

STEVE LONGENECKER, *Gettysburg Religion: Refinement, Diversity, and Race in the Antebellum and Civil War Border North* (New York: Fordham UP, 2014), 246 pp.

Steve Longenecker's micro-historical study attempts to carve out the significance of Gettysburg beyond its role as the site of a three-day Civil War battle, or its place in the name of Lincoln's address as he dedicated the Soldier's National Cemetery. Longenecker seeks to uncover Gettysburg by shifting the focus away from the stifling legacy of the war and to the town as representing small-town America in the antebellum Border North (1). Longenecker's project is to read Gettysburg through the lens of three key terms—refinement, diversity, and race—in order to demonstrate that this small town was indicative of antebellum trends and tendencies in the larger Border North as well as on the national level (1). In so doing, Gettysburg hovers between the special and the ordinary: while it was “typically American” in subscribing to a “pursuit of material gain and improvement” (i.e., refinement), Longenecker calls Gettysburg “unusually diverse and modern” (33) for its rural setting. Relating the key terms to their significance for and within religion and religious practices in this “intriguing” (33) town of Gettysburg is supposedly the core of Longenecker's study. As the chapters progress, however, one might argue that what he calls once “race,” “diversity,” or “war” might actually be at the heart of the matter.

Longenecker's outline is straightforward. He first introduces Gettysburg and its inhabitants, its history and development, and, most importantly, its various religious congregations. He then moves on to highlight the different characteristics of refinement, diversity, and war “in theory” and “in practice” (chs. 2 and 3), as well as their interplay with lived religious practices in Gettysburg: refinement as “the quest for improvement” (1) among the middle-class touched, for example, the church buildings as well as “polished worship” (2); diversity in Gettysburg, for Longenecker, comprises not only denominational but also doctrinal, educational, and ethnic diversity (3). The war's impact on religion in town, so Longenecker's conclusion, was only “moderate” (5), in the sense that most congregations recovered rather quickly and resumed their “routine” after July, 1863 (5). Therefore, the actual battle only figures in the last chapter,

and although there is a factual account of the lead-up and its course of action, the focus is put on its aftermath and direct impact on the inhabitants and religious communities. This is part of Longenecker's strategy to de-nationalize the Battle of Gettysburg and to contradict the superlatives of historiography that have contributed to turning it into an American *lieu de mémoire*.

The book chapters are interspersed with so-called “divertimentos”—the actual methodological coup of the author. In these brief introductions of select Gettysburg families and individuals—the Steenburgen Schmuckers, Sallie Myers, the Codoris, the Briens, the Sherfys, and Thaddeus Stevens—Longenecker achieves introducing the reader to the personal composition of the town's microhistory and establishes a direct link between readers and the local community. The title is misleading, however. Despite Longenecker's definition, the divertimentos are not “light” entertainment (8), as one would expect from what was originally a musical piece. Rather, they are “serious” (8) short biographies in line with the author's bottom-up approach to his study and offer an alternative history of Gettysburg and the battle of 1863.

Indeed, the divertimentos engage the reader and, eventually, are at the heart of a substantial reevaluation of the battle not just as an event of national significance, but as having an impact on the level of a small town and its inhabitants. By the time the actual battle figures in the book, the Gettysburg cosmos has unfolded before the reader, who is now equally taken in by the drama and “surreal” character (151) of the war. We are able to identify the farms of the Briens, the Sherfys, and the Codoris on Emmitsburg Road where the two armies face off, with Union troops occupying the Sherfy's peach orchard (146). The reappearance of these characters throughout the different chapters underlines an interconnectedness between micro and macro that reaches a climax during the battle. As representatives of the Gettysburg community and its religious congregations, ethnicities, and races, these individuals show that Longenecker's key terms are the effects of the people who shape them. Longenecker seems to have understood this well, for the Coda follows up on the individual fates and stories of the families—post-Civil War.

Eventually, the narratological choice of the divertimentos creates an effect which weighs

more heavily, perhaps, than the portrait of Gettysburg religion in its shapes and forms, and foregrounds the ambivalent key term of “race/war.” For example, the portrait of Samuel Schmucker, otherwise an important Lutheran theologian in town (9), shows that race was as crucial in his life as religion, refinement, and education. Longenecker focuses notably on his marriage to Mary Steenberg, daughter of a Southern slaveholder, who brings slaves—Longenecker also likes to call them “servants” repeatedly (11,12)—into the marriage and into Gettysburg (10). Also, although Longenecker claims that the Civil War impact on religion was but moderate in Gettysburg, one of the two congregations which suffered dramatically is AME Zion (6; next to the German Lutherans), the African American Methodists with whom Abraham and Elizabeth Brien are worshipping. The example makes Longenecker’s statement that the Civil War left “intact refinement, diversity, and race” (6) somewhat incoherent.

The most obvious problem with Longenecker’s study is the inconsistent use of “race” and “war” throughout the chapters, with race appearing on the book cover, for example, while in other instances, it seems to indicate another layer of diversity (ch. 5), whereas “war” is identified as one of the “trends” (1) in the antebellum Border North. It appears to be an underlying assumption that “race” and “war” were mutually influ-

ential, but it remains unclear why Longenecker uses the terms in specific instances. Also, the author identifies the setting of the Border North for the purposes of his study objectively as “Gettysburg and the southern Pennsylvania region along the border with Maryland” (6), but shifts meaning at the end of his introduction as “the borderline between freedom and slavery” (8), which leaves a different impression altogether, suggesting a much stronger emphasis on “race” to be expected in the book.

In sum, Longenecker’s reconsideration of Gettysburg and the impact of the Civil War on one of its most famous sites are well taken. He puts it back on the map under a different set of parameters, appreciating the micro-level of community and religious practices that the weight of the July, 1863 battle has tended to ignore. However, the three lenses of refinement, diversity, and race (or, war?), while important aspects of antebellum Gettysburg life, are used inconsistently. Longenecker underlines again and again, almost tediously, how “diverse” Gettysburg’s religious landscape had been, and how it had almost been left unshaken by the War, whereas his assertion that tolerance in the area was “imperfect” (4) is an important statement on the “numerous trials” for the local African American community, both religious and secular.

Mainz

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