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The Making of a Southerner: William Barclay Napton's Private Civil War (review)

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Journal of the Early Republic, Volume 30, Number 1, Spring 2010, pp. 145-149 (Review)

Published by University of Pennsylvania Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jer.0.0131>

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discuss their interpretations. How much do German speakers in America need Halle's interest? Which is more influential: the theological or non-theological aspects of Halle? Despite some inconsistency between the authors on the level of jargon, the book is accessible to a broadly academic audience, and of special interest to those studying Germans in America, Lutheran theology, the role of pastors, identity, ethnicity, use of print, and migration. Overall, it is the intellectual satisfaction of a conference without the headache of asking for travel funding.

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The Making of a Southerner: William Barclay Napton's Private Civil War. By Christopher Phillips. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008. Pp. vii, 162. Illustrations. Paper, \$19.95.)

Reviewed by Lillian Marrujo-Duck

Christopher Phillips's *The Making of a Southerner: William Barclay Napton's Private Civil War* narrates the experiences of a Jersey-born northerner, William Napton, whose desire for political, economic, and social status led him to the slave South, where he fully adopted an elitist, paternalistic ideology and lifestyle. In the process, Napton committed himself to the protection of slavery as a morally superior way of life and, after the Civil War and the end of slavery, he became a staunch advocate of Lost Cause mythology.

Phillips organizes Napton's life into well-researched chapters that begin with his early alienation from his father, representing his rejection of northern ethics, and end with the loss of his wife, representing Napton's sharing in the sacrifices made by the South during the Civil War. Phillips relies on an immense collection of primary sources, including Napton's detailed journals, numerous legal decisions, and family papers, all fleshed out by the latest scholarship on issues relating to the church, slavery, and politics. Phillips begins each new era of Napton's conversion with a set of lengthy entries from Napton's journal, most of which nicely illustrate the evolution of an adopted southerner's social and political views.

William Napton's father, John, worked his way up to the position of master tailor in New Jersey, a free-labor state, diversifying his skills and opening his own business. Napton Sr. used his resources to provide his son with the best education he could afford, including private tutors and attendance at the College of New Jersey (later Princeton). William used this education as a means of self-improvement, but his learning was rote, lacking any creativity or originality of thought. According to Phillips, "precedents of the past outweighed the realities of the present and the possibilities of the future," an important hint as to Napton's future leanings as a jurist (11). When his father's business failed and the funds were no longer available to keep him in college, young Napton went South, angry, cutting short his legal study to support himself by tutoring the children of a wealthy and influential Virginia family.

In Virginia, Napton, "re-invented himself" (19). As the children's tutor, Napton was often included in the dinner invitations his wealthy host family received. So enchanted was Napton with the genteel South, so eager was he to be accepted and included by the elite Virginian society he was exposed to, he dismissed his northern college degree as worthless and attended the University of Virginia to continue reading for the bar. He also fully embraced the cultural and social assumptions of the oldest southern region, home to George Washington, James Madison, and, especially, Thomas Jefferson. Surrounded by the leading families of Virginia and their descendants, Napton yearned to gain entry into their society. Yet even graduating at the top of his class at Jefferson's university did not earn him the prestige he desired: He was not southern born, and Virginia's genteel, elite world was a privilege of birth only.

Out west, however, Napton could be a founding luminary. In Missouri, Napton's entry into legal circles and marriage into a southern Democratic, politically active, and slave-holding family provided the groundwork from which he could pursue his goals. He married a young Melinda Williams, barely half his age, but with land as a dowry. The marriage suited him. Both Napton and Williams accepted an ideology that required women to focus purely on domestic endeavors, while the men engaged in the public contests of the day.

In 1838 Napton was appointed judge, a position from which he could interpret and extrapolate the law. Although he wished a more active political life, the law suited him as it gave his views the platform necessary to push Missouri's courts to reflect Virginia's more closely. In the personal realm, Napton endeavored to emulate Jefferson, the pre-

eminent southerner, by building a library and enjoying the finer things in life: good books, plays, and cultural advantages.

As Napton's time on the bench progressed, he moved toward greater support for slavery as a positive good in society. Like many in the South, his writings reflected the move from slavery as a necessary evil to slave ownership as a morally superior way of life. Napton continued down this ideological path to write and support rulings that challenged African Americans' rights to citizenship along with Congress's right to restrict the expansion of slavery into the western territories. Napton also prepared a brief similar to the one U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney eventually passed down in the *Dred Scott* decision in 1856, a case that, in fact, had originated in Napton's Missouri.

