

Reviews

The General vs. The President: MacArthur and Truman at the Brink of Nuclear War, by H. W. Brands. New York: Doubleday, 2017. 437 pages. \$30.00, cloth. \$17.95, paper. \$17.95, electronic.

The Korean War (1950-1953) has been called the “forgotten war” between the United States’ involvement in World War II and Vietnam. Unlike these other wars, the Korean War never formally ended. The 1953 ceasefire demilitarized zone became the *de facto* border between North Korea and South Korea, and the U.S. still stations tens of thousands of troops in the peninsula. North Korea’s recent nuclear missile threats give the forgotten conflict a contemporary relevance. The debate over U.S. policy to stop North Korea was as heated and uncertain in the early 1950s as it appears to be today. *The General vs. The President*, by prolific University of Texas historian H. W. Brands, is a highly readable and timely look at the politics of fighting North Korea the first time, as viewed through the conflict of wills between President Harry Truman and General Douglas MacArthur.

Brands’ latest book is readily usable by and should be of interest to history teachers, particularly those seeking to make connections between U.S. history and civics/government. Brands’ account focuses on the different backgrounds and personalities of Truman and MacArthur and why they disagreed over Korea. Attention to the Korean War in U.S. school curriculum typically emphasizes a constitutional crisis over civilian control of the military. While there were constitutional dimensions (Truman certainly felt he was protecting the authority of the presidency), Brands details how the rift was chiefly over policy and how much freedom of action the field commander should have. MacArthur favored aggressive latitude to secure victory against communists even at risk of expanding the war; Truman’s policy was restrained containment of communist military aggression. At no point did MacArthur challenge the President Truman’s constitutional authority, nor did he directly refuse to obey any executive order. Even when the military joint chiefs of staff endorsed firing MacArthur, they did not charge him with insubordination or violating the Constitution. However, MacArthur willfully stretched and at times undermined orders from Washington. Perhaps more than any general before or since, MacArthur played an openly political game (testing

multiple runs for the presidency during wartime). As MacArthur wrote or spoke to the media obliquely questioning Truman's commitment to fighting communism, Truman and his advisors played politics back by leaking documents questioning MacArthur's wisdom and competence.

The General vs. The President has several qualities useful for history education. First, the book demonstrates how history can be "framed" through alternate perspectives. Brands shifts the narrative's point of view between MacArthur and Truman, conveying to the reader how each figure saw himself, the conflict, and the rightness of his behavior. Even though Brands has a personal preference, he does not let it undermine even-handed treatment of multiple perspectives. I find the book's prologue particularly skillful—framing the broad perspectives and values of European leaders (via Clement Attlee), Truman, and MacArthur in just seven pages.

Teachers interested in primary sources will appreciate how the narrative is heavily based in period documentation. Virtually every page contains quotes from letters, memoranda, speeches, newspapers, and memoirs used to flesh out the narrