Marling vividly interprets the visual experiences and material culture of the fairgrounds, utilizing wonderful illustrations of changes in fair architecture and the mosaic of fair exhibitions. Social and cultural historians, American studies scholars, and general readers will find interesting material about the appeal of the fair. Indiana State Fair patrons might find more to experience on fair days after reading Marling’s Blue Ribbon.

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Mark E. Neely, Jr., has written an important book that explores the record of President Abraham Lincoln’s maintenance of order and security during the Civil War. He studies arbitrary arrest and military trial, topics not systematically treated since James G. Randall’s Constitutional Problems under Lincoln (1926). His research is broad and deep, not only in range of the usual primary materials but in a massive amount of sources in the National Archives on specific cases, hitherto unused.

Each of the several chapters is an informative essay: on worrisome Maryland at the start of the conflict, on great upheaval in Missouri, on Lincoln’s rationale of emergency power, on the character and numbers of actual cases, on the darker side of the story, and on the historical significance of the policies. This is a compact volume, requiring careful reading, and cannot be summarized in brief form, though a couple of highlights ought to be noticed.

Neely can confidently generalize on types of cases, the preponderant part of them involving persons from the Confederate South (blockade runners, contraband traders, guerrillas) and not northern citizens committing sedition and raising free-speech questions, thus contrary to views of previous historians. As for the perennial puzzle about numbers of cases, he concludes there were “far more” than the traditional figure of thirteen thousand. He counted up to fourteen thousand and then stopped because he was more interested in substantive features.

His assessment is moderate, rather cautious. He recognizes the imperatives of controlling disorder and winning the war, but he sees the darker side of sloppy, unjust administration, the instances of torture and anti-Semitism, even the willingness to hold hostages. And on the key case from Indiana, that of Milligan, invalidating military trial in peaceful areas of the Union, he says the famous decision is “irrelevant” to future protection of civil rights.
The only lesson from that episode, and for that matter the whole wartime policy, he believes, is that there is "no clear lesson." One feels Neely would not protest too much a rejoinder that this conclusion remains debatable.

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History has not been kind to General John Henry Winder. He has been portrayed as a dictator who established a reign of terror while provost marshal general of Richmond and as a brutal, inhuman fiend responsible for the fate of Union prisoners at Libby, Andersonville, and elsewhere.

Arch Fredric Blakey believes this image is inaccurate and incomplete. In this volume, reportedly the first biography of Winder to examine his antebellum career, the author attempts to rescue a villain from history, to overturn a historical myth.

In trying to alter Winder's reputation, Blakey wisely avoids picturing the general as a saint. Instead, he describes Winder as abrupt, abrasive, arrogant, vain, short-tempered, impulsive, stubborn, profane, and aloof. At the same time, Winder is also characterized as loyal, somewhat innovative, moderately flexible, honest, efficient, and courageous. He is seen as highly qualified by training and experience for the responsibilities he had during the Civil War. And most important to Blakey, Winder was neither cruel nor vindictive, and to describe him as either is totally untrue.

One of Blakey's clearest contributions is to demonstrate that Winder often found himself in a catch-22 situation; no matter what he did, he would be criticized. For instance, at the same time he was being castigated in the northern press for treating the prisoners inhumanely, he was being maligned in the southern press for pampering the prisoners and for showing them undue leniency.

The author aptly points out that much of Winder's troubles were beyond his power to correct. The Confederacy never mobilized the necessary resources nor established an efficient system of prison organization. The inability of the two governments to agree to a general exchange doomed prison reform. Overcrowded conditions, clothing shortages, and insufficient food are all viewed as problems created by others, not Winder. There is truth in all this, but the author has a troublesome tendency to brush aside too lightly some of the criticism of Winder and to spread the blame so widely as to remove nearly all sense of wrongdoing on Winder's part.