

Civil War History

VOL LXXII

JUNE 2026

NO 2

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Published Quarterly by The Kent State University Press

ISSN 0009-8078

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On the cover: Scott Hancock, Drew Gilpin Faust, David Blight, Stephanie McCurry, and Jim Downs at the Fortenbaugh Lecture, Gettysburg College, November 19, 2025, the anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Photograph courtesy of Gettysburg College.

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EDITOR'S OVERVIEW

The June 2026 issue brings together innovative scholarship that reflects both the vitality of Civil War studies and the intellectual challenges currently facing the field. The contributions gathered here move beyond familiar interpretive binaries and ask readers to reconsider language, temporality, and scale—whether political, environmental, or historiographical—in shaping how we understand the war and its aftermath.

This issue features a major article by Gwion Wyn Jones, “Radical Reconstruction and the Language of Conservatism in the United States, 1865–1877,” which makes a fascinating and important intervention in Civil War-era political history. Jones traces how Republicans during Reconstruction strategically deployed the language of “conservatism” to defend policies conventionally understood as radical. By distinguishing between “true” and “false” conservatism, Reconstruction-era actors unsettled what has long been treated as a stable Radical-versus-Conservative divide. In doing so, Jones not only reframes Reconstruction politics but also offers an interpretive framework of broad significance for scholars of US political history. As one reader perceptively observed, the article’s signal contribution lies in demonstrating the “elasticity and capaciousness of conservatism in nineteenth-century political discourse, revealing the Radical–Conservative binary itself to be something of a false dichotomy and opening new avenues for thinking about how temporality—haste, delay, and duration—shaped Reconstruction debates.”

The issue also includes a roundtable based on the 2025 Fortenbaugh Lecture at Gettysburg College, reconceived as a collective conversation rather than a single keynote address. Organized in response to growing concerns about the place of the Civil War within the field of US history, the roundtable brings together David Blight, Drew Gilpin Faust, and Stephanie McCurry for a wide-ranging discussion of the past, present, and future of Civil War scholarship. At a moment when Civil War courses remain popular in some regions but appear to be waning elsewhere—and when senior scholars are retiring without replacement—the participants directly confront whether the Civil War should be understood as a decisive rupture or as part of a longer continuum of racial oppression.

Building on earlier conversations published in these pages, their exchange revisits the interpretive shifts that have reshaped the field since the 1980s and

1990s, when the Civil War was widely understood as central to the destruction of slavery. By engaging newer scholarship that emphasizes continuity alongside transformation, the roundtable offers a rare and illuminating dialogue among three of the field's most influential historians and underscores the enduring stakes of Civil War history for understanding the American past.

Taken together, the articles and roundtable in this issue reaffirm the journal's commitment to publishing work that challenges established categories and invites sustained reflection on the meanings and legacies of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

This issue contains no book reviews, but with the appointment of our brilliant new editor, Matthew Fox-Amato, we will publish many reviews in the future. Please reach out to him if you would like to serve as a reviewer or if you have suggestions for books to be reviewed—including your own!