to Angelina’s wedding to Theodore Weld, and fought against racial prejudice in the North. However, as Robertson rightly points out, eastern Garrisonians such as Maria Weston Chapman actually chided their western sisters for aiding fugitive slaves, describing this life-saving work as a distraction and a mere palliative that would not help achieve their true goal—an end to the evil system of slavery. Black and white western abolitionist women ignored these rigid strictures and gained hands-on experience in interracial cooperation as they fed and clothed the many fugitive slaves whom they met and cared for. They also worked in interracial coalitions to attack the region’s Black Laws that restricted the rights of free blacks.

*Hearts Beating for Liberty* is a useful addition to the antislavery literature, providing the first full-length study of abolitionist women in the West.

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**Army at Home**

*Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front*  
By Judith Giesberg


This is an ambitious book. As Judith Giesberg correctly explains, while historians have extensively examined Southern women and middle-class Northern women during the Civil War, there has been relatively little work on working-class, rural, immigrant, or African American women in the North during the conflict. The author uses a series of case studies to explore how different types of Northern women, who often left little written record, experienced the Civil War. Giesberg seeks to blur the distinctions between battlefield and home front while simultaneously demonstrating how these women and the war affected each other.

Giesberg’s case studies are wide-ranging thematically, including women managing farms alone, seeking aid in relief shelters, working in munitions factories, struggling to integrate street cars, and journeying to reclaim soldiers’ bodies. Their geographical range is more limited—the author’s subjects live in rural Pennsylvania and the cities of Boston,
Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, New York, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco. Had Giesberg explained how and why she chose these locations and the particular women on which she focuses, she would have aided the reader in understanding how representative these case studies are and would have strengthened her assertions about how Northern women in general acted and thought during the war.

The book raises two constant themes: that “the line separating the battlefield from the home front had ... eroded during the war,” and that Northern and Southern women often experienced the conflict in similar ways (p. 16). In a needed corrective, Giesberg directly challenges Gary Gallagher’s argument that Southern women were distinctive in their enthusiastic support of the Confederacy despite considerable wartime deprivation. She rightly insists that the conflict deeply affected many Northern women, who in turn helped shape the course of the war. Still, Giesberg may go too far, for real differences remained between the difficulties faced by families on the Northern home front and Union armies rampaging through the South. Her arguments—that “though popular images sought to create a sense of distance between home and the war, women exposed that separation as largely imaginary,” or that female munitions workers were “blurring the line between soldier and civilian”—sometimes feel strained (pp. 9, 76).

Giesberg ambitiously engages a wide variety of theoretical models in a relatively short book. James Scott’s concept of “infrapolitics,” for example, informs her discussion of how Northern women imagined free-labor nationalism. She states that the “book examines alternative wartime geography” and that “the Civil War changed the way people on the home front saw space and moved through it” (pp. 10, 164). None of the theoretical models, however, is fully developed.

The critiques above arise only because Giesberg has written an ambitious book in a relatively new field. This is the kind of work that provokes more questions than it provides answers, exactly what the scholarship needs at this time. Giesberg should be applauded for pushing the boundaries of scholarship and helping to set the path for future research about women on the Northern home front during the Civil War.

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