

Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation

By Caroline E. Janney

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013. Pp. 464. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00.)

Caroline Janney's *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* is a landmark study that synthesizes a considerable body of recent scholarship and challenges a number of assumptions characterizing the study of Civil War memory in recent years. In particular, Janney makes a careful distinction between national reunion and reconciliation. The definition and attainment of national reunion was largely straightforward—it constituted the reunification of North and South and was “achieved in the spring of 1865 and refined during Reconstruction.” Reconciliation proved to be “harder to define, subject to both multiple and changing interpretations . . . For some, reconciliation implied forgiving one's enemies for their transgressions. For others, it suggested a mere silence on the issues. . . . [It fostered] a memory of the war that emphasized the shared American values of valor and devotion to one's cause” (p. 6). Importantly, Janney contends that a spirit of reconciliation failed for decades to gain the upper hand, as both southerners and northerners, black and white, promoted memories of the Civil War and Reconstruction that insisted on the rightness of their cause and the wrongdoing of their enemy. Focusing on Union and Confederate veterans, women's Civil War organiza-

tions, and African American leaders, Janney convincingly demonstrates that for the generation that fought the war, as well as for their sons and daughters, moments of true reconciliation were much more tenuous, fleeting, and contested than previous scholars have recognized.

Slavery was one sticking point. While David Blight and others have argued that white northerners quickly abandoned a focus on emancipation and the cause of black equality to hasten reconciliation with southern whites, Janney shows that Union veterans consistently emphasized the end of slavery as a signal accomplishment that helped to ensure the triumph of the Union cause and the survival of the nation, even as their commitment to the memory of emancipation did not imply dedication to racial justice in the present. White southerners, for their part, were determined to insist that states' rights had been a cause of secession, even as they fostered memories of content and complacent slaves and, later, the alleged horrors of black freedom and “domination” of whites during Reconstruction. Janney argues that a reconciliationist message deemphasizing slavery and emancipation began to gain ground among postwar generations, and that even then, African Americans

continued to insist on the centrality of freedom and equality as the most significant—and unfinished—outcomes of the Civil War.

Janney's insights into women's roles in shaping and promoting Civil War memory are also instructive. Building on a significant body of scholarship, including her own earlier work on Ladies' Memorial Associations, Janney argues there were a number of reasons why southern women in particular emerged as committed guardians of the Lost Cause, peculiarly resistant to reconciliation. While prior scholarship has emphasized that Reconstruction-era southern women could safely promote the memory of the Confederacy as a "personal" and domestic, rather than political, affair, Janney argues that well into the twentieth century women felt freer to espouse sectionalist sentiments—and were supported by their men in doing so, as this allowed southern men to essentially have it both ways. Moreover, women's role in preserving southern memory proved a primary source of their social and cultural authority in the region. Janney also argues that northern women kept an equally tenacious hold on opposing memories of the war, suggesting that women had neither the shared war experiences nor the current business interests and political incentives that convinced some men in both regions at least to espouse the rhetoric of reconciliation.

Janney's analysis of a shift in emphasis in Civil War memory is also

noteworthy and deserving of further consideration. During the early 1900s, as southern interpretations of the Civil War became explicitly tied to developments in southern race relations, leaders of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and Confederate men's associations increasingly extended their wartime narratives to encompass the purported crimes of Reconstruction and southerners' eventual "redemption" of the region. But, as Janney points out, this embrace of incendiary portrayals of Reconstruction was not limited to the South or Confederate organizations. Instead, nationally renowned historians, widely popular novelists, and such epic Hollywood productions as *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Gone With the Wind* (1939) all depicted the empowerment of African Americans during Reconstruction as a gigantic mistake—a move that had clear implications not only for national (white) reconciliation but also for contemporary race relations and politics.

Remembering the Civil War is certain to be a standard-bearer in the field of Civil War memory for the foreseeable future. It will be up to subsequent scholars to explore the relative significance of the resistance to reconciliation among the groups examined by Janney—African American leaders, veterans, and white women—in comparison to some of the other arenas of memory, for instance commercial media and popular culture, where reconciliationist narratives appear to have taken hold

much earlier. Janney's impressively researched and comprehensive book, spanning more than seven decades, indicates that Civil War memory will continue to be a rich and contested field of study for many years to come.

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Rural Fictions, Urban Realities: A Geography of Gilded Age American Literature

By Mark Storey

(New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. viii, 200. Notes, works cited, index. \$75.00.)

When Caroline Meeber steps onto the train station platform in Chicago at the beginning of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, readers are clearly meant to understand that she is taking a step forward—in space, but also in time. True, Dreiser's novel then goes on to equivocate for more than five hundred pages over the question of whether moving forward necessarily constitutes a move for the better. But there is never really any doubt about what Carrie's initial journey from small-town Wisconsin to the heart of the Windy City is intended to represent. Put simply, Carrie's arrival in Chicago symbolizes her arrival at the doorstep of American modernity.

Such grand metaphorical gestures served Dreiser and a number of his contemporaries extraordinarily well. Not only do we continue to read their books today, we cite them as exemplars of literary "realism" precisely because we see in "urban" novels like *Sister*

Carrie the kind of dark and disenchanting world that Weberian theorists of modernity promised we would. But as Mark Storey rightly notes in *Rural Fictions, Urban Realities*, modernity touched virtually everything about American life during the Gilded Age—including the pages of "rural fiction," a rich and yet largely unappreciated genre of writing that Storey persuasively argues was anything but provincial in its character or concerns.

On the contrary, Storey finds in the pages of American late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century rural fiction many of the same thematic preoccupations typically associated with the most avowedly metropolitan of Gilded Age novels. He simply finds them off the beaten path: on the train as it speeds across the rolling countryside; at the circus; on the road with a country doctor; amidst the lynch mob; even in the middle of nowhere, if you take Storey's thoughtful recon-