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Behind Bayonets: The Civil War in Northern Ohio (review)

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in the epilogue seems gratuitous as Biggers concludes his argument.

Reading *The United States of Appalachia* feels good. After years of abuse, natives and scholars of the region like to hear good things about the mountains. Biggers is a skilled writer and his main argument that Appalachia was ahead of its time in many areas is compelling. However, being the first to do something does not guarantee lasting historical relevance or importance. The author is full of enthusiasm and he is a true believer, but there are times when *The United States of Appalachia* feels more like Appalachia-centrism and regional boosterism than effective history.

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Behind Bayonets: The Civil War in Northern Ohio. By David D. Van Tassel, with John Vacha. (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006. Pp. 125.)

The Civil War continues to be a topic of nearly infinite fascination with countless books being published on the conflict each year. An unfortunate by-product of this profusion of material is that it has forced historians, driven by the never-ending quest for innovation, to explore subjects of an increasingly narrow focus. During the past decade alone, books have appeared on such obscure topics as Civil War time-keeping, Civil War buglers, and Civil War balloonists. At first glance one might be tempted to place *Behind Bayonets* in this category, but in fact this book has much to offer both professional historians and the general reader.

The subject has much to recommend it—Ohio played a vital role in the Northern war effort and contributed more than 300,000 troops and 230 regiments to the Union cause, numbers surpassed only by those of New York and Pennsylvania. Additionally Ohio was also home to many of the war's key players such as Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase, along with several military commanders including William Sherman (whose brother John served as one of Ohio's U.S. senators), and future presidents Ulysses S. Grant, William McKinley, Rutherford B. Hayes, and James A. Garfield.

While it carries the subtitle *The Civil War in Northern Ohio*, the main focus of *Behind Bayonets* is the city of Cleveland and its environs. The choice of Cleveland is a good one. With a population of about 43,000 people in 1860, Cleveland was both an important commercial center and a stronghold of the Republican Party and the antislavery movement (radical abolitionist John Brown hailed from nearby Hudson, Ohio). Cleveland was also home

to John D. Rockefeller who, as a titan of the newly emerging oil industry, would play a prominent role in the transformation of America into an industrial giant. Both the antislavery movement and Rockefeller receive prominent treatment in *Behind Bayonets*. In this way the book not only illustrates the meaning of the war itself, but also hints at the changes that the war brought both to Cleveland and to the nation at large.

Among the book's main strengths are its descriptive quality and its ability to accurately convey the experience of life in another time and another place, while at the same time make those experiences relatable to the modern reader. One of the book's highlights in this regard is its account of Lincoln's 1861 stop in Cleveland on his way to Washington for his inauguration. Lincoln's visit is of particular interest in that it offers the reader a side of Lincoln not often seen. The Lincoln presented in *Behind Bayonets* is not the Lincoln of history. This is not the Great Emancipator, nor even Lincoln the president, but rather Lincoln the celebrity. As president-elect Lincoln was largely an unknown quantity. Certainly he had done and said little to inspire confidence, but as a well-known name he naturally attracted crowds wherever he went. Strangely enough this image of Lincoln as media-star makes him seem more accessible to anyone living in today's celebrity-obsessed American culture.

Another of the book's highlights is the 1864 Northern Ohio Sanitary Fair. While the purpose of the fair—to raise funds for a “Soldiers Home” for troops on their way to or from the war—was quite serious, the book's detailed portrait of the fair accurately conveys the enormous excitement that the event must have generated. Of particular interest is the depiction of Floral Hall and its central display (erected directly over the city's monument to Commodore Perry) which, judging from the following excerpt, must have presented an awesome sight to those who saw it: “On the eastern side, for example, (local florist) Theodore Shuren of Superior Street had constructed a Swiss mountainside depicting cottages, flocks of goats, millstream and mill, and a basin with real fish at the bottom” (77).

While *Behind Bayonets* has much to recommend it, it is not without its flaws, the most serious of which is the fact that its main author, David Van Tassel, died before he could finish it. While John Tacha has attempted to complete the manuscript using Van Tassel's notes, this remains a serious handicap. Indeed the main reaction that one has from reading *Behind Bayonets* is a sense of incompleteness, that Van Tassel must have had more to say. Despite these limitations, *Behind Bayonets* offers a fascinating portrait of one community's experience of life on the homefront during the Civil

War, and is a welcome addition to the literature of the Civil War as well as to local Cleveland history.

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Virginia at War, 1861. Edited by William C. Davis and James I. Robertson Jr. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005. Pp. x, 256.)

Virginia at War, 1861 is the first of five planned volumes, "each to deal with a discrete year" in the history of Virginia during the Civil War. The prospect of such a series certainly will excite the interest of students of the history of the Civil War, Virginia, and West Virginia.

The team of authors gathered by the editors have brought fresh and often neglected subjects to the pages of the first volume. Collectively, the essays reflect the authors' combined academic and public history perspectives and are written in a style that is accessible to all interested audiences.

What spoils the style, subject range, and the promise of a thorough treatment of Virginia's Civil War years through upcoming volumes is the resurrection of old sectional rivalries. The book is decidedly Virginia-centric, not merely in subject (as would be expected), but in attitude and analysis. *Virginia at War, 1861* hearkens back to the age of Southern apologists. This bias severely damages the work.

In the first essay, "The Virginia State Convention of 1861," James I. Robertson Jr. provides a thorough account of the convention which culminated in the secession of Virginia from the Union. Robertson's depiction of the convention sheds greater light upon the crucial events of the convention than perhaps any other account. Robertson aptly recounts actions on the part of both North and South that exacerbated the secession crisis, but fails to maintain a balance in assigning fault. The author portrays Abraham Lincoln as disingenuous and refers to Lincoln's "hostility to Southern rights." While Robertson provides pointed detail on the number of pro-secession votes cast by western delegates, he overlooks accounts of intimidation which hastened the departure of pro-union delegates from Richmond before the consummation of the state's secession.

The editors chose Craig L. Symonds, formerly a professor at the U.S. Naval Academy, to write about the land war in Virginia in 1861. In spite of a sometimes precarious grasp of local geography and scattered use of citations of mostly secondary sources, the essay is thorough and interesting. By contrast, Joseph T. Glatthaar's essay on "Confederate Soldiers in