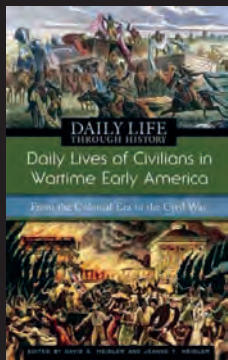


BOOKREVIEWS

Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Early America: From the Colonial Era to the Civil War



Edited by David S. Heidler and
Jeanne T. Heidler
Greenwood Press, 2007
Pp. xxix, 248. \$65

Review by Lincoln Mullen

A recent trend in military history connects the events and institutions of warfare to broader themes in social and cultural history. This book on the *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Early America*, coedited by David Heidler and Jeanne Heidler, follows in that trend. By studying the home front during the wars of early America, the essayists examine what the wars reveal about society and culture at war.

This volume is a collection of essays on the colonial wars, the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Civil War. It is a part of the *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime* series, which is in a still larger series from Greenwood on *Daily Life Through History*. This publication is a reference work, intended more for academic libraries and students of these specific conflicts than for the general reader. Each essay includes a helpful annotated bibliography. To describe this book as a reference work, however, is not to say that the

essays are mere reworkings of secondary sources. Rather, each piece is an original contribution from primary sources.

An introduction by the editors ties the essays together. The editors argue that the experiences of civilians during the wars covered by this volume were so varied that only two generalizations can be made: “that American civilians experienced war” in every generation, and “that the lines between civilians and combatants were usually blurred” (p. xi).

Armstrong Starkey writes the first essay on “Wartime Colonial America.” Starkey describes the experience of colonists and Indians, both of whom experienced atrocities and brutal fighting firsthand. The colonists were often not merely civilians because the militia system expected most male civilians to be soldiers, responsible for their own defense. In the colonial wars in particular, the line between home front and battle front, civilian and soldier, was often indistinguishable. This reviewer wishes that the plan for the volume provided for more than one essay on the colonial wars. This single essay has to cover two-thirds of the total time span and at least half the conflicts within the scope of the book.

Wayne Lee’s essay discusses “The American Revolution.” Numerous civilians in this war faced the problem of maintaining neutrality. Many were neutral, out of political indifference or religious conviction, but the Patriots and the Loyalists often compelled them to choose a side so that those that chose neutrality often endured as much as or more than combatants. For both Patriots and Loyalists, combat took place close to home, and both groups suffered due to the necessity of provisioning large armies.

In his essay titled “America’s War of 1812,” Richard Barbuto connects an earlier campaign fought by William Henry Harrison against the Indians at Tippecanoe to the Indian fighting during the War of 1812, which includes the offensive against the Creeks in the South and the disastrous fighting at Forts Detroit and Dearborn in Michigan. Through its focus on Indian fighting, this essay covers numerous conflicts on the frontier that do not fit the more formal wars among Europeans and Americans. However, during the War of 1812, only civilians living on the fringes of the United States were caught up in the fighting, and Barbuto only briefly describes the effects of British raids on cities and towns in the Atlantic theater. Most American civilians, he argues, experienced the war mainly through economic difficulty.

Gregory Hospodor’s essay, “The American Home Front in the Mexican War,” examines how the Mexican War was different from every other war in this period because nearly all of the fighting took place in a foreign country, away from most American civilians. This distance meant less direct suffering by noncombatants. It also meant that they experienced the war primarily through newspapers and letters. The war was often celebrated by politicians and clergymen, yet it also gave rise to significant dissent from the likes of Henry David Thoreau and Abraham Lincoln.

