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Steven J. Ramold, *Across the Divide: Union Soldiers View the Northern Home Front*. New York: New York Univ. Press, 2013. Pp. ix, 223. ISBN 978-0-8147-2919-9.

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Across the Divide is an ambitious study that reassesses the relationship between soldiers and the home front in the North during the Civil War. Rejecting the majority view of united support for the war effort (with conspicuous exceptions like the Copperhead movement and the New York Draft Riots), Steven Ramold (Eastern Michigan Univ.) argues that, in fact, “at crucial times of the war and on specific issues ... soldier and civilian beliefs diverged” (2). Misunderstandings and misperceptions between soldiers and civilians were “the result of various ‘divides,’” both physical and emotional, as well as differing experiences, difficulties in communication, and social, racial, and political ideologies (2-5). Over the course of the war and due to their separation from home, “soldiers shaped their own view of civilian behavior. Tasked with saving the Union, soldiers held misinformed views regarding the nature and extent of civilians’ actions and beliefs, but their reactions to civilian behaviors represented the views of those acting most directly to win the war” (2). We must, Ramold advises, carefully identify these attitudes to fully understand just how soldiers conceived of their service and their relations with those at home.

Ramold begins with the premise that military service caused geographic and cultural divisions that worsened as the war progressed. There were romantic “notion[s] of how civilians were to behave and how [soldiers] ... were to be treated. Civilians were spectators to war, observers whose sole task was enthusiastically to support the army in the field. Conversely, soldiers respected the status of civilians and maintained the chivalrous view that warriors protected noncombatants, regardless of side” (7). But the scope of the Civil War, Ramold argues, created a far from romantic wartime environment. As the war went on, “the uncertain loyalty of northern civilians generated a sense of hostility among Union soldiers that shattered the rosy view of the military/civilian cultural separation. Increasingly, Union soldiers believed northern civilians did not bolster their cause, culminating in severe erosion of the traditional divide” (8).

The book’s six chapters move from a broad overview of the soldier/civilian divide, as it pertained to individual relationships, to a more case-specific focus on political and social issues of the period. Chapter 1, “The Divide between Union Soldiers and Civilians,” sets the stage for the rest of the book by analyzing the causes of growing animosity between soldiers and civilians in the North. Ramold sees the horrors of battle and the uncivilized life in camp as driving this disconnect. As the fighting intensified, soldiers came to recognize the sacrifices that defeating the South would entail and to resent civilians they felt were unappreciative of those sacrifices.

Ramold observes that news from home, in newspapers and letters, did not always reinforce the idea of a common struggle. Though soldiers felt aggrieved at editorials questioning the war effort, letters from home (or lack thereof) could be still more disconcerting, since they were the only link many retained with their families (19, 26).

[Soldiers] already isolated in their military existence ... found themselves even more isolated in ways they never anticipated. Instead of giving soldiers steadfast support, civilians at home did not always approve of the war. Rather than agree with all soldier views of military leadership, civilians pressed for victories and wondered why the army could not defeat the Confederacy sooner.... Besieged by perceived negativity on all sides, Union soldiers defended their accomplishments and hardened themselves against the world around them. In the process they could come to view as potential antagonists the same civilians whom they swore to defend. (31)

Chapter 2, “The Gender Divide,” concerns the impact of the shifting gender structure in Civil War America, which “placed men and women in roles unfathomable before the war” (33). In particular, Ramold argues that many soldiers were uneasy about women taking care of financial affairs back home. At the same time,

they had to create space in the traditionally all-male army for nurses, officer's wives, and female soldiers (who enlisted as men), as well as prostitutes and other camp followers. All these social shifts "complicated soldiers' conceptualizations of gender, especially as the presence of varied types of women ... crossed the gender divide and conflicted with prewar views they held as the norm" (54). The changing personal relationships between soldiers and those at home and the strains that military service placed upon families in the North were unique in the American experience.

The final four chapters¹ concentrate on wartime debates over political issues like emancipation, conscription, the anti-war movement, and the election of 1864. The author writes that "Political debates served their purpose in shaping public opinion, but to the Union soldiers actually fighting the war, the debate became increasingly moot" (58). Disputes regarding the constitutionality of President Abraham Lincoln's policies and the political direction of the nation in general were of little concern to the men in the armies so long as federal leadership and policies seemed likely to shorten the war. Conversely, they could not abide civilians far from the fields of battle proposing measures that might protract the war or negate the sacrifices soldiers had already made to preserve the Union.

Though there was disagreement about the political purpose of the war, by 1862 it was increasingly clear that emancipation was at the center of the Union war effort. Ramold categorizes soldiers in three primary groups. Abolitionists, who enlisted early on with the sole intent of destroying the southern slaveocracy, "viewed themselves and their crusade as guided by the hand of God" (62). Emancipationists, though "sympathetic to the plight of slaves" (66-67), differed from abolitionists regarding the social impact of liberating the slaves; pro-emancipation sentiment grew among soldiers who saw it as a means to impede the southern war effort and "accepted that fighting would decide the outcome of the war and the future of slavery.... [They] viewed the war as a military struggle much more than abolitionists did" (73). Finally, Anti-abolitionists "strove to separate the political from the social and [to] reinstate the antebellum nature of America once the war ended, presumably with slavery intact" (76); their ranks included private soldiers and officers alike, who often threatened to oppose a government and military that enforced emancipation efforts, though nothing ever came of their threats. Regardless of these divisions in the ranks, soldiers believed "their experience made them the ones who were most suitable to select an outcome" (55), an attitude that further distanced them from civilians at home.

