



Civil War in the Southwest Borderlands, 1861–1867 by Andrew E. Masich.

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In 1988, historian James McPherson observed that the scholarly literature on the US Civil War era totaled more than fifty thousand books.¹ In the past three decades, scholars have added thousands of additional books to that number. However, a distinct geographical imbalance exists in the literature. The Eastern Theater (Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia) receives the lion's share of attention, the Western Theater (everything else east of the Mississippi) considerably less. The Trans-Mississippi Theater (everything west of the Mississippi, including the Southwest Borderlands²), hardly receives any attention at all. In the present volume, historian Andrew Masich (Carnegie Mellon Univ.) brings his expertise³ to a growing conversation about the overlooked corners of the Civil War, with a revealing survey of developments during the war along the US-Mexico border from California through Arizona, New Mexico, and western Texas.

Masich notes at the outset that, “while historians have addressed the Union and Confederate conflict in the Southwest, none has focused on the importance of the Civil War as the spark that ignited a powder keg of civil wars relating to preexisting ethnic tensions in the borderlands” (4). His assertion that the Civil War enveloped the borderlands in violent conflicts is unquestionably true. However, he understates the work of scholars who have long argued that the removal of federal soldiers led to intensified fighting between Native Americans and white residents of the Southwest. That aside, Masich argues that the wars in the Southwest were deeply intertwined and chides historians for treating Mexico's French Intervention (a civil war pitting Liberals against Conservatives, Imperialists, and the French invaders), the US Civil War, and the struggles between Anglos, Native Americans, and Hispanic settlers of the Southwest as if they were discrete conflicts.

Masich begins with a useful discussion of the peoples of the Southwest Borderlands. Throughout the book, he urges readers to stop thinking in terms of undifferentiated large groups—for instance, Native Americans, Mexicans, and Anglos—and understand the subtle gradations among groups of people. He contends that “all the peoples of the Southwest understood the concept of conquest by force of arms, yet the rules of war differed for each group, and the

1. *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 1988) 870.

2. That is not to say that the Southwest Borderlands have been altogether ignored. See, e.g., Don Frazier, *Blood and Treasure: Confederate Empire in the Southwest* (College Station: Texas A&M U Pr, 1995); Don Alberts, *The Battle of Gorieta: Union Victory in the West* (id., 1998); Jerry Thompson, *Cortina: Defending the Mexican Name in Texas* (id., 2007); Jerry D. Thompson, *A Civil War History of the New Mexico Volunteers and Militia* (Albuquerque: U New Mexico Pr, 2015); Thomas W. Cutrer, *Theater of a Separate War: The Civil War West of the Mississippi River, 1861–1865* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina Pr, 2017); and Jerry D. Thompson, *Tejano Tiger: José de los Santos Benavides and the Texas-Mexico Borderlands, 1823–1891* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian U Pr, 2017).

3. His previous work includes *The Civil War in Arizona: The Story of the California Volunteers, 1861–1865* (Norman: U Okla Pr, 2006) and, with David Fridtjof Halaas, *Halfbreed: The Remarkable True Story of George Bent—Caught between the Worlds of the Indian and the White Man* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Pr, 2004).

strategies and tactics employed varied” (13). In other words, no two conflicts in the Southwest were exactly alike. Masich skillfully uses recent work on gender to illuminate life in the borderlands, which “became a stage upon which martial men assumed roles dictated by their conceptions of manhood, honor, and violence” (31).⁴

The year 1861 proved to be a crucial moment. As state after state seceded from the Union, rebels began to capture garrisons, weapons, and soldiers. At the same time, the federal government repositioned soldiers within the territories and frontier states: “like a rapidly receding sea before the onrush of a violent tidal wave, the Civil War at first created a great power vacuum. The retreating federal presence and redirection of resources left the Southwest temporarily exposed to opportunistic raiding and conquest” (38). However, before long, the federal government began to realize the importance of this region and soon sent troops to occupy it and drive the rebels out.

The Trans-Mississippi and the Southwest are vast regions. The US-Mexico border is more than two thousand miles long. Masich has chosen to omit Texas, except for its western portions, and focus on California, Arizona, and New Mexico. This is problematic, because Texas played a vital role in border warfare. Some analysis of federal expeditions to reclaim portions of Texas would have strengthened the author’s narrative. Furthermore, he too often rehashes material covered in his earlier work on the war in Arizona (see note 3). Readers interested in the California Volunteers or Gen. James H. Carleton⁵ will be delighted, but others may rightly feel the author spends too much time on those topics.

After discussing the repulse of Confederate general Henry H. Sibley’s invasion of New Mexico, Masich analyzes borderland wars between Native Americans, Anglos, and Hispanos. He contends that New Mexico and Arizona “became the main arenas for conflict spawned by the disruption and militarization resulting from the American Civil War” (112). As one might expect, the chaos of the 1860s bled into the borderlands and “the Apaches stepped up their raiding activities and the endemic warfare of the borderlands” (118). The author warns against drawing broad conclusions and stresses that the region’s wars had unique histories. In time, it became obvious that Anglo-Americans would prevail, because “the exigencies of the Civil War had allowed the introduction of a policy of total war against the more mobile foraging tribes, now considered hostile, and had marked them for subjugation or destruction” (261). However, this overlooks the frequent attempts to exterminate Native Americans long before 1861.⁶

While there is much to like about this book, it has its flaws. Besides a preoccupation with the California Volunteers and events in Arizona, it privileges Anglo perspectives and voices in its discussions of Native Americans and Mexicans. On the plus side, Masich reveals the riches to be found in the underutilized Indian Depredation Claims records housed in the National Archives; in a brief appendix, he discusses how scholars might use them to reach new conclusions about borderlands life and warfare. In sum, Andrew Masich’s interesting and readable book demonstrates that scholars can, and should, continue to study the Civil War in the Southwestern Borderlands.

4. See Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 2005).

5. Masich offers a good discussion of Carleton’s attention to logistics, on which, see further Earl J. Hess, *Civil War Logistics: A Study of Military Transportation* (Baton Rouge: LSU Pr, 2017), with the review at *MiWSR* 2018-035.

6. See Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873* (New Haven: Yale U Pr, 2016).