

masses of black Americans whose value systems had been largely shaped under the peculiar institution" (p. 5).

Though the voices of women are mostly silent and the issue of gender is largely absent from this book, *Festivals of Freedom* is a very good study of how African Americans have sought to use public space and the public sphere to advance freedom and equality. Kachun's use of editorials from African American newspapers

and the texts of Freedom Day speeches is particularly engaging. Readers interested in African American history, African Americans' transition from slavery to freedom, African American identity and historical consciousness, and African American institutional life would benefit from reading this book.

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Copperhead Gore

Benjamin Wood's Fort Lafayette and Civil War America

Edited by Menahem Blondheim

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. Pp. xi, 292. Appendices, glossary, notes. Cloth-bound, \$55.00; paperbound, \$21.95.)

"An interesting cultural artifact" is a euphemism literary critics sometimes use for a piece of literature that is a dog artistically but has value for what it illuminates about the society that produced it. Such is the case with *Fort Lafayette; or, Love and Secession*, a Civil War novel published in 1862 by Benjamin Wood, Democratic U.S. congressman from New York, owner-editor of *The New York Daily News*, and a Copperhead.

Menahem Blondheim, of the departments of American Studies and Communication at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has exhumed Wood's long-forgotten novel, added an extensive introduction and glossary, and appended two of Wood's anti-war congressional speeches. The result is

an eye-opening overview of the Copperhead movement, particularly in New York, during the war.

The action of *Fort Lafayette* is painfully melodramatic much of the time. Deathbed scenes read like shameless lifts from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and in another nod to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Wood includes an exciting cross-river chase with a slave trader in hot pursuit. The characters, both good and bad, are exceedingly flat. The protagonists exist primarily to present representative views from 1861 of the impending conflict. There's the lovely Southern belle, fiercely loyal to the Southern cause and to her paternalistic version of slavery; her fiancé, a northerner equally opposed to secession; her

brother, a Southern moderate, opposed to the war but loyal to his native Virginia; and, finally, their friend from Vermont, a pacifist opposed to participation in war in general, yet physically courageous, morally superior, romantically intriguing, and, yes, holding views which reflect those of the author himself. Even with its 1862 publication date (Manassas being the only large-scale clash to have taken place during its composition), *Fort Lafayette* contains the classic Civil War motifs of brother killing brother and friend clashing with friend. Despite the clichés, what is of great value about these characters is that their views are fairly nuanced and give the reader some feel for the variety of opinions that existed prior to the war.

In his preface, Blondheim claims that "*Fort Lafayette* is at one and the same time an action-packed thriller and an intellectually complex and intriguing literary work reflecting important trends in political thought . . . [it] can surely stand on its own as a gripping story and a profound ideological statement" (pp. viii-ix). Fortunately, in the comprehensive and very readable introduction that follows, the author does not mount a defense of the novel as great literature, but instead sets it in historical,

political, and biographical (for indeed Benjamin Wood's own life was rife with material for several page-turners) contexts. Blondheim also places the work within the current field of border studies, effectively demonstrating both the significance and moral unity of the variety and type of North-South border crossings associated with Wood's novel, his newspaper, and his life. Ultimately, claims Blondheim, *Fort Lafayette's* "line crossing comes to signify the point of conflict between the morally sanctioned and humane [i.e. Wood's anti-war views] and the tyrannical and criminal [Lincoln's refusal to tolerate secession] on the other" (p. 28).

Fort Lafayette provides an immensely entertaining, but decidedly un-literary, and instructive look at the Copperhead movement. Menahem Blondheim has added real value to this deservedly forgotten cultural artifact.

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