



PROJECT MUSE®

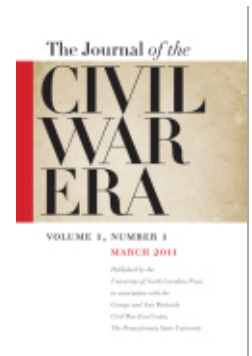
The Long Shadow of the Civil War: Southern Dissent and Its Legacies (review)

Stephen A. West

The Journal of the Civil War Era, Volume 1, Number 1, March 2011, pp. 129-131 (Review)

Published by The University of North Carolina Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cwe.2011.0008>



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/417328>

reach possible readers halfway; neither provides a map of Texas for readers, or its proliferating railroad network, despite the interpretive significance of geography for both arguments.

In sum, both of these good works would have profited from more intellectual ambition. Historians ought to be interested in Reconstruction Texas, but the authors might help them see why.

MICHAEL W. FITZGERALD

MICHAEL W. FITZGERALD is professor of history at St. Olaf College and the author, most recently, of *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (2007).

The Long Shadow of the Civil War: Southern Dissent and Its Legacies. By Victoria E. Bynum. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. Pp. 240. Cloth, \$35.00.)

Victoria Bynum's previous books—*Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (1992) and *The Free State of Jones: Mississippi's Longest Civil War* (2001)—challenge misconceptions that white southerners were unanimous in their commitment to the color line or their devotion to the Confederacy. In her new book, she revisits some of the same places and actors and extends her historical vision, asking how men and women who defied the region's orthodoxies during the Civil War era continued to shape its history for decades to come.

Bynum draws on evidence from three white-majority, nonplantation areas: the Quaker Belt of the North Carolina piedmont, the Piney Woods of southeastern Mississippi, and the Big Thicket region of East Texas. In all three, many residents opposed immediate secession in 1860–61, and within two years some had taken up arms against the Confederacy. Deserters and draft dodgers banded together, often along kinship lines, to evade and in some cases do pitched battle with Confederate forces. The best known of these bands—thanks in part to Bynum's prior work—is the company led by Newt Knight in Jones County, Mississippi, but she finds similar groups at work in North Carolina and Texas. In each locale, women were crucial to the anti-Confederate resistance. Female relatives provided food and information that allowed men to hide out, and confronted and even threatened government officials themselves. Bynum's local detail complements Stephanie McCurry's sweeping treatment of some of the same topics in *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in*

the Civil War South (2010). Both emphasize Confederates' willingness to use intimidation and terror against female dissenters. McCurry explores how poor white women crafted a political identity for themselves as "soldiers' wives" and used it to win changes in Confederate policy; Bynum sees such appeals, too, but her subjects often seemed more intent on rejecting Confederate authority than manipulating it to their benefit.

Four of Bynum's six chapters examine the legacies of Civil War dissent for the postwar South. The most compelling draw connections to wartime events and actors. A chapter on Reconstruction-era North Carolina explores a number of important topics—including Klan violence and interracial sexual and family relations—but does not link them closely to the war years. Those links are stronger in the chapter titled "Civil War Unionists as New South Radicals." In Texas and Mississippi, several wartime dissenters helped lead Populist and Socialist challenges to a Democratic Party that wrapped itself in Lost Cause mythology and white supremacy.

Bynum also gives an extended turn in the spotlight to Newt Knight, the Mississippi Unionist whose wartime activities and multiracial family figure so prominently in *The Free State of Jones*. One chapter details Knight's vain attempts, stretching over three decades, to claim federal compensation for his service as a wartime guerrilla. Knight, as well as his supporters and opponents, sometimes adapted personal memories of wartime events to meet federal officials' insistence on clear evidence of allegiance and service to the Union. After the war, Knight's growing family confounded those who wished to draw an absolute color line. Newt fathered several children by Rachel Knight, a freedwoman who had belonged to his father as a slave; two of Newt's children by his white wife, Serena, married other children whom Rachel had previously borne in slavery (the genealogies are tangled, and readers may regret the choice not to reprint a family tree that appeared in Bynum's earlier work). Bynum devotes a chapter to the different strategies that Rachel and Newt's descendants—especially their daughters and granddaughters—pursued to cope with Jim Crow. Some married and identified with African Americans; others sought to avoid racial discrimination by "passing" as white or claiming Native American ancestry as the reason for their olive skin; at least one remained unmarried and childless, devoting herself to educational and religious work.

The Long Shadow of the Civil War reads more as a collection of related essays than as a continuous narrative. It excels as a fine-grained study of the three areas discussed, but Bynum does not give them equal attention: Texas gets the least, and North Carolina is the focus of two of the first three chapters but disappears thereafter. Bynum draws few sustained comparisons among the three areas or to developments elsewhere.

The book thus raises a number of questions that go unanswered. Does the appearance of several wartime Unionists among southern Populists and Socialists reveal something of broader significance about wartime or postwar dissent? More fundamentally, where did Bynum's dissenters fit on the spectrum of "unionism" in the Civil War South, and how did that shape their postwar allegiances and actions? The Unionists she finds in her three locales were of a particular stripe—one that helps explain the failure of Newt Knight's claims for federal compensation. Even when they had opposed secession, he and many others acquiesced in the formation of the slaveholders' republic and even volunteered for its army in 1861. Their defiance dated to 1862 and 1863, when the Confederacy adopted conscription and tax policies that drove many nonslaveholders to take up arms to protect themselves and their families. The local and defensive character of their resistance—while consistent with Bynum's emphasis on kinship and community—sets them apart from many upper and border South Unionists, who opposed the Confederacy earlier and more aggressively, and who later allied with the Republican Party in greater numbers. Historians wishing to pursue such comparisons and questions will find great value in Bynum's careful research.

STEPHEN A. WEST

STEPHEN A. WEST is associate professor of history at the Catholic University of America. He is the author of *From Yeoman to Redneck in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1850–1915* (2008).