

Melting Pot Soldiers: the Union's Ethnic Regiments

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told in a book that is an outstanding contribution to both Mormon history and the history of antebellum Missouri and the Midwest. While LeSueur makes clear that Mormon actions—especially their cruel raids in Daviess County and their attack at the Battle of Crooked River—provoked the overwhelming, remorseless reaction of their gentile enemies, the conclusion remains, as LeSueur shows, that the Mormon War in Missouri in 1838 was a deep stain on the fabric of American democracy. He is to be commended for his unbiased, judicious account of this tragic event in American frontier history.

Melting Pot Soldiers: The Union's Ethnic Regiments, by William L. Burton. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988. x, 282 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$26.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY ALVIN R. SUNSERI, EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

One of the more informative ways to explore a society is to study the military organization that forms an extension of that society. In times of both peace and war the personnel who constitute the armed forces carry with them the strengths and weaknesses, biases and prejudices, and values and traditions of the people they serve. They reflect in microcosm the sociological structure of their society. Thus, studying the ever-changing composition of the military sheds light on American history, especially American ethnic history. Since the Revolution, the polyglot makeup of the army has mirrored America's multiethnic cultures and conflicts.

At no time was this truth more evident than during the Civil War, as William L. Burton, professor of history at Western Illinois University, shows in this well-researched and equally well-written study of ethnic regiments that served in this most tragic of conflicts. He describes the formations of the various German, Irish, Scandinavian, French, and other multiethnic regiments from Missouri to New England, and tracks their histories through the battles and campaigns that followed. Ironically, Iowa, which even today is rich in ethnic groups retaining their collective identities, did not produce an ethnic regiment during the war. One effort to recruit an Irish regiment ended in failure because of political animosities; other efforts proved fruitless because the population base was inadequate when many Iowa Irishmen, along with Germans and Scandinavians, joined ethnic regiments recruited in neighboring states.

Burton analyzes the political and social situation in the North that produced and supported the organization of these colorful and often controversial forces. He also examines the changes in the regi-

ments as the war continued. Such changes illustrated Americans' changing political and social attitudes toward ethnics during the conflict.

This book is equally important because of Burton's discussion of the ethnics' attitudes about themselves and others along with the parts they played in America's social and political development during this critical period of history. Burton plays no favorites when examining ethnic conflict. He describes the excesses of nativistic behavior and the negative consequences of such misbehavior, but he also points out examples of hooliganism and clannishness practiced by the Irish and Germans both as citizens and as soldiers. Such forms of collective misbehavior were counterproductive and only exacerbated their differences.

Burton also reveals that, while both ethnic and native-born soldiers shared similar motivations in joining regiments, important differences existed. Ethnic warriors hoped to prove their loyalty to their adopted country. They fought to serve the Union *and* to gain acceptance as Americans, rather than to free slaves. The intensity of their loyalty is most dramatically revealed by the awful casualties ethnics experienced from wounds and disease. One regiment, the New York Eighty-eighth, led by a controversial colonel, Thomas F. Meagher, suffered the loss of 550 troops of 1,300 engaged at Fredericksburg. Ethnic regiments were also plagued by the same problems of terrible sanitation, political bickering, alcoholism, and other hardships of war that were experienced by native troops. In the awful crucible of total conflict the ethnics did bolster their political power and, to a great extent, their economic opportunities following the war. The shanty Irish of the fifties were to become the lace curtain Irish of the seventies.

Burton's study vividly shows that ethnicity remains a rich field of historical research, and partially supports the melting pot theory in the face of recent critics. His comprehensive and important assessment of the parts played by the ethnic regiments makes his work a valuable contribution to the fields of both ethnic and military history.

Aspen: The History of a Silver Mining Town, 1879-1893, by Malcolm J. Rohrbough. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. viii, 263 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$19.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY ALLAN KENT POWELL, UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Aspen, Colorado, is known today as one of America's premier ski and vacation resorts. One hundred years ago, with a population of more

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