

scores a recent emphasis among scholars looking at the darker side of the conflict—its brutality, horror, and baleful impact on American culture. As Drew Gilpin Faust reminds us, it changed the face of death itself. Now we need to look beyond the “Gray Ghosts” and find a believable face for what Sutherland and his col-

leagues have elsewhere called This Terrible War.

ROBERT E. MCGILONE is Associate Professor of History at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa and the author of *John Brown's War Against Slavery* (2009).



Border Wars

Fighting Over Slavery before the Civil War

By Stanley Harrold

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. Pp. xiii, 283. Map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$30.00.)

Stanley Harrold, a preeminent scholar of abolitionism, has in this book thrown down the gauntlet at the standard interpretations of abolitionism, antebellum politics, and race relations. In a study of fugitive slaves along the North-South border, Harrold argues that violence erupted where freedom and slavery touched, that the two sides were starkly different, and that no public policy was going to mitigate the clash. Historians of the antebellum period cannot ignore Harrold's conclusions and will either have to incorporate them or explicitly refute them.

The substance of the book is easily described. *Border Wars* looks at the conflict over fugitive slaves from the 1790s to the 1850s, along the line from Delaware to Kansas that separated freedom from slavery. Harrold's governing idea is that cultural clashes are greatest at the sites where two

separate cultures meet. He traces those clashes in the actions of four particular groups: runaway slaves, free northern blacks, northern whites and abolitionists, and gangs of southern slave-catchers. The fugitive slave question brought riot after riot in the lower northern states, gave birth to the Underground Railroad, and generated friction between state legislatures. Harrold sees a continuum of escalating violence; indeed, he considers Bleeding Kansas a logical result of the border wars over fugitive slaves. The border South's quest for security for the peculiar institution was, in Harrold's eyes, a demand for a stronger national government that could override state sovereignty on the runaway question, a demand that took initial legal form in the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. At the close of the book, Harrold insists that the reason Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and

Missouri stayed in the Union was their shared belief that a strengthened Union committed to enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act would better guarantee the survival of slavery than a new and immature slaveholding Confederacy.

Consider the challenges to current interpretations that Harrold presents. First, for general antebellum period historians, Harrold does not see two largely similar cultures. Unlike Edward Ayers's *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America, 1859-1863* (2003), which emphasizes common cultural ground between southern Pennsylvanians and northern Virginians, Harrold elevates the presence of violence when border northerners and southerners confronted each other over slavery issues. From his presentation, one could infer that the clash was between a culture of natural rights and a culture of mastery. Northerners saw the slaveholder's assumption of mastery when slave-catchers forced entry into northern homes and threatened whites with violence. Conversely, southerners came to suspect that every northerner was an abolitionist and a thief. By the 1850s, both the slave power conspiracy and the abolitionist free-soil conspiracy theories took concrete form—aggression was no figment of a vote-seeking political demagogue's irrational imagination.

Scholars who study abolitionists have dealt gingerly with the pacifism of the movement's radical faction, and many of them might well be shocked

from reading this book. Harrold simply throws away the idea when discussing how radical abolitionists dealt with runaway slaves: "Most abolitionists were not fundamentally opposed to violent means, and even those who were, including Quakers, professed varying degrees of pacifism" (p. 99). Harrold's treatment of abolitionism differs starkly from that of other authors: he does not go into an exegesis of abolitionist literary texts, does not wonder about the relationship between abolitionism and capitalism, and—rather shockingly—does not even bother much with religious motivation. Harrold's abolitionists are *actors*; his interest in them is not in what they said but what they did, and as a result he portrays a group of radicals who acted violently against slavery. In addition, the author's portrayal of northern border whites distinctly downplays the racism that social and political historians have stressed so forcefully.

While this work is strong in many ways, it raises a few serious questions. Were contemporaries able to contextualize the runaway clashes by marginalizing the two groups of activists and proclaiming them outlaws and deviants, with neither group being representative of either southern or northern culture? An additional question involves the social composition of the border North: the original settlers there came from the border South, especially Virginia and Kentucky. Were these people, living in free states, being converted to anti-

slavery, or were they more likely to support their relatives in the slave states? This ethnic dimension needs elucidation. Finally, this reviewer has considerable qualms about Harrold's interpretation that border southerners remained in the Union because they thought they could obtain stronger laws for the preservation of slavery. Given the description of how violently the lower North and the border South battled over runaway slaves, I would surmise that the bor-

der South would have learned that continued union with northerners led to the extinction of slavery, not to its preservation. Border South loyalty to the Union will require a fuller analysis. Regardless of these reservations, Harrold's book is not only informative but provocative, and antebellum historians will have to weigh carefully his conclusions.

JAMES L. HUSTON is Professor of History at Oklahoma State University.



God's Almost Chosen Peoples *A Religious History of the Civil War*

By George C. Rable

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. Pp. 586. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00.)

An important book that provides a full-scale religious history of the Civil War, George C. Rable's *God's Almost Chosen Peoples* takes the Christian perspective of the majority of Americans at the time and illuminates our understanding of the whole scope of the conflict. Although the author notes that "this is not a thesis-driven work," his study sheds light on "important questions about the war's origins, course, and meaning" (p. 6). Ultimately, it stands as a magisterial synthesis of intellectual and social history that reveals how "religious conviction produced a providential narrative of the war" (p. 9).

The book begins by explaining the place of religion in antebellum America, including Christianity's rela-

tionship to politics, especially with respect to the issue of slavery. Rable demonstrates how the faithful interpreted the rush of events in 1860-1861 in light of theological views conveyed by clergymen of all political persuasions in both the North and South. Protestants and Catholics alike turned to their churches to find meaning as the war began and men enlisted to fight "for God and Country" (p. 69). Many thought bloodshed necessary for a cleansing of the nation's sins—whether they saw slavery or alcohol or greed or some other vice as the chief stain on the soul of America.

The "new" military history, bringing the lens of social history to the study of war, informs chapters