**History 288 Civil War & Reconstruction**

**Discussion Transcript for Tuesday, April 7, 2020**

**Main Reading: Elizabeth Varon, Armies of Deliverance, chapter 9**

This chapter mainly covers the final four months of 1863, from September through December, focusing on the politics of occupation and reconstruction. Toward the end of the chapter, especially on the unfolding debate over abolition, reconstruction and southern unionism, Varon also looks ahead to some events in 1864 and 1865.

**Dickinson Connection Challenge**

No winners today (I blame post-paper fatigue…) but here were some possibilities: Flavel Barber, the “Tennnessee infantryman” whom Varon quotes at the very end of the chapter on p. 321, graduated from Dickinson in 1850 and Pennsylvania governor Andrew Curtin (Class of 1837), whose reelection victory in October 1863 helped pave the way toward what Varon calls the “crucial context” for Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.

The following are selections from student comments & questions with some responses from Prof. Pinsker

**Chickamauga and Chattanooga**

STUDENT COMMENT: Varon opens this chapter discussing Chickamauga and Chattanooga and their broader significance. The way that Varon describes it, victory at Chickamauga gave Confederate forces a sense of confidence going into a siege situation at Chattanooga. This turned Chattanooga into not just a loss, but what Varon calls a "humiliating setback" for Confederates after Union support came in to break the siege and overwhelmed the enemy with surprising force such as the "improvised" push from Thomas's troops to take Missionary Ridge. This lead to changes in Confederate leadership like Bragg being replaced with Johnston.

STUDENT COMMENT: One of the things I noticed about this battle [at Chattanooga] was that numbers were starting to play a role in the war and were crucial to the Union specifically. The sheer number of Union soldiers allowed for them to send more reinforcements to wherever they needed it seemed like. Reinforcements came from 3 different regions to help General George Thomas at Chattanooga. I don't think the Confederates would have been able to send that many reinforcements if they were in the same position because it would leave them too exposed in another area. Another aspect of the battle that stuck out to me was the attack of the Army of the Cumberland  on Missionary Ridge, which was not ordered by either Thomas, who was in charge or that army, or Grant, who was in charge of all of the Union forces in the west. I was surprised by the success considering no real order was given for the attack. I wondered who made the ultimate decision to attack, or if it was a consensus that the army as a whole came to. I can't imagine either way that they would have had a lot of time to make the decision to attack or that the attack was very organized, which is why I'm surprised it was successful.

QUESTION: Why did Jefferson Davis wait so long to replace Braxton Bragg after he had already had so many complaints about him before?

*Answer: The way Varon tells story of the Union military actions in East Tennesse is a good example of a “campaign narrative” on full display. She helps the reader understand the movement of armies and the connections between one hard-fought Confederate victory (at Chickamauga) and a subsequent “humiliating setback” at Chattanooga and how the maneuvering around those two battles also resulted in the evacuation of Knoxville. For your final essays and projects, you will need to visualize military action (if you choose to focus on a military story) in this kind of strategic fashion. The second comment also raises the insightful point about logistics and larger forces that lay behind heroic combat. You can tell the story of the Union victory at Chattanooga by focusing almost exclusively on remarkable events like the successful charge on Missionary Ridge, but you can also realize that the ability of the Union military to reinforce its armies in the field was essential, too. Varon doesn’t even tell the full story of that dramatic effort to reinforce Union troops after Chickamauga. She mentions that the War Department sent “Hooker from northern Virginia,” but doesn’t highlight for readers how much this was a logistical marvel and required an unprecedented use of rail lines to succeed. The question about Davis and Bragg also raises an important strategic point. Jefferson Davis was far more experienced in military matters than Abraham Lincoln and yet it was Lincoln, despite all of his struggles with McClellan and other generals, who proved more effective at managing military subordinates than his Confederate counterpart. Anyone really interested in this dynamic (or anyone writing about a military campaign) should read two recent books by James McPherson: Tried By War (on Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief) and Embattled Rebel (on Davis as wartime commander in chief).*

**East Tennessee**

STUDENT COMMENT: Varon goes on to discuss the fighting in Tennessee at the city of Knoxville. She argues that northern media and Union perception was that Knoxville was a centerpiece for deliverance. This turns out to be inaccurate as Varon points out that most of the whites in this city were pro-Confederacy. Even the Union supporters in this Tennessee city turned to neutrality rather than a strong stance. Varon states that the Union saw Knoxville as a city "yearning for rescue" and proves why this is not true. This goes against Varon's argument about deliverance in the south, because it becomes clear that not many people in Knoxville wanted saving by the Union. Is this seen anywhere else where the Union newspapers exaggerates the South's "yearning for rescue", and does this hurt Varon’s argument about deliverance?

