

Equally as fascinating was the wartime revolution that southerners levied against politics. This trend began in the spring of 1861 when fire-eaters grew testy at the capital's being moved from Montgomery to Richmond. In their eyes, the transfer made it easier for Upper South conservatives to exert more influence on appointments and policy.

The southern nation had no "national" identity and many states' righters were not interested in acquiring one. Other leaders south of the Potomac viewed centralized decision making with alarm. After all, Federal usurpation of constitutional authority had forced the South from what once had been an honorable Union. Thus the Confederate experiment became a constant tug-of-war between political idealism and political practice. What southern leaders wanted never materialized much beyond secession. Yet that did not stop politicians from trying to implement dreams—even the unrealistic ones.

At the heart of ultimate failure, Rable firmly believes, was the Confederacy's inability to reconcile the tensions and the differences between unity and liberty. Jefferson Davis and Alexander H. Stephens, the South's ranking wartime leaders, personified the ongoing battle between unity and libertarianism; by the midway point of the Civil War the two men were not on speaking terms.

The failure to form political parties, where individuals could blow off steam without doing any damage to governmental machinery, resulted as well in an administration that drifted with the winds of fortune.

As for Davis, his arrest and imprisonment in 1865 "began his slow transformation from an all-purpose scapegoat to Lost Cause martyr [and] made Davis seem more victim than villain" (p. 299).

Rable argues convincingly that in the end Confederate politics did more to strengthen the southern nation than weaken it. If historians have wearied of underscoring the internal dissension rampant in the Confederacy, Rable is quick to show that the arguing was commendable. After all, national unity and personal liberty are among the highest goals to which men can aspire.

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Worker-Writer in America: Jack Conroy and the Tradition of Midwestern Literary Radicalism, 1898–1990. By Douglas Wixson. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994. Pp. xvi, 678. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95.)

Jack Conroy's literary reputation rests primarily on one novel and his editorship of three short-lived, small-circulation, depres-

sion-era magazines. In terms of quantity, this output would hardly seem sufficient to justify such a massive biography. But as Douglas Wixson argues, Conroy's importance far exceeds his specific literary production. As editor of *Rebel Poet*, *Anvil*, and *New Anvil*, Conroy fostered the growth and recognition of a wide range of midwestern and southern worker-writers, including Erskine Caldwell, Richard Wright, Meridel Le Sueur, and Nelson Algren. In his autobiographical proletarian novel, *The Disinherited* (1933), Conroy drew on "the subliterate traditions of orality and worker expression" (p. 341) to capture brilliantly the working-class culture of midwestern mining communities and factories. Finally, Wixson demonstrates the way in which Conroy symbolized a broad-based, midwestern radicalism that has been largely overlooked by historians.

In using the label "worker-writer," Wixson emphasizes that Conroy viewed his literary career and proletarian labor experience as mutually reinforcing. Unlike most writers from working-class backgrounds, Conroy did not see his talents as a means of escaping into the middle class. Rather, he made a conscious decision to remain a worker and use his writing to convey working-class experience. Conroy viewed literature as a weapon in the class struggle, necessary, as Wixson says, "to reproduce from the fragmented evidence of a confused and broken reality a coherent narrative that remains true to the heterogeneous cultural diversity and irregular textures of the original experience" (p. 229).

Drawing on recent literary theory, Wixson traces the wide range of influences on Conroy's writing that enabled him to transform his personal experiences into the story of an entire class—the economically dispossessed workers during the Depression. "In place of strong authorial discourse and carefully delineated psychological characterizations," Wixson comments, "Conroy's writing in this period explores the intertextual relations of his experience and reading, crossing the line repeatedly between oral and literary, folk vision and social history" (p. 347). This intimate familiarity with proletarian culture also made Conroy an outstanding folklorist when he worked for the Illinois Writers' Project in the late 1930s.

The book's greatest strength is in the way it recaptures the socioliterary culture of midwestern radicals in the 1920s and 1930s. Often ignored in histories of the American left, midwestern radical thought tended to be much less ideological and more individualistic and eccentric than the east coast variety. Wixson recaptures not only the spirit and character of this culture, but also the processes by which it was disseminated. Because of the vast geographical distance separating them, midwestern radical intellectuals often communicated through letters for years before actually meeting. In this way, an extensive epistolary network was established, connecting various isolated radicals into a grass-roots network. Out of this community of correspondents—nearly all of whom, like Conroy, were "worker-writers"—emerged the journals which Conroy edited.

Wixson also discusses in great detail the problematic relations between this group of organic intellectuals and the Communist party, which always distrusted the individualism of the midwesterners. But as Wixson makes clear in this fine biography, the same elements that made Conroy such a suspect Communist—his belief in democracy, decentralization, and grass-roots activism—made him an effective spokesperson for the “disinherited.”

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Women Remember the War, 1941–1945. Edited by Michael E. Stevens; assistant editor, Ellen D. Goldlust. *Voices of the Wisconsin Past* series. (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1993. Pp. x, 157. Illustrations, appendix, bibliography, index. Paperbound, \$7.95.)

Here is a Wisconsin version of Studs Terkel’s *“The Good War”* with the important qualification that all the oral history interviewees are women. The second in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin’s series *Voices of the Wisconsin Past*, this volume is a small sample from over a hundred interviews done in 1992 and 1993. The editors have arranged their selections topically, with sections on working women, women in uniform, raising families, schooling, loved ones, and the end of the war.

The most compelling reaction for many readers will be the immediacy of the war—the degree to which these women fifty years later remember events, people, and feelings. Their recorded memories constitute powerful testimony to the emotional power of oral history to make the past seem real. The reader can feel the joy still persisting as these women recall with pride their contributions—as in the case of Rose Kaminski, who learned to operate an industrial crane in just three days, not the three weeks she was told it would take: “It just came to me: I loved it” (p. 12). These memories include too the strong bonds that the war forged among women on the home front—the kind of support groups that would come to life in more formal ways three decades later. And there are the stories that capture the heavy hand of ethnic differences among Wisconsin’s people, most poignantly in the struggles caused by marrying out of one’s ethnic neighborhood or community. In the end, many of these women comment on the ways in which the war accelerated the pace of change and forced them to grow up more quickly.

These Wisconsin memories are a welcome addition to the growing body of recorded World War II voices. It is still possible for others to add to that record—but not for long.

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