The Confederate civilian’s experience during the Civil War is described in James Marten’s “A Very Sad Life: Civilians in the Confederacy.” Southern civilians witnessed the majority of the fighting because most of it took place in the South. The proximity of the combat often necessitated that Southerners support large armies fighting nearby. The comparatively

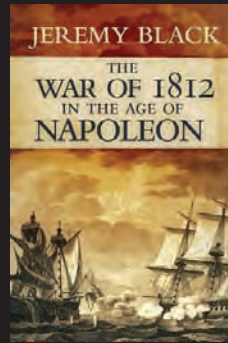
small population of the South often meant that women and children were left behind throughout the Confederacy and that they had to keep farms and plantations running despite food shortages and severe inflation. The morale of Southern civilians was high during the first several years of the war, but the sieges of cities like Vicksburg and Atlanta brought the battle even closer to home. Southerners became increasingly embittered with the Union Army and this bitterness severely hampered Reconstruction after the war. Slaves, too, were a type of refugee from the war, as many escaped to the freedom offered by the Union Army.

Paul Cimbala closes the collection with an essay on “The Northern Home Front During the Civil War.” Northern civilians did not experience much of the war firsthand, but the mounting casualty lists and returning wounded soldiers made them keenly aware of the suffering they were being spared. Civilian life changed dramatically, though it was not as disrupted or as terrifying as in the South. Women had to carry on at farms or businesses. Industry changed to support the war effort; commerce was handled with Union greenbacks. This war, too, had its share of dissidents at home. The volume ends at a fitting place, for the Civil War was the final major American war fought on U.S. soil, and so the last experienced directly at home.

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The War of 1812 in the Age of Napoleon



By Jeremy Black
University of Oklahoma Press, 2009
Pp. xv, 286. \$32.95

Review by Roger D. Cunningham

In just over a year, Americans will begin to stage the first ceremonies commemorating the bicentennial of the War of 1812. As Jeremy Black, a professor of history at the University of Exeter, points out in his book *The War of 1812 in the Age of Napoleon*, the United States conducted that war poorly, but it is “etched into the American memory, with the heroic defense of Baltimore in 1814 and New Orleans in 1815” (p. 3). In spite of the war’s great importance in determining the fate of North America, however, it is widely forgotten in the author’s homeland, Great Britain, where it is totally overshadowed by the Napoleonic Wars.

For the British, the War of 1812 “was an aggravating sideshow to the much larger conflict in Europe” (p. 32). About six thousand British troops were sent to North America in 1813, but more soldiers than that had been dispatched to Spain. Because the British had major military commitments elsewhere, they launched no major North American offensive in 1813, which gave the Americans a chance to consolidate and develop their military system. After a provisional French government deposed Napoleon Bonaparte, forcing his abdication in the spring of 1814, the British no longer required troops and ships for action against France, and forty-eight

thousand of their soldiers were deployed to North America, more than the number of British troops at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. The War of 1812’s “far-flung nature,” however, “ensured that there was no major concentration of this force” (p. 165).

In the war at sea, Black maintains that the United States had very good ships, while many of the British ships were in bad condition and their crews short of sailors. Also, most of the British Navy was required for the blockade of France and French-occupied Europe. The Americans fought well—faring better than the British government had anticipated—and their naval victories helped to offset their losses on land. Speaker of the House Henry Clay of Kentucky said of these victories at sea: “Brilliant as they are however they do not fill up the void created by our misfortunes on land” (p. 128).

As far as the fighting on land is concerned, the author devotes an inordinate amount of text discussing the famous Battle of New Orleans, which was fought two weeks after American and British envoys had agreed to peace terms at Ghent, Belgium, on Christmas Eve, 1814. Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson assembled a ragtag force of less than five thousand regulars, militiamen, and pirates (under Jean Lafitte) and established a strong defensive position behind a rampart and canal, with his right flank anchored on the bank of the Mississippi River. Jackson was able to defeat a larger British force under the command of Maj. Gen. Sir Edward Pakenham (the Duke of Wellington’s brother-in-law), who was mortally wounded during the attack. The Treaty of Ghent was unanimously accepted by the Senate (35 to 0) and finally ratified in February 1815, but, as the author points out, the Battle of New Orleans was not the last fight between the two sides. News of the peace took quite a long time to reach warships that were sailing on distant stations, and on 30 June 1815 the American sloop *Peacock* captured the British East India Company brig *Nautilus* in the Sunda Strait near the East Indies.

Black argues that the political consequences of the War of 1812 were