

## The Most Complete Political Machine Ever Known: The North's Union Leagues and the American Civil War

Wallace Hettle

*University of Northern Iowa*

ISSN 0003-4827

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### Recommended Citation

Hettle, Wallace. "The Most Complete Political Machine Ever Known: The North's Union Leagues and the American Civil War." *The Annals of Iowa* 78 (2019), 302-304.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.12595>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

ing the conflict. For example, he argues that the narrow range of average income levels for three-year enlistees from Iowa reflects the poor economic state of affairs there much more than it does a greater desire of the more affluent Iowans to enlist than in other Northern states. In addition to analyzing the statistical data for Iowa, Marvel also includes passages from the diaries, letters, and memoirs of quite a few individuals from the state who served in the Union Army. *Lincoln's Mercenaries* would thus appeal to many *Annals of Iowa* readers.

"It's a rich man's war but a poor man's fight" is a phrase that many associate with the Union cause during the American Civil War. Quite a few historians, if they accept the statement's validity at all, believe that it could only apply to the period of time after the Lincoln administration created a conscription system in 1863 that allowed for a monetary commutation. William Marvel, however, has forcefully argued that the phrase holds true for the entirety of the conflict. Based on meticulous research, *Lincoln's Mercenaries* has changed forever the paradigm regarding Union motivation, and will undoubtedly lead others to examine his thesis on an even larger scale in the near future.

*"The Most Complete Political Machine Ever Known": The North's Union Leagues and the American Civil War*, by Paul Taylor. Civil War in the North Series. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2018. xiv, 322 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45 hardcover.

Reviewer Wallace Hettle is professor of history at the University of Northern Iowa. He is the author of *Stonewall Jackson: A Civil War Hero in History and Memory* (2011) and *The Peculiar Democracy: Southern Democrats in Peace and War* (2001).

In this concise yet ambitious book Paul Taylor examines the Civil War Union Leagues in the North. Pro-Republican Union Leagues in the South during Reconstruction have received ample scholarly treatment. Those organizations, however, had their roots in the North during the Civil War.

Although the Union Leagues have received relatively little scholarly attention, the author fits their story into a growing literature on loyalty and patriotism on the Union home front. It is no mystery why the Confederacy persisted at the ballot box and on the battlefield: Confederates could not imagine a world without slavery. In 1861 Confederate Vice-President Alexander Stephens famously called slavery the "cornerstone" of their society. While division among white Southerners existed, Confederate unity can be readily grasped.

By contrast, in 1861 it seemed that Lincoln's goal, the preservation of the Union, was an abstraction. When Lincoln described secession as the "essence of anarchy," he failed to articulate a compelling case for long-term sacrifice as the conflict dragged on far longer than anyone had anticipated. Although the Union won some notable victories in the West, on balance the military results in the first two years of the conflict were disappointing. Morale flagged in the spring of 1862 as George McClellan's Army of the Potomac stalled at the gates of Richmond.

Stephen Douglas and the majority of Democrats backed the war in 1861, but by 1862 popular patience had worn thin. Southern Illinois, for example, had never been an antislavery hotbed. In the lower Midwest, settled in part by Kentuckians, farmers and merchants took substantial financial losses due to the closure of the Mississippi River. White workers, especially Irish Americans in New York, were never enthusiastic about the war. They associated it with upper-crust Yankees in the Republican Party, whom they despised, and believed that the war would benefit African Americans, whom they loathed even more. Opposition to the war reached critical mass in 1862. It brought rioting and a growing number of "Copperheads," as opponents to the war were known.

The Union Leagues emerged in this difficult time as a means of maintaining civilian support for the war. For the Leagues, prowar sentiment was inextricably tied to patriotism. Taylor argues that the core of patriotism was "virtue," a willingness to put the nation ahead of narrow personal interests. The public-spirited political culture of the Leagues, Taylor argues, shared much with fraternal organizations of the antebellum years, such as the Masons.

The book traces the first Union Leagues to small towns in the lower Midwest. There, he asserts, the Union League movement was driven by ordinary citizens; that is, it was built from the bottom up. That may be true, but the bulk of the documentation for the study comes from letters and publications generated in the East. The book examines clubs in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. "Gentlemen," or Republican elites, dominated Union Leagues there. The Leagues had a significant role to play there in developing discussion circles, writing in widely circulated newspapers, and distributing pamphlets promoting the cause.

Taylor ably builds on recent work by several scholars, most notably J. Matthew Gallman, to illustrate how patriots used their social circles and publications to build popular loyalty. However, the boundary between loyalty and acquiescence can be a fine one. Taylor shows how the Leagues used social and economic ostracism to suppress disloyal opinion. Such extralegal activity may have diminished the freedom of those deemed unpatriotic, and certainly could be unfair to some individuals.

However, given the high stakes involved, the Leagues' actions seem eminently reasonable. The book ends with a chapter on the spread of Union Leagues in the South, as they struggled unsuccessfully to graft Northern fraternal ideals onto a society riven by racial division.

The signal virtue of this book is its abundant research. Scholars seeking to build our still limited understanding of Union political thought, among other topics, will do well to use this book's footnotes as a guide. Iowans such as Samuel Kirkwood appear in cameo roles, but the book is predominantly shaped by debates in more established states. Taylor's prose is reasonably accessible, but the audience for this book is scholars and the most highly motivated lay readers.

*The Children of Lincoln: White Paternalism and the Limits of Black Opportunity in Minnesota, 1860–1876*, by William D. Green. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018. xi, 498 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$34.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Dwain Coleman is a Ph.D. history student at the University of Iowa. The Iowa History Center recognized his master's thesis, "Still in the Fight: The Struggle for Community in the Upper Midwest for African American Civil War Veterans" as the outstanding master's thesis in Iowa history for 2017.

William Green's *Children of Lincoln* is a welcome addition to the growing historiography of emancipation and Reconstruction studies. Green reveals the rich history of racial politics in Minnesota and the rest of the Midwest and the critical role racial politics played in the political and demographic development of the nation during Reconstruction. At the same time, Green explores the often paradoxical positions that white "Lincoln Republicans" took concerning race.

At over 400 pages containing meticulously researched information taken from newspapers, journals, and letters, Green's book makes a statement about the rich history of Reconstruction in Minnesota and the Midwest and the transformative role it played. Green takes great care to reconstruct the national, state, and local context in which Minnesota's Republican Party stalwarts developed and espoused their political and social views on race during Reconstruction. Green's examination challenges the standard narrative of Northern racial progressivism during this period and reveals the often complicated reality of racial politics and the limits of white paternalism. Green scrutinizes four prominent white Lincoln Republicans from Minnesota as he charts the multifaceted nature of the efforts of white Republicans to reform the political, social, and demographic makeup of the state and nation.