edited by Mark Hubbard. Common Threads Series. Urbana, Springfield, and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2018. 304 pp. Map, illustrations, notes. \$25 paperback.

Reviewer Dan Monroe is associate professor of history and chair of the Department of History and Political Science at Millikin University. He is the author of *At Home with Illinois' Governors: A Social History of the Illinois Executive Mansion* (2002).

The bicentennial of Illinois statehood in 2018 prompted Mark Hubbard and the University of Illinois Press to collect 14 essays on the history of the state. These pieces previously appeared in the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, for which Hubbard, professor of history at Eastern Illinois University, is the editor-in-chief. The essays are organized chronologically by topic from the territorial period to the present with a unifying theme of "relationships of power and their historical dimensions," and the political conflicts such relationships produced. The authors represented in the collection are talented historians whose names will be familiar to students of American and Illinois history: Paul Finkelman, Bob Sampson, Reginald Horsman, and Roger Biles, among others. The resulting collection is strong and offers readers excellent treatments of important historical episodes.

All of the articles are valuable, but several are particularly notable. The distinguished scholar of Illinois history Robert Sutton describes Edward Coles's battle against an effort that might well have made Illinois a slave state only a few years after it entered the Union as a free state. Coles is unfortunately a little-known figure, but as governor of Illinois he helped prevent a constitutional convention the leading object of which was to alter the state constitution to allow slavery. Thanks in part to Coles's leadership, the statewide referendum calling for the convention was decisively defeated in 1824. Coles's political career did not survive his antislavery sentiments. Sutton's article helps, along with recent biographies, to rescue Coles from an undeserved obscurity.

If Sutton's article on Edward Coles leaves the reader feeling positive regarding Illinois and race, Paul Finkelman's contribution on slavery and Illinois quickly diminishes any sense of triumphalism. Finkelman points out that Illinois was a remarkably antiblack state even by antebellum standards. Slavery, officially prohibited, existed nonetheless during the territorial phase and after statehood in 1818. Free black Americans were discouraged from settling in Illinois via laws that limited black civil rights and tried to deter black immigration into the state. The state's 1848 constitution required the passage of laws to restrict black immigration, and the Illinois legislature obliged in 1853.

Finkelman provides important historical context on the political milieu in which Abraham Lincoln operated. Lincoln spoke out against slavery, calling it morally wrong, and he said that African Americans were included in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, its natural rights affirmation. His statements seem all the more remarkable given the antiblack sentiment of his own state.

Finally, Bob Sampson's work is included twice in the collection, a reflection of his stellar if unsung scholarship on Illinois. In his piece on the Charleston riots of 1864, Sampson explains the conditions that produced the violence in Charleston, Illinois, violence that clearly reflected strong Democratic opposition to Lincoln administration policies, such as emancipation, and to the ongoing war in general. When Democrats from Coles and Edgar Counties fired on Union troops, they were, Sampson suggests, acting on a "logic of rebellion," responding to what they perceived as acts of repression on the part of the Lincoln administration, acts that, in their view, warranted an extreme reaction. Sampson builds on the work of Jean Harvey Baker and others and enhances our understanding of Illinois Democrats.

The collection features compelling articles on twentieth-century events and figures as well; indeed, no substantive period in the state's history is neglected. Anthologies and collections are notorious for incoherence and for the uneven quality of the assembled pieces. Mark Hubbard has succeeded in organizing a collection that is thematically coherent, informative, and interesting. Any scholar of Illinois history would profit from reading this fine work.

A Brief History of Nebraska, by Ronald C. Naugle. Lincoln: History Nebraska, 2018. v, 143 pp. Illustrations, map, index. \$14.95 paperback.

Reviewer Mark R. Scherer is professor of history at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. His research and writing have focused on Nebraska and Great Plains legal and political history.

As its title suggests, *A Brief History of Nebraska* is an abridged version of Ronald C. Naugle's familiar and highly respected *History of Nebraska*. That volume, coauthored with John J. Montag and James C. Olson, is now in its fourth edition and has become the leading narrative text in Nebraska history, long serving specialists, students, and general readers as an essential starting point for exploring the state's rich and complex past. With this extremely condensed abridgement, Naugle obviously seeks to reach a much more casual readership, one that—regrettably but probably accurately—reflects the shortened attention spans of so many readers in the Instagram/Twitter world we now inhabit.