

rect, but we will never know with reasonable certainty until some historian undertakes a statistical analysis. Nor can we hope to learn *what kinds* of Ohio Republicans—in terms of ethnicity, religion, economic situation, and so forth—were egalitarians, what kinds were racial conservatives, what kinds were abstainers or “no-shows.” Such information cannot be plausibly inferred from visually reviewing aggregate election returns.

*Dubious Victory* is not an assessment, as promised, of “public opinion” in postbellum Ohio, but only of the opinions expressed in various newspapers and letters. (Even Sawrey’s newspaper research lacks any overtly systematic basis. Did he read *all* extant papers? Most? Some?) And his single attempt at quantitative analysis—of 26 Republican county convention platforms in 1865—is flawed. That only 7 platforms (or 26 percent) endorsed black suffrage is not the correct datum, since 9 conventions offered no platforms at all. The valid calculation is that 7 of 17 platforms (or 41 percent) were pro-suffrage—suggesting that grass-roots racism among Ohio Republicans was much less powerful than Sawrey is willing to concede.

The last word on this subject has not yet been written.

*Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865–1900*, by Stuart McConnell. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992. xvii, 312 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$32.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY GEORGE MCJIMSEY, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Stuart McConnell has written a fresh and valuable account of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR). Seeking to go beyond the “partisanship and patronage” interpretations that have characterized earlier treatments of the organization, he examines the GAR’s social and cultural history. Founded in order to provide the northern veteran with a myth about his place in the civilian order, the early GAR experienced the tension between civilian equality and military order and discipline that historians have long attributed to the soldiers in the field. Early attempts to establish a rank system failed, and in the 1880s the GAR became a fraternal organization, envisioning an ideal of a republican middle-class community of self-disciplined comrades who respected each other’s rights and led exemplary lives.

Alert to discern social differences, McConnell examines three GAR posts: socially conscious Philadelphia; working-class Brockton,

Massachusetts; and the western frontier community of Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin. The Philadelphia post was prominent in civic functions and charity work and led by a social elite. Brockton and Chippewa Falls concentrated on social events for the members, not civic or charity functions. The Chippewa Falls post was supported by a stable elite core of the town aristocracy within an unsettled, migratory periphery of veterans who had moved west.

Championing a core value of manly independence, the posts sought to provide charitable relief to their members, most commonly with burial insurance. Chronically unable to raise sufficient funds, the smaller posts sought appropriations from state legislatures and inevitably from the national government. Gradually overcoming the larger urban posts' opposition to pension subsidies, they won over the national organization, and in 1890 obtained a pension for every veteran of 90 days' service who had been incapacitated for manual labor regardless of his financial condition or the means by which he had been incapacitated. Thenceforth, by pressing their claim as a privileged minority to whom society owed a special debt, they fattened their benefits down to World War I.

In its mature years a haze of middle-class sentimentality enveloped the GAR's self-image, obscuring the real war's hard and rough edges. Official publications analyzed grand strategy or spun tales of campfire comradeship. Not surprisingly, such comradeship informed the war's single important meaning: nationalism. In saving the Union the veterans had achieved a national perfection that needed no improvement. All that remained was to erect monuments and to hold ceremonies to remind later generations.

Thus defined, GAR nationalism became predictably narrow and self-serving. Immigrants were objects of suspicion; women were relegated to second-class status. Racial segregation was rejected, but informal discrimination permitted. The GAR campaigned strenuously for schoolbooks to tell the "truth" about the virtues of northern unionism and the treachery of southern rebellion. It became a center for promoting the flag as the emblem of an American civil religion.

In formulating a nationalism that honored white, native-stock, middle-class males and excluded or subordinated persons with other racial, ethnic, gender, or class characteristics, the GAR affirmed a "prewar ideal of a virtuous, millennial Republic," based on the independent producer, entrepreneurial capitalism, and the citizen-soldier volunteer (222). Such a vision could last only as long as the population that sustained it and the social order that it represented. As the GAR generation began to die out, and as the United

States became increasingly a nation of immigrants, corporations, and reform-minded citizens who were destined to fight a morally ambiguous Great War, the vision was challenged, and searching questions were raised about the American national identity.

McConnell skillfully places the GAR in the dominant Anglo, male culture of its time. Indeed, he paints a clear portrait of late nineteenth century conservative morality, and cites major general studies to support his interpretations. In so doing, he also makes an important contribution to understanding why American nationalism has often lacked the linguistic and religious trappings of other nineteenth-century nationalisms. Given this and the GAR's accommodations to the period's dominant social/fraternal norms, it seems a little peculiar that he so often stresses the GAR's insistence on its own uniqueness. Did not other "mainstream" fraternal orders stress their unique virtues? Also, I think McConnell overstresses the disjunction between the GAR's small capitalist worldview and the social reality of the veteran. In the 1880s there was certainly a lot of small capitalism going on and, according to the evidence in his table of occupations, most of these veterans were participating in it (59).

But let me conclude by stressing the virtues of this book. Residents of Iowa, a state with a proud Civil War heritage and a small capitalist tradition, will learn much from this volume about the origins and nature of their civic values.

*Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940*, by Deborah Fink. Studies in Rural Culture. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992. xxiii, 242 pp. Maps, tables, illustrations, notes, appendix, references, index. \$34.95 cloth, \$12.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY SARAH LARSON, HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

"My mother once described my grandfather's birth in a sod house and his farm childhood by asking me to imagine living in a place without beauty, without diversion, without light, with only work to fill out each day. . . . In Nebraska, women encountered a bleakness that they had not known before" (32-33).

Deborah Fink's *Agrarian Women* is intended as a corrective to the portrait of the frontier West as a place of tremendous opportunity, where homesteading offered women a chance to work shoulder to shoulder with their husbands and gain greater social and politi-

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