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Evan Turiano

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The Worst Passions of Human Nature: White Supremacy in the Civil War North

By Paul D. Escott

(Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020. Pp. ix, 227. Notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.)

Paul D. Escott's latest book, *The Worst Passions of Human Nature: White Supremacy in the Civil War North*, starts and ends with a simple historical premise: "This is a white man's country" (p. 1). Through examination of partisan newspapers and political correspondence, he develops the bold argument that this notion had remarkable staying power through the social transformations wrought by the Civil War and the destruction of American slavery. The rapid evolution of wartime emancipation outpaced white Northerners' racial attitudes, and at times even fueled a reactionary response. White supremacy, even in the face of revolutionary change, "obdurately resisted progress" (p. 3).

Escott picks his story up in 1861, amid the chaos wrought by war. The exigencies of the conflict quickly brought many Northerners into the pro-emancipation fold. But new converts to emancipation refused to follow the abolitionists and radical Republicans toward racial egalitarianism. Escott's evidence reveals an expanded wartime emancipation program emanating from a groundswell of public support as early as 1861. However, he insists that "northerners thought of emancipation separately from equality" (p. 22). While much of the book is devoted to debunking

overly sunny portraits of Republican racial attitudes, equally central is the author's compelling assertion that white supremacy drove Democratic messaging through the dirty, difficult work of surviving as a wartime opposition party. Escott convincingly shows that racism, which bound Northern Democrats to the planter class before the war, only became more central as they struggled to maintain their position and relevance during wartime.

Escott then examines the resilience of Northern racism in the face of Lincoln's preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. He not only shows how Democrats leaned into racist rhetoric when characterizing and criticizing it, but he also reveals how Lincoln's Republican colleagues retreated from the equality question and even sometimes "employed explicitly racist arguments as part of their defense of military emancipation and the arming of freed slaves" (p. 53). Later war years brought clear evidence that emancipation was, and would remain, integral to the Union war effort. The response Escott lays out is, by this point in the book, a familiar pattern: soldiers' attitudes were transformed; Republican editors continued to skirt messages of racial equality, focusing on emancipation as a military expedient; and Democrats tied themselves into

increasingly complex knots to pair patriotism with anti-abolitionism. All this added up to, at most, an incomplete fulfillment of the conflict's promise that "the Civil War could not realize completely the ideas of the Declaration of Independence. It achieved, at best, only a partial repudiation of the idea of a 'white man's country'" (p. 179).

Frequently persuasive, Escott's work has much to teach students of Civil War-era partisan politics. A few problems, however, put his thesis on shaky ground. His portraits of Republicans, Northern Democrats, and slaveholders reacting to the onset of war do not comport with any logical accounting of how the war came to pass. If all were blindsided by the emergence of emancipation, why did the South secede in the first place? It was, he asserts, "an enormous miscalculation" that slaveholders blundered into (p. 9). Furthermore, his premise that "for the vast majority of northern whites, black people were an unfamiliar, threatening group known through

a host of extremely negative stereotypes"—while surely true in some cases—does not reckon with the nearly half-million free Black northerners and their successful anti-racist activism over eight decades (p. 102). Escott's theory of racial attitudinal change assumes a homogenous North that simply did not exist.

Ultimately, this otherwise forceful book reflects broader problems with barriers historians erect in the name of periodization. The Civil War did not unfold in a vacuum; its course was set by the people, events, and dynamics that catalyzed it in the antebellum era. More opportunities for meaningful engagement between historians of the Civil War and historians of antebellum slavery politics will cast further light on the politics of race in the Civil War North. Until then, *The Worst Passions of Human Nature* is a valuable place to start.

EVAN TURIANO, Queens College, CUNY
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Daybreak Woman: An Anglo-Dakota Life

By Jane Lamm Carroll

(St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2020. Pp. 288. Appendix, notes, bibliography, index. Paperbound, \$18.95.)

Jane Lamm Carroll's *Daybreak Woman: An Anglo-Dakota Life* reframes the history of *Mni Sota Makoce* (the Dakota homeland) in new and transformative

ways. *Daybreak Woman*, a mixed-ancestry Dakota woman also known as Jane Anderson Robertson, lived a full traveling life throughout the