

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 temporally 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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Michael L. Tate

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'

study stands up well in light of sixteen years of additional historical analysis. Indeed, the only change made to this new edition is a bibliographical essay that updates the scholarship since 1974.

What makes *They Who Would Be Free* impressive is the care with which the authors explore the complex nature of Afro-American ideologies, attitudes, and activities from the "abolitionist crusade" beginnings in the 1830s to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. Not only do the Peases tell us much about American and Afro-American life during this era, but their work provides considerable understanding of the racial and interracial debates of our own time. Although antislavery was the cause that helped shape black American activities within the North and drew blacks and whites together in the only meaningful interracial endeavor in pre-Civil War America, it was an experience that symbolized the difficulties and conflicts of black and whites learning how to live, work, and respect one another in a society "half free and half slave." As the Peases and others have shown, it was one thing for white abolitionists, a minority themselves, to engage in the good fight against southern slavery in alliance with former black slaves and free blacks; it was another matter for them to truly embrace Afro-Americans as their equals and imagine a society where black leaders and ideas were truly valued by the dominant white culture.

Thus, as the sub-title of this book indicates, it is the "search for freedom" that defines the experiences of Afro-Americans in the North as they responded to and helped shape the abolitionist movements and were affected by the critical events leading to civil war. "Freedom" extended, in this respect, well beyond the termination of slavery; at its basic level, it involved for blacks issues of personal respect, dignity, equal rights, and self-determination. Despite the efforts of Afro-Americans, who were often as much in conflict with one another as they were with their white friends and adversaries, the absence of any real power--political, economic, and cultural--made significant interracial interaction and understanding extremely difficult. By the end of the 1850s, black Americans of differing political and social persuasions were in common despair over the possibilities for either ending slavery or achieving racial equality within the North. It was ultimately only the violence of war itself that made possible the end of southern slavery.

This is a book that needs to be pondered by both teachers and students since almost all of the racial and interracial struggles of our own time are clearly present in the battles of the early nineteenth century. As the post-World War II civil rights movement reflected, it is when blacks and whites are brought together most directly in the cause for racial and social justice that historical and cultural differences emerge most acutely and painfully. To realize that inequality involves far more than simply the absence of legal rights but is rooted also in the cultural attitudes of a nation that often refuses to take seriously--respect--the very people whose freedom it celebrates, is one of the sobering lessons of the Peases' study. *They Who Would Be Free* deserves to be read and contemplated.

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John B. Kirby

Charles P. Henry. *Culture and African American Politics*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990. Pp. ix, 140. Cloth, \$22.50.

When W.E.B. Dubois observed the "two-ness" of the African-American he brought attention to a theme that would pervade writings in black studies to the present day. While a majority of works have considered blacks as Americans and focused upon their inequitable treatment or condition compared to other segments of the population, a growing literature has sought to portray African-American moral and social life as distinctive from that of other Americans. This work summarizes some of this thinking and attempts to extrapolate from it a political ideology unique to black Americans.

Henry begins his book by refuting the works that have defined black politics in terms of elite leadership groups and strategies. He presents an alternative model linking ideology, cultural symbols, and political action and postulates that the values found in the mass culture of African-Americans form a type of ideology. He goes on to hypothesize that this "distinct black politics based on a unique