

Alan T. Nolan. *Lee Considered: General Robert E. Lee and Civil War History*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991. Pp. xii, 231. Cloth, \$22.50.

Robert E. Lee holds almost as much fascination among today's population as he did among the generation that fought the Civil War. Except for Thomas L. Connelly's 1977 critical book, *The Marble Man*, Lee has virtually escaped scholarly analysis and has remained on a pedestal of public worship that borders on the dogmatic. To reconsider these gilded assumptions, Alan T. Nolan, author of several combat histories on the Civil War, examines the wide variety of existing sources on six particular themes: Lee as opponent of slavery; devoted Virginian forced into the war; brilliant military strategist; magnanimous adversary; nobleman who maintained a sense of honor even in defeat; and promoter of post-war reconciliation. The author enters this historiographic fray not as a polemicist, but as one who hopes to set the record straight and to "humanize" a true American hero. At the outset, he frankly states, "I believe that Robert E. Lee was a great man--able, intelligent, well-motivated and moral, and much beloved by his army. He did what he believed to be right."

One of Lee's most ennobling qualities supposedly was his utter revulsion at the Peculiar Institution. Yet this is more of a post-war public relations image than an honest sentiment. Before the war he owned slaves, traded in them as if they were commodities, and helped apprehend runaways for anonymous masters. In a long letter to his wife in December, 1856, Lee spelled out his true feelings that black people were more fortunate as American slaves than if they had remained as freemen in the barbarism of Africa, for white civilization and Christianity bestowed upon them the tools for being temporarily uplifted and spiritually saved. Lee placed some faith in a long term plan of gradual emancipation, but he ardently opposed the abolitionists and clearly saw righteousness in the Confederacy's defense of slavery. Likewise, he represented the mainstream of southern sentiment when he elected to leave the Union and serve the cause of the Confederacy. He did this not simply because of his personal loyalty to Virginia, as so many people have long claimed, but because of his loyalty to the South and its institutions against a perceived tyranny.

On the battlefield, Lee's strategy and tactical performance were brilliant, contends Nolan, but he never constructed a realistic "grand strategy" for winning the war on terms that were consistent with the South's strengths and its stated purposes in the war. Nolan's conclusion that Lee should have adopted a "grand defensive strategy," in place of the daring offensive plans that led to Antietam and Gettysburg, will rankle many historians, but the argument is well-grounded. On an equally harsh note, Nolan contends that the general needlessly sacrificed tens of thousands of soldiers even after there was no hope for victory, and that after the war, Lee became more defensive about the South's "noble cause" and an obstructionist against Reconstruction policies.

Lee Considered promises to be a controversial book whose unorthodox conclusions necessitate responses from serious scholars. The History Book Club and the Book-of-the-Month Club have already included the work among their offerings, and thus it will receive broad exposure within the general reading audience. It likewise has great potential in college classrooms because of its brevity, lucid style, fast pace, and impeccable scholarship. Certainly for Civil War and historiography classes it has the most utility, but even a freshman-level survey class in American history can appreciate this book, and better understand how and why historians differ in their interpretations about past events and personalities. An inexpensive paperback reprint would clearly find a welcome place in the college market.

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Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease. *They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom, 1830-1861*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990. Pp. xi, 339. paper, \$14.95.

First published in 1974, *They Who Would Be Free* remains a work of considerable insight and importance. Reprinted in 1990 by the University of Illinois Press as part of their fine series on Blacks in the New World, edited by August Meier, both the scope and the interpretive quality of the Peases'