Phillips's strongest chapter discusses Napton's disappointment with the temporary loss of his judgeship. While he made more money as an attorney trying cases, such work put Napton in the undesirable position of competing with frontier lawyers whom he considered his inferiors for lacking his prestigious education. This experience moved Napton into an even more conservative pro-slavery position: He feared the leveling effects of a free-labor society of equals because its logical conclusion would be emancipation. In 1854, with passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, this concern became tangible: If Kansas became a free state, it seemed highly likely that Missouri would follow suit. In fact, the percentage of slaves in Missouri was falling and had dropped below 10 percent of the total population, even if the actual numbers of slaves in Missouri was increasing faster than in the cotton states (68). Napton responded to these changing circumstances at the Pro-Slavery Convention of Missouri, helping to draft the Convention's address, resolutions, and statement to Congress. These resolutions found that the economy of Missouri was dependent on slavery, and the members of the Convention accused the national government of generating war on a social and economic system that had been proven to benefit the nation.

Napton's argument seemed persuasive in Missouri. After the resolutions received the approval of the Convention, Napton felt his long-hoped-for political star was on the rise. He placed his expectations on a senate appointment. The denial of the sought-after senate seat was another loss, again moving Napton toward an even more extreme pro-southern position. Napton turned resentful, establishing a newspaper that he used to promote a pro-slavery Kansas and editing political addresses for Missouri's pro-slavery Democratic leadership. Despite these

efforts, the Republicans won the 1860 election. Significantly, Missouri was one of the only slave states that put Lincoln's name on the ballot, and seventeen thousand of twenty-seven thousand total southern votes for Lincoln came from Missouri, demonstrating that the battle over slavery was well represented in this border state.

With Lincoln's election, Missouri's governor called for the state to stand with the other slaveholding states and secede, but too many others disagreed. While Missouri remained officially neutral, some Democratic state leaders worked behind the scenes for secession, including Napton, who likely wrote the governor's speech. Meanwhile, Napton also called on national leadership to settle the slavery question and end the war, blaming events on an aggressive North. He was still a judge, and his views hardened even more as he realized he could not continue to support the South publicly—his politics might cost him his judgeship and bring financial ruin. Any moderate views Napton held about the possibility of compromise by protecting slavery where it currently existed ended with the death of his wife in December 1862. Just days after she was buried, Napton was forced from his home by Union soldiers, completing both his loss and his conversion into a true southerner: He had now lived their experiences. His sons fought for the Confederacy. He spent the war politically ostracized. Like many wealthy white southerners, he regained his economic status and position after the war, benefiting from the "Confederate renaissance" (109) taking place in Missouri, just as the Myth of the Lost Cause took hold in the ex-Confederate states. Napton lived out the end of his days reading his favorite classics, searching out the relevant quotes that supported his entrenched point of view.

Napton's story has great potential in the classroom to illuminate students' most pressing questions: Why did the United States practice slavery for so long? How could white southerners have created such a violent system that violated the principles upon which whites and blacks fought during the American Revolution, principles we continue to hold dear today? Phillips misses the opportunity. Napton's life story could serve as a metaphor for the southern experience as a whole. As Napton suffers each personal defeat, his conservatism, elitism, and defense of slavery become more extreme, creating an excellent personal analogy for southern antebellum history. Southerners were put on the defensive starting with the creation of the United States Constitution.

Napton's story is told in an extended biography, the relevance of

which may be lost on most readers without an informed understanding of larger events. Phillips's work would be stronger and reach a larger audience if he provided the bigger picture. The significance of Napton's story could be placed in a larger context if we knew how many other northern sons took similar paths or about the southerners who went to the North. Although Phillips does not explore it, this reader found it interesting that while Napton reviled his father, he followed his father's lead in educating his own sons. Napton spent every bit of his money giving his children the best education possible—and his sons, like him, went on to successful careers as lawyers and judges. There could have been a discussion here about advancement in society as a whole, comparing North and South. This holds true for Melinda Napton's experiences as well. While Napton benefited from his increased income as a lawyer, the standard of living for his wife and children was also greatly improved. In an era when a significant number of women in the North busily engaged in reform movements, Melinda, too, was able to leave her isolated homestead, though she engaged in extended visits to her family and indulged in some spa treatments instead of social activism. But Napton, like the white elite South as a whole, preferred his status and prestige at the expense of his wife. He returned to the bench.

Toward the end of the work Phillips claims that what was unique about Napton's pro-slavery argument was his claim that the westerners were the rightful ones to settle the slavery issue, not the federal government. This argument, however, was hardly unique to Napton, as the popular sovereignty argument was by then already being espoused by Stephen Douglass and included in legislation passed by Congress.

What is needed is a more extended work, one that fully places Napton in the center of this larger conflagration—a riveting conflict, imbued with high drama, natural law versus our revered constitution, and ending with a ghastly bloody conflict, pitting family members against one another yet in the end resolving one of the most hideous moral errors of our nation's history. Phillips needs to engage in this drama. The story of Napton and others like him is one not often told, yet it is necessary to understand and fully explore so as to better judge our generation's own moral quagmires.

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