



The Good Men Who Won the War: Army of the Cumberland Veterans and Emancipation Memory

Robert E. Hunt

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Robert Hunt examines how Union veterans of the Army of the Cumberland employed the extinction of slavery in the trans-Appalachian South in their memory of the Civil War. Hunt argues that rather than ignoring or belittling emancipation, it became central to veterans' retrospective understanding of what the war, and their service in it, was all about. The Army of the Cumberland is particularly useful as a subject for this examination because it invaded the South deeply, encountering numerous ex-slaves as fugitives, refugees, laborers on military projects, and new recruits. At the same time, the Cumberlanders were mostly Illinoisans, Ohioans, Indianans, and, significantly, Kentucky Unionists, all from areas suspicious of abolition before the war.

Hunt argues that the collapse of slavery in the trans-Appalachian theater of the Civil War can be usefully understood by exploring the post-war memories of this group of Union veterans. He contends that rather than remembering the war as a crusade against the evils of slavery, the veterans of the Army of the Cumberland saw the end of slavery as a by-product of the necessary defeat of the planter aristocracy that had sundered the Union; a good and necessary outcome, but not necessarily an assertion of equality between the races.

Some of the most provocative discussions about the Civil War in current scholarship are concerned with how memory of the war was used by both the North and the South in Reconstruction, redeemer politics, the imposition of segregation, and the Spanish-American War. This work demonstrates that both the collapse of slavery and the economic and social post-War experience convinced these veterans that they had participated in the construction of the United States as a world power, built on the victory won against corrupt Southern plutocrats who had impeded the rightful development of the country.

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