Ford does not ignore that prejudice. She discusses anti-black laws and riots in Cincinnati. For a book about bonds of union Ford’s volume discusses a lot of conflict. But her account stresses bonds across racial lines and African American agency. Her most important observations about relations between African Americans and whites come in an intriguing analysis of how African Americans in the two cities developed economic skills that allowed them to create a cultural space for themselves. They became hairdressers, barbers, artists, and photographers. Influenced both by a growing culture of refinement and by a romantic racism that saw blacks “as embodying the finer, yet gentler, values of sympathetic feeling in an otherwise callous, hurly-burly world,” whites “gave black artists and personal service workers license or permission to reform white bodies and souls” (135). Indeed, Ford goes on to argue, that in “the Ohio River valley’s cities, middle-class blacks and whites placed extraordinary emphasis on the power of refinement to negate racism and its attendant maltreatments in a postemancipation society” (137). And “well before 1865” African Americans in Louisville “had made it eminently clear that their bonds of union were with northern free institutions—whether those were educational, religious, or political.” They “were therefore ready to play a role as powerful agents of union during the Civil War itself” (302).

Ford’s cultural analyses of the convergence in style between Catholics and Protestants and of the role of refinement in affecting relations between blacks and whites rest on a wide base of research and are fully developed, often through stories of individuals or an analysis of their writings. When the book turns to explaining how the cultural phenomena helped create the bonds of union, how people came to appreciate their ties together, and what might be called the bonds of the Union, what held the nation together, the analysis proves less substantial and satisfying. The case is made best and most fully in the discussion of the work of relief societies during the Civil War. They helped create a bond with the Union as well as “bonds between civilians and soldiers, home and war fronts, and women’s relief aid and men’s logistical administration” (271).

Although the book has a good discussion of the rise of the Republican Party in Ohio, the closer the analysis gets to the political rather than the cultural, the more doubts or questions readers will have. Anne E. Marshall, Luke E. Harlow, and other historians who argue that Kentuckians remained committed to slavery into the war and embraced the Lost Cause after it will no doubt challenge some of Ford’s conclusions. To take an example, she argues that during secession “enough Cincinnatians and Louisvillians ensured the Union’s continued existence by securing Kentucky’s allegiance and they did so while also arguing for slavery’s immediate end in that loyal state as well as in the rebellious Confederacy” (304). She concludes that by 1865 slavery had collapsed throughout Kentucky.

The historians who have reached very different conclusions about Kentucky’s commitment to slavery and Unionism will benefit from engaging Ford’s provocative arguments. They and other historians will profit even more from her fascinating exploration of African American life, analysis of antislavery thought and proslavery religion, and especially the description of the convergence of Catholics and Protestants in one of antebellum America’s most important borderlands.


In the summer of 1862, following the Second Battle of Bull Run, General George McClellan, commander of the Army of the Potomac, boasted to his wife that his enemies had been crushed, silenced, and disarmed. McClellan, John H. Matsui reminds us, was not referring to Confederate generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. His barb was directed at his fellow Union general John Pope, commander of the Army of Virginia.

In The First Republican Army, Matsui draws on hundreds of letters and diaries of generals, volunteer officers, and enlisted men to provide an in-depth examination of the ethnic and regional composition, unit organization, lived experiences, and political perceptions of the field commanders and rank-and-file soldiers of the Army of Virginia. In sharp contrast to the Army of the Potomac, the short-lived Army of Virginia, he argues, was “anti-slavery from top to bottom.” A veritable Republican Party in arms, Pope’s forces constituted “the vanguard of the pro-emancipation and punitive turn” of the Union’s war effort (3–4).

Matsui’s smoking guns, so to speak, are Pope’s proclamations. General Order No. 13, the most controversial among them, stipulated that the soldiers under his command no longer waste their “force and energy” protecting the private property of men and women who were hostile to the government of the United States (49). Pope also banished from their homes and beyond the army’s lines those who refused to take an oath of allegiance. Republican officers tacitly approved of Pope’s decrees, Matsui claims, which many enlisted men construed as authorizing punishment and the wholesale plunder of the countryside (32–33). Democrats, West-Pointers, and McClellan allies, all of whom hoped for a quick end to the conflict and a return of the status quo ante, deemed Pope’s orders a violation of the principles of modern warfare.

Whereas opposition to slavery and admiration for contrabands (slaves who escaped or were brought to Union territory) was not much in evidence in the Army of the Potomac, Matsui claims that the Army of Virginia was a magnet for runaway slaves. A substantial number of Pope’s officers and enlisted men, many of them citizens of the states of the Old Northwest Territory, favored emancipation. A few wanted to allow African Americans to take up arms in the fight for their freedom.
The First Republican Army provides substantial support for the proposition, embraced by virtually all Civil War historians, that Union officers and enlisted men did not agree on war aims. Matsui may well go beyond his evidence, however, in claiming that from “John Pope to the lowest private,” a majority of the soldiers in the Army of Virginia “identified with the antebellum ideology of the Republican Party and radically opposed both slavery and pro-Confederate white civilians” (4).

