



PROJECT MUSE®

Die Kultur der Niederlage: Der amerikanische Sudan 1865,
Frankreich 1871, Deutschland 1918 (review)

Stefan Goebel

The Journal of Military History, Volume 67, Number 1, January 2003,
pp. 249-250 (Review)

Published by Society for Military History
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.2003.0033>



➔ *For additional information about this article*
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/40459>

eral unusually good essays in this section, Frances Clarke's chapter on northern amputees stands out as perhaps the best in the entire volume. This refreshingly innovative study focuses on the postwar writings of men who had lost their right arms in the war. Clarke uses these writings to gauge the attitudes of these badly scarred veterans toward the war, civilian society, patriotism, and the values for which they had fought. Eschewing presentism, Clarke brilliantly differentiates between the reactions of Civil War soldiers and those of some of the veterans of the wars of the twentieth century. Through their Christian faith, commitment to the Union cause, and belief that true manhood lay in self-discipline rather than in physical wholeness, most Civil War amputees retained a positive outlook after the war.

All students of the Civil War will find much of interest and value within this book.

Steven E. Woodworth

Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

Die Kultur der Niederlage: Der amerikanische Süden 1865, Frankreich 1871, Deutschland 1918. By Wolfgang Schivelbusch. Berlin: Alexander Fest Verlag, 2001. ISBN 3-8286-0165-0. Notes. Indexes. Pp. 464. €35.50.

Wolfgang Schivelbusch, one of popular history's most ambitious authors, has written his most ambitious book yet. His thought-provoking *Die Kultur der Niederlage* transcends established academic boundaries between American and European history in comparing the cultural impact of military defeat on the Southern States after 1865, France after 1871, and Germany after 1918. In order to come to terms with the enormity of the military débâcle, all three societies embarked on sustained and creative efforts to give meaning and purpose to the unexpected experience. Schivelbusch concentrates primarily on two facets of this process: first, the invention of political myths which smoothed over the humiliation of defeat, and, second, the proliferation of visions of modernization which promised national regeneration. The author likes to refer to collectives ("the public opinion," "the collective psyche"), but, effectively, he restricts himself to the analysis of elite discourses conducted by intellectuals, politicians, generals, engineers, and businessmen.

In the aftermath of war, the old élites were anxious to create myths which denied the finality of defeat or its moral implications. "The Lost Cause" in the Southern States reconfigured the war as a sacrifice, the Secession as a tragedy, and the reunification as catharsis. The French *Revanche* represented an equally redemptive myth featuring the restoration of French glory. While both the American and the French fabrications contributed to postwar social cohesion, their functional equivalent in Germany—*Im Felde unbesiegt*—undermined the legitimacy of the new post-1918 Weimar Republic. If Germany was indeed "undefeated in the field," why then had it lost the

war? Another myth, the *Dolchstoß*, came to the fore; it asserted that the “victorious” German army had been “stabbed in the back” by revolutionaries—like the legendary Siegfried who had been killed from behind by his friends.

All three societies drafted older legends into service. The *Dolchstoß* resonated with the *Nibelungenlied*; *La Revanche* was filled with images reminiscent of the *Chanson de Roland* and the story of Joan of Arc; and “The Lost Cause” drew on Sir Walter Scott’s novels. In the new age of industrialized warfare, the archaic and the modern apparently went hand in hand. Preindustrial imagery, Schivelbusch suggests, was not a form of antimodernism or escapism; it sweetened the pill of unavoidable socio-economic modernization. The author argues that, ultimately, defeat proved a salutary lesson; in peacetime, the losers learned from and, in fact, outdid the one-time victors. The former Confederates envisaged an industrially thriving “New South”; the Third Republic engaged in educational reform, physical exercise, and colonial expansion to compensate for both a humiliating defeat and territorial losses; and Weimar Germany indulged among other things in jazz dancing and Fordism.

The cultural history of war is a booming field, and Schivelbusch relies heavily on secondary works. However, the idea of uniting this vast body of scholarly literature in a comparative study aimed at the general reader is ambitious and original. Unfortunately, the author fails to explore the comparative method fully. The book is divided, rather conventionally, into three parts, one on each country, interspersed with occasional comparisons and cross-references. The long introduction highlights some cultural convergences and national contrasts, and yet throughout the book the author touches on many points without pursuing them systematically. Full of interesting theses but few conclusions, this book is rather an essay or a fragment. Characteristically, it ends with a puzzling question: perhaps, Schivelbusch wonders, the essence of the “culture of defeat” and its various components (sports and *levée en masse* in France; dance and assembly lines in Germany—Schivelbusch omits American examples) was a longing for “movement” to help overcome the trauma of defeat.

Stefan Goebel

Churchill College
Cambridge, England

The Paraguayan War, Volume One, Causes and Early Conflict. By Thomas L. Whigham. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. ISBN 0-8032-4786-9. Maps. Illustrations. Notes. Index. Pp. xvii, 520. \$75.00.

The Paraguayan War (1865–70) pitted Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil against Francisco Solano López’s Paraguay. The book jacket accurately calls it the “deadliest and most extensive interstate war ever fought in Latin America.” In this volume, Thomas Whigham, professor of history at the Uni-