The Copperhead Movement, conscription, and the election of 1864 caused sharp disagreements between soldiers and civilians. Soldiers, who were "struggling and dying to save the Union ... had difficulty in accepting the peace movement" (133) and toleration of men who sought to avoid service (107-8). "The basis of opposition to the war, the soldiers recognized, was the right to talk freely about the war, and soldiers wished to silence those whom they believed were poisoning the well of support" (133); the same attitude applied to those who rejected conscription. These contentious political issues culminated with the presidential election of 1864. While some soldiers and civilians voted for McClellan as the peace candidate, the vast majority of soldiers "felt a sense of betrayal [by the peace movement] that went beyond McClellan. [They saw] the entire Democratic party ... [as] complicit in advancing the demands of the Southern States over the needs of the country as a whole" (162). Volunteers believed their sacrifices were undervalued and that civilians, unaware of or unconcerned about the harsh realities of war, time and again promoted political decisions likely to prolong the war. These resentments, Ramold notes, were short-lived and soldiers did not return home as disaffected men nursing lingering animosities; this allowed the nation to make a quick transition to peace.

Across the Divide approaches a critical historiographical question with a new, corrective emphasis on tensions between soldiers and civilians during the Civil War. Previous scholarship has made much of the stability of the northern home front in ensuring Union victory, especially as compared to the damage that chaos in the southern states did to the Confederacy's ability to wage war.² Thus, Ramold seeks to fill a major void in the

1. Respectively, 3: "Soldiers, Civilians, and the Purpose of War," 4: "The Debate over Conscription," 5: "Soldiers and the Anti-War Movement," and 6: "Soldiers, Civilians, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln."

2. See, e.g., even books as recent as Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge: Harvard U Pr, 2011), James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (NY: Norton, 2012), and Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil*

literature. He notes in his introduction that a “misunderstanding and ideological separation ... existed between Union soldiers and the different civilian communities” (2), most evidently when soldiers chose to “assert themselves in national debates and demand the support and respect of the civilian community who increasingly seemed inclined to adopt policies that did not favor a successful outcome of the war” (6). This implies that the “divide” was a disruptive factor throughout the Civil War, alienating soldiers from those back home. If Ramold is right about the split between front lines and home front, then most of the literature on relations between civilians and soldiers must be incorrect. But far too much evidence proves the close ties between soldiers and the home front.³ Indeed, Ramold himself shows throughout his book that soldiers actively participated in the social and political debates that arose at home.

The author appears to struggle at times with the restrictions imposed by his principal theme, especially in the early chapters. For example, he relates two telling stories. In one, a sympathetic railroad conductor escorts soldiers to the first class car: “It was all right, that the conductor took soldiers to be gentlemen, [an observer noted], although [they were] dressed in their old, worn uniforms” (14). In the other, a conductor describes an argument between a soldier and civilian over a seat: “I saw the uniform seemed to anger [the civilian]” (14) and found the man a seat in another car. Accounts like these certainly reveal northern home-front attitudes during the war, but did such behaviors shape the attitudes of soldiers? Most of them identified primarily with their local communities and, more pertinently, their own families. Thus, the “home front” was a rather personal space and unpleasant random encounters, for example on a train, although clearly annoying, cannot be taken as typical of individual relationships with those at home.

On another matter of significance, Ramold writes that “shifts in gender roles were most disconcerting in cases where women temporarily bridged the gender divide as participants in the war” (33). But his fascinating commentary on the ways soldiers and their womenfolk discussed domestic financial matters does not reveal that such interactions were so very “disconcerting.” On the contrary, he demonstrates that men and women successfully negotiated the new social environment in which they found themselves. Moreover, the fact that husbands worried about their finances and the well being of their families speaks to the strong bonds that continued to exist in spite of the separations brought about by war and the conditions of extended military service (39–45).

Chapters 3–6, the bulk of the work, deal each with a specific event or ideology. Ramold systematically examines the beliefs, attitudes, and reactions of soldiers concerning major issues of the time. He provides strong evidence of the strained relations between soldiers and civilians over emancipation, the draft, and the Peace Democrats. He does not, however, show that this evidence of political dissension, which was part and parcel of nineteenth-century American society, fundamentally altered the war effort in any way.

Steven Ramold challenges our preconceptions of northern unity by interpreting the war and war policies through the eyes of the men who fought. The establishment of the existence of a pervasive divide is not his book’s only or most significant contribution. To be sure, he proves that the unified front typically associated with the northern war effort was less real than historians have believed. But he also stresses that Union soldiers were attuned to the political and social rhetoric that emerged on the home front and voiced their criticisms of actions and issues they did not agree with. In this regard, they were active participants in the debates of the period.

Across the Divide is an excellent addition to the field of Civil War history. It forces us to reconsider how we understand the experiences of Union soldiers in the war and how they saw themselves within a northern society undergoing dramatic social and political changes.

War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina Pr, 2013). Closer to Ramold’s perspective are studies of more subtle expressions of political dissent that threatened to divide the North by Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln’s Opponents in the North* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2006), and Robert M. Sandow, *Deserter Country: Civil War Opposition in the Pennsylvania Appalachians* (NY: Fordham U Pr, 2009).

3. See, e.g., Gallagher and Sandow (note 2 above), and Melinda Lawson, *Patriot Fires: Forging a New American Nationalism in the Civil War North* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2002), and Paul Cimballa and Randall M. Miller, eds., *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front: Wartime Experiences, Postwar Adjustments* (NY: Fordham U Pr, 2002).