“Liberal foraging” often proved necessary during the war, Matsui acknowledges. Ambrose Burnside, a close friend of McClellan, allowed the soldiers in his command to “[take] up the practices of the Army of Virginia, with a will, especially the confiscation of property” (139).

Republicans, of course, were not necessarily abolitionists. It is by no means certain, moreover, that secession had rendered abolitionists “prophets worthy of honor in northern public opinion in the summer of 1862” (41). Nor does sympathy for abolitionism emerge from more than a handful of the letters and diaries of the soldiers of the Army of Virginia.

Indeed, Matsui indicates that the attitudes of these men toward slaves “could be complex and inconsistent, changing according to circumstance,” with many finding it difficult to accept the Second Confiscation and Militia Acts passed by a Republican Congress, making it possible for contrabands to serve in the Union Army (104). According to a Massachusetts chaplain quoted by Matsui, some of Pope’s men wanted a proclamation ending slavery, others wanted to leave the peculiar institution as it was, while “the drifting is toward emancipation” (113).

Participation in the Civil War certainly made some soldiers more interested in politics than they had been when they were civilians. That said, What They Fought For, 1861–1865 (1995), James M. McPherson’s careful study of a large sample of soldiers, sets a context relevant to an assessment of Matsui’s claims. McPherson found that a substantial percentage of officers and enlisted men were motivated to join the armed forces by a love of country. A much smaller percentage, however, discussed ideological issues.

Matsui’s splendidly detailed study demonstrates that while General McClellan and his allies resisted and, at times, subverted the evolving military and political priorities of the Republican Party, the Army of Virginia tried to advance. He reminds us well that the relationship between political generals and frustrated enlisted men can be mutually reinforcing in a democratic society.

In the end, however, events (including General McClellan’s tactical and strategic battlefield failures) far more than Pope’s divisions, stimulated the radicalization of the Civil War.

GLENN C. ALTSCHULER
Cornell University


Once upon a time, long ago, white northerners who had participated in the great struggle to defeat the southern Confederacy in the 1860s told themselves—and others—many stories about their wartime conduct. Referring routinely to “the War of the Rebellion,” they constructed the victors’ narrative of the American Civil War. Unlike the South’s Lost Cause that continues to resonate in modern controversies over displays of the Confederate battle flag and the removal of Confederate monuments, this narrative was lost with the passing of the wartime generation and the rush to reconciliation between the warring sections. But during the 1880s and 1890s its exponents regularly lauded the patriotic service of those brave citizen-soldiers who had saved the American republic from disaster and in the process extinguished slavery from the national domain. They also heralded the importance of preserving the Union as a beacon of liberty and democracy in the world and denigrated the efforts of southern rebels to destroy it. This heroic and in many respects self-serving tale ignored the fact that racism had tarnished the Union war effort, that not all Union soldiers had fought courageously, and that the Lincoln administration’s hard-war policies had caused widespread suffering in parts of the South, including loyal border slave states like Kentucky and Missouri. Human remembrance, however, is necessarily selective, and inconvenient truths are seldom embedded in dominant narrative strains.

Although historians have done an excellent job of assessing the creation of the South’s Lost Cause—the losers’ memory of the Civil War—Unionist memory attracted relatively little attention from scholars until the early years of this century. Matthew E. Stanley’s book is a very useful addition to a developing corpus of scholarship on Unionist memory after the Civil War. Focusing his gaze on the southern-tier counties of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, he argues that the “Lower Middle West” forged a distinctive historical memory of the war that he labels “the Loyal West.” (During the mid-nineteenth century Americans regularly referred to the modern Midwest as “the West.”) The origins of this narrative, he shows convincingly, lay in the antebellum period when upland southern whites played a formative role in settling the area. The inhabitants’ embrace of white supremacism and lack of moral concern over slavery made the area a Democratic stronghold in the late 1850s and rendered local Republicans conservative on issues of race. The Civil War, argues Stanley, may have severed the lower West’s ties to the slave South across the Ohio River, but it did not erode the conviction of a majority of its residents that blacks, enslaved or free, were inferior to whites. As a result, many Democrats from the region, including many men serving in the Union Army, fiercely opposed the Lincoln administration’s wartime policies of emancipation and enlistment of African American troops, as well as congressional Republicans’ support for black civil rights during Reconstruction.

The last three chapters constitute the most innovative section of the book. Here Stanley argues that Unionists in the lower West, Union veterans in particular, fostered a racist subregional variant of the victors’ memory that marginalized the achievement of emancipation and trumped what they regarded as westerners’ leading contribu-