ough knowledge of finance and the art of diplomacy, it offers valuable insights into these major aspects of Gallatin’s life. Its only lapse is its relative neglect of Gallatin’s major state paper, the 1808 “Report on Roads and Canals,” in which he proposed a system for a national network of transportation routes, including routes to Indiana – a proposal that was eventually implemented. Overall, Gallatin: America’s Swiss Founding Father deserves a place among the major interpretations of life in the early American republic and merits recognition as a model of the biographer’s art.

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Mightier than the Sword
Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Battle for America
By David S. Reynolds

In Mightier than the Sword, David S. Reynolds argues for the unprecedented impact of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin upon American culture and democracy. Beginning with Lincoln’s assertion that “Our government rests in public opinion. Whoever can change public opinion can change the government,” Reynolds goes on to cite the president’s alleged greeting of Stowe: “Is this the little woman who made this great war?” He claims that “no book in American history molded public opinion more powerfully than Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” asserting that the novel was essential in making America a more egalitarian state (pp. x-xi). Mightier than the Sword proceeds to identify sources that influenced Stowe during the writing of Uncle Tom’s Cabin and to show how the novel, once published, redefined American culture.

Reynolds is a first-rate researcher, uncovering, for example, that a probable model for Uncle Tom was a freed slave named Tomas Magruder, whose Indianapolis home, two blocks from the home of Stowe’s brother Henry Ward Beecher, was known prior to the publication of the novel as “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” Magruder also had living with his family a man named Peter and his own child Moses (names subsequently given to Tom’s children in Stowe’s novel), and a daughter nicknamed “Topsy.” Reynolds likewise finds probable models for the ice-hopping, baby-sav-
ing Eliza, the despicable Simon Legree, and the ever-angelic Eva. He shows how Stowe’s own upbringing forged the righteous moral drive so prominent in her literary vision. Reynold’s writing abilities match those of his researching, and the first four chapters—dealing with Stowe’s life, the evolution of her book, and its immediate effect on abolitionism and American culture—are beautifully written, convincing, and fascinating.

Stowe’s great impact, Reynolds argues, originated in her perceptive use of a vast range of cultural influences (from spirituals, to kitchen discourse, to abolitionist accounts of slavery) and real-life situations that—if at times personally unfamiliar to an elevated white readership—were nevertheless articulated in recognizable forms of domesticity and morality. Originally published in 1852, the novel sold over 300,000 copies in the U.S. and a million in Britain in less than a year sparking a massive proliferation of cultural spin-offs: Uncle Tom plays, Uncle Tom pamphlets, Uncle Tom characters in magazines and advertisements, and lots of Uncle Tom paraphernalia. This new and widespread cultural empathy towards the plight of the humanized slave made Northerners as a whole far more receptive to a candidate like Lincoln, and to the nation-changing decisions he made during his presidency.

The last two chapters of Reynold’s book document what the author calls “Tomitudes”—the plethora of often disturbing postbellum cultural spin-offs from the novel, including Jim Crow caricatures, cartoons, film characters, toys, and so forth. This aspect of the novel’s cultural legacy is both startling and easily recognizable. Although his research is again impressive, Reynolds himself crosses some dangerously thin ice, arguing that while the stereotypes promulgated by Stowe’s work were undeniably racist, many nevertheless allowed for the articulation of socially progressive ideas.

Reynold’s celebration of the novel’s cultural importance also comes with an undaunted lionizing of Stowe. Although she was viewed by many, including Frederick Douglass, as benefactor, Reynolds’s treatment of Stowe’s relationship to African Americans could be more complex; he might have cited the fact that, for example, Stowe thwarted publication of Harriet Jacobs’s personal slave narrative in order to include Jacobs’s material in her own Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Reynolds also sidesteps discussing Stowe’s literary merit, but, to his credit, convincingly argues that the chief importance of Uncle Tom’s Cabin lies in its cultural impact. Reynolds’s illustration of the centrality of Stowe’s work in the reformulation of American culture before, during, and after the Civil War is most impressive.

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James Marten’s new book is not the comprehensive account of the post-war lives of Union and Confederate veterans that he had hoped to write. As Marten acknowledges in the introduction, such an undertaking soon proved too massive. Instead, he focuses his study mainly, but not exclusively, on Union veterans whose transition into civilian life was problematic or who failed to fit into the rapidly changing industrial and urban society of late nineteenth-century America. Offsetting this narrowing of scope, Marten carries his study beyond the immediate postwar years and into the 1890s. He also engages in an ongoing examination of how Union veterans were perceived by civilians during these decades, mainly in newspaper reports but in Civil War novels as well.

This focus on what might be called the downside of the Civil War veteran’s experience offers, of course, a less known, more intriguing, and perhaps more viable research project than would an emphasis on those who handled civilian life well. But it does remind readers that, rather than being members of a heroic generation in peace as well as war, many of these men were burdened by disappointment and even failure, while civilians perceived them quite often as problems and misfits. Accordingly, the tone of Sing Not War is subdued and sometimes even sad.

The heart of this study is contained in four chapters that treat a series of problems confronted by many Union veterans. One chapter, entitled “Maimed Darlings,” recounts the struggles and tribulations of veterans who were wounded and disabled. Another describes how veterans’ own interest in their wartime experiences combined with the public’s fascination with the recent civil war to generate a market for all kinds of commercial opportunism and exploitation, some of it rather crass and demeaning, but all of it resulting in “the commodification of veterans and veteranhood” (p.147). A third chapter, “Regiments So Piteous” (all the chapter-titles, like the title of the book itself, derive from Walt Whitman’s “The Return of the Heroes” in the 1881-82 version of...