*Answer: This comment seems too rigid in its approach. Varon’s main point in this section on the “deliverance” of East Tennessee is to demonstrate that there were nuances and sometimes even contradictions behind often-exaggerated propaganda claims. But I don’t see how this “hurts” her argument. Nothing in a historical interpretation should be simplistic or black-and-white. Varon’s thesis on deliverance does not require her to “prove” that each side was right about their claims of deliverance, just that they were sincere or sincerely deluded, i.e. that it was an important factor in shaping how they understood the meaning of their terrible conflict. Students also need to remember that historical interpretations should never be static. Varon’s claims about deliverance take into account how that concept evolved over the course of the war, and her contrast between the symbol and reality of East Tennessee helps her demonstrate that evolution.*

**Andrew Johnson**

STUDENT COMMENT: Another really small and random fact stood out to me, and that was when Andrew Johnson gave a speech to African Americans in Nashville where he compared himself to Moses in saying he would lead the way for African Americans to freedom. This to me just seemed really weird and almost made me think he is a little arrogant. This is one of the first times he has come forward in support of African Americans, and it was not even until 1864. The battle for the abolishing of slavery had been going on now since the late 1700s. There were many other people who had done more and had been fighting longer to help African Americans in their fight for freedom than Andrew Johnson. Harriet Tubman was also compared to Moses due to her work with the Underground Railroad, and I think it is absurd, and almost rude, to compare someone like Andrew Johnson to Harriet Tubman.

*Answer: We’re going to spend some time near the end of the semester focusing on Johnson. This section of chapter 9 describing his role during the “internal reconstruction” of Tennessee offers some initial insights about him. Johnson, as Varon describes, was a key Southern Unionist, not only because he was the only Southern senator in 1861 not to join the secession movement with his state, but also because he became a wartime military governor who supported emancipation in 1863. Johnson’s willingness to back black freedom was what ultimately made him acceptable to Lincoln as a vice presidential candidate in 1864. Of course, Johnson’s arrogance and self-aggrandizement in comparing himself to Moses for black people is something that Varon and the student commentator above rightly consider to be ridiculous. But it’s also important to understand how Johnson saw himself, as a profile in political courage who was risking his life and future by supporting both Union and emancipation.*

**Ten Percent Plan and Wartime Reconstruction**

STUDENT COMMENT: One concept from the reading which I had not thought about before was the idea that Lincoln and Union leadership was thinking about how best to go about reconstruction even before the end of the war, or wartime reconstruction. Varon talks about "experiments" in states that stood to inform Lincoln and his administration about which course to take in reconstruction. Varon points out "internal reconstruction", or border states working towards gradual emancipation and incorporating Republican policies into their state governments. To push Varon's concept of "experiments" a little, were these border states prompted to do this kind of "internal reconstruction" on the part of the government or did they do it on their own and just happen to serve as a demonstration for Lincoln and his administration?

STUDENT COMMENT: The deliverance of the Gettysburg Address in November 1863 was a significant moment in Lincoln's career. … I thought Varon made an interesting point when she talked about Lincoln referring back to the Declaration of Independence to back up his point of view. Also that there were political reasons for Lincoln attending the event, namely meeting with Pennsylvania political allies who could aid him as he prepared for the election. The 10 percent plan was also something that I have never heard about until reading about it. It is my understanding that if southerners took an oath of loyalty to the Union they would receive amnesty, the restoration of all their property rights minus slaves as well as the end of the confiscation act. They could begin organizing local governments once their number numbered one tenth of the number of votes in the 1860 election. This plan obviously had supporters and dissenters but I was curious as to why it is never really talked about in schools.

QUESTION: Why was postwar reconstruction such an issue before the war itself war over? Was the union that certain of their victory?

QUESTION: What were Lincoln's true feelings on readmitting the Confederates into the Union? We know he wrote and talked differently about slavery privately than he did publicly, so was Lincoln being lenient for political and public reasons, or did he really want to help the Confederates who realized their mistakes and were supposed to be redeeming/rectifying their actions?

*Answer: Perhaps the biggest insight about Reconstruction is that it began long before the end of the Civil War. You can date serious national focus on Reconstruction from late 1863 (with the battle between Sumner and Blair and Lincoln’s middle-ground approach in his Annual Message and Amnesty Proclamation) but the truth is that Reconstruction issues date back to the beginning of Southern occupation, which started in 1861. It wasn’t that the Union was “certain” of victory, but rather than the necessity of occupation compelled attention to the question of Reconstruction. And what some of the comments and questions above quite rightly realize is that Lincoln understood how he might leverage Reconstruction policy to end the war sooner. He wanted to create momentum for both reunion and abolition and worked incredibly hard behind the scenes (in places like Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, Maryland and elsewhere) to make that happen. Of course, Lincoln worked just as hard in public and that’s what I believe is the significance of understanding the Gettysburg Address in the same context as the December 8th annual message and Lincoln’s announcement of his Reconstruction plans. Varon connects the two public statements in a smart way and as part of the larger political context, following the 1863 state elections (like the PA gubernatorial campaign) and the upcoming presidential and congressional elections in 1864. What Lincoln had to accomplish over the winter of 1863-64 was to find a message and set of policies that could unify Republicans and as many Unionists as possible. His soaring rhetoric and the 10 percent plan were both essential to that goal. The Address at Gettysburg was not yet aimed at reuniting North and South (as some believe) but rather at holding together a fractious North. If you doubt this, just check out the Google exhibit we created and available by link through the course site where we laid out the case with even greater detail than Varon provides in her chapter. The 10 percent plan and especially Lincoln’s amnesty policy announced just a few weeks after the Gettysburg Address furthered this goal by connecting amnesty (reconciliation) with professed loyalty not only to the Union and the Constitution, but also to emancipation. In my classes, I always say that December 8 amnesty proclamation was the essential bookend to the January 1 emancipation proclamation. The December proclamation made clear Lincoln’s commitment to the January 1st proclamation. The two should be considered together and yet they are rarely done so. As several students noted, the December 1863 proclamation and policy announcements were new to them.*

**Southern Unionism**

STUDENT COMMENT: I was particularly interested in Varon's discussion of Confederate sentiment at the end of the chapter.  She has spent much of the book talking about how both sides believed the other felt about the war, but not nearly as much discussing how they actually felt.  The Confederate government's treatment of North Carolina Unionists I found particularly striking, especially considering that one of the main arguments in contemporary politics is that the Lincoln administration was "tyrannical."  Restricting rights, targeted conscription, confiscating property, and turning a blind eye to the acts of anti-Unionist guerrillas seems far worse to me than any war measures Lincoln has thus far enacted.

QUESTION: While Varon seems to show North Carolina as a sort of hub of southern Unionism, how what was the state of pro-Union sentiment in other states?  Was allegiance to the Confederacy breaking down everywhere, or just in certain states?  Were there other Confederate states with significant Unionist populations aside from North Carolina?

*Answer: I agree with these comments and want to highlight them for everyone –if you didn’t make it to the very end of the chapter, please try to do so. Varon does spend more of her book on the Union side than the Confederate side (as I do in class as well), but her analysis of the problem of Southern dissent and the particular challenges in North Carolina were especially effective and compact. North Carolina, Western Virginia and Eastern Tennessee were particular hubs of Southern unionism, but there were pockets almost everywhere across the South. But the key word there is “pockets.” We don’t have polls or scientific data for public opinion in that era, but by every measure we have it seems clear that the vast majority of white southerners supported the Confederacy, even if they griped or complained frequently about the sacrifices of the war, as William Stoker from Texas did in that student exhibit I asked you to examine previously.*