Our study of America’s Civil War era took a fortunate turn when we began to delve more deeply into wartime experiences at regional and state levels, breaking our fixation on simple North or South distinctions. What new specific insight do we gain about wartime experiences when we situate our vantage point within a state and among its residents? Plenty. And what emerges as well are not only some unique circumstances but, more tellingly, also myriad commonalities (experiences, activities, opinions) among certain states that form the heart of regional distinctiveness. These ideas form the basis of Ohio University Press’s series, Civil War in the Great Interior, of which John W. Quist’s *Michigan’s War: The Civil War in Documents* is a part. In this volume, Quist has carefully selected a range of insightful, often compelling documents and illustrations that are representative of Wolverine State wartime issues (many also common to other midwestern states). These are interspersed with sources that reveal several uniquely Michigan stories.

*Michigan’s War*, like other volumes in this series, relies on a very workable organizational framework and accompanying succinct historical narratives to enable the many documents to speak for themselves. Michiganian Civil War and Reconstruction era experiences have been selected from newspapers, legislative actions, political addresses, and official records, as well as personal writings, such as letters, memoirs, and diary entries. They are grouped into nine topic-driven chapters, which, for the purpose of this review, are divided into thirds. The volume concludes with a timeline, chapter discussion questions, and a selected bibliography.

Michigan gained statehood in 1837, fewer than twenty-five years before the Civil War broke out. The 1860 census enumerated just under 750,000 residents (many with northeastern roots) of which fewer than 7,000 were African Americans. Counting the Native American population was less straightforward, but Quist puts that figure at nearly 14,000. The state was overwhelmingly rural and agricultural, and economic development, as represented for example by railroad mileage, was slow. Michigan’s largest city (by far), Detroit, had 45,619 residents. Smaller population figures did not diminish the political passions of the day and in fact touched all groups and parts of the state.

The first three chapters focus on how the politics of sectionalism, slavery, race, and secession played out in Michigan, followed by the pragmatics associated with shifting the state to wartime participation and activities. Quist offers crucial insight about the dominant role of the Democratic Party in state politics until 1854 when power shifted to the new Republican Party. This shift was not
entirely unforeseen given the rise of abolitionist influence with the founding of the Michigan State Anti-Slavery Society in 1836. While Quist notes the role of Quaker Elizabeth Chandler and women’s involvement in the Liberty Party in passing, he misses an opportunity to incorporate documents that would have underscored women’s roles and activities in antislavery politics. This would also have kept the political narrative from being almost exclusively male. Midwestern women, including Michigan women, were not silent, inactive, or without opinions on these political developments going forward. Of particular interest in the first chapter’s documents are those related to Michigan’s powerhouse Democrat Lewis Cass and his views on nonintervention (popular sovereignty) in the territories, an excerpt from a little-known 1859 debate between John Brown and Frederick Douglass in Detroit, and an 1860 Stephen A. Douglas speech in Detroit along with his response to hecklers in Dowagiac.

With secession shortly after Abraham Lincoln’s election in 1860, an election win strongly supported by Michigander voters, we see how the state’s political lines mirrored those seen elsewhere in the Midwest and across the North. In his inaugural message, Republican governor Austin Blair called for “patriotic firmness and decision” because there was no ambiguity here: “Secession is revolution, and revolution, in the overt act, is treason” (pp. 28, 29). Yet, as chapter 2 documents reveal, there was room for ambiguity, even among Republicans. Anti-abolitionists rioted in February 1861, and the Michigan Democrats’ mouthpiece, the *Detroit Free Press*, published a sharp rebuke of Lincoln’s inaugural address. Quist also reminds us that available secession and war information lagged for rural or remote settlements as shown in a news clipping from the *Grand Traverse Herald*. But shifting Michigan to a war footing, the third chapter’s focus, was evidently swift, even producing public statements of setting aside political ideological differences in favor of patriotic professions of “undivided loyalty” to protecting the Union (p. 38). Patriotic fervor initially swelled Michigan ranks, as elsewhere. Governor Blair easily raised the first ten regiments (eight infantry, one cavalry, and one artillery), such that by the end of 1861 more than sixteen thousand soldiers had joined (some even joining out-of-state regiments). All but one of the chapter documents emphasize the impact of the recruitment process on men: a meeting of volunteers, recruitment challenges after the first year, and departure for the front. Among the two memorable voices are those of a mother desiring to cause her son to reconsider before enlisting and a Detroit speech of a former prisoner of war, Orlando Boliver Willcox. He reflected: “I say that this monster is Slavery at the bottom, with that scum of all the earth, Southern Chivalry, at the top. We, Democrats and Abolitionists, can shake hands on that subject” (p. 49).

Michigan’s war comes alive in its participants featured in the next group of chapters and documents (chapters 4-6): “The Soldier’s Life,” “Conscription, Commutation, and Dissent,” and “Civilians Confront the War.” Quist provides a detailed snapshot of the approximately ninety thousand Michigan men who enrolled in or were drafted into the war, most of whom served in the eastern or western theater. Eastern theater service was primarily in Virginia and the Shenandoah Valley, while western theater service focused on Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia, including part of Sherman’s march into the Carolinas. At least thirteen hundred Black men enlisted in Michigan’s Colored Infantry, which became redesignated as the 102nd US Colored Troops, and then sent to Florida in 1864 and on to South Carolina. By 1863, Michigan Odawa, along with Ojibwe, Delaware, Huron, Oneida, and Potawatomi, formed Company K of the Michigan Sharpshooters, “the most famous Indian unit in the Union army fighting Confederate forces east of the Mississippi” (p. 83). Chapter 4’s documents consist of a variety of soldier perspectives on combat and military life, including documents from a
regimental chaplain and a hospital steward and a report on George Armstrong Custer’s command of the Michigan Cavalry Brigade at the Battle of Yellow Tavern. We also learn of Annie Lillybridge who disguised herself as a man to serve near her lover in the 21st Michigan Infantry and of Anna Etheridge who, along with nineteen women, volunteered to accompany the Second Michigan Volunteers as a nurse.

Chapter 5 provides context and examples of Michigan’s waning patriotic fervor as it was increasingly challenged by harsh wartime realities. Controversial enlistment bounties to encourage badly needed recruits gave way to state-level conscription in February 1863 and the start of drafts through the Enrollment Act passed by Congress a month later. Some found a way to pay a substitute, paid the hefty three-hundred-dollar commutation fee (disallowed in July 1864), or fled to Canada. Documents illustrate these examples as well as Detroit’s anti-Black riot in March 1863, a political prisoner’s letter to President Lincoln, and an early 1865 example of violent draft resistance in Huron County.

However, the sense of urgent immediacy that Michiganders experienced during the war is perhaps best represented by chapter 6. Except in the remotest areas, the Civil War was ever present for women, families, and communities. Civilians, especially women, enthusiastically took on the role of organizing relief work to meet the material and food needs of their soldiers. Just as the US Army depended on the United States Sanitary Commission (USSC), the USSC relied on state and local soldiers’ aid societies for supplies and some distribution, such as the Michigan Soldiers’ Aid Society, which had 358 subsidiaries in 45 counties. In September 1864, Valeria Campbell of the Michigan Soldiers’ Aid Society forwarded an appeal to women and children “to dry, or otherwise prepare all the fruit they can.... If they are unable to do much, let them do all they can” (p. 107). This patriotic energy is also seen in the women who rather boldly chose to serve as nurses, including Julia Wheelock of Ionia, who was employed by the Michigan Relief Association. She wrote: “Our Michigan soldiers were scattered through all these hospitals, and to find out and visit every one was no small task” (p. 109). From the nation’s capital, Detroit Advertiser correspondent Lois Bryan Adams reported on hospital conditions in May 1864: “I have been among our wounded soldiers today” (p. 108). Even more impressive was Hannah Carlisle of Buchanan who served with the 2nd Michigan Cavalry as a nurse in Kentucky and then assisted with teaching for the Freedman’s Bureau there. She later received a twelve-dollar monthly pension for her wartime nursing (p. 111). Documents also illustrate grave concerns about the soundness of government contracts, inadequate support for military families, labor shortages and disputes in Upper Peninsula mines, and genuine tension over the border with Canada and its proximity to Confederates fleeing Northern prisons.

The final three chapters (7-9) return to a focus on Civil War era politics (and thus again to a predominantly male voice), including views on Emancipation and Reconstruction. While Michigan’s politics continued to be dominated by Republicans through Lincoln’s reelection in 1864 (though with fewer counties than 1860), Democrats were not done rallying. Michigan Democrats successfully allied with conservative Republicans in 1862 and, as Quist notes, won fifty-one seats in the statehouse. Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation and the corresponding shift in war aims toward ending slavery, along with the president’s controversial actions on civil rights, provoked dissent and vitriol among many Democrats. In Michigan as in many midwestern states, copperheadism represented a vocal arm of the Democratic Party that peaked in 1864 and often led to accusations of traitorous behavior. Chapter 7 documents show partisan divides over Lincoln and emancipation and the ways party lines could be blurred over both. A fascinating 1865 example of an appeal from Detroit Blacks for suffrage.
is also included. Chapter 8, which perhaps should have been combined with the previous chapter, essentially traces Michiganders’ response to emancipation and to being the third state to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment ending slavery. Responses range from Democratic charges of Republicans’ “Abolition Fanaticism” to soldiers’ opposition to emancipation and enlistment of African Americans. Key insight is found in an autobiographical excerpt of abolitionist Laura Haviland of Raisin Township. Her commitment toward seeking racial equality drove her work on behalf of the enslaved; here, we learn of the dire conditions and “great suffering” freed people faced at war refugee camps like the one at Cairo, Illinois (p. 154).

Finally, the remaining chapter (9) brings together documents representative of Michiganders’ reactions to the end of a long, grueling war amid great partisanship and decisions made in charting a path forward during Reconstruction. Quist characterizes this period as one that “often consisted of local debates regarding national issues,” including support for advancing African American rights and railroad building (p. 162). Accompanying documents also reflect soldiers’ end-of-war circumstances, disabled veterans, and a nurse applying for a pension.

Quist has assembled a valuable documents-driven narrative of how Michiganders experienced the Civil War. I would have welcomed a bit less of the politics and much more on civilians’ lives, especially women and farmers (who comprised the majority of the population) and community impact. And yet those interested in the Civil War’s impact on midwestern states like Michigan will find *Michigan’s War* to be an insightful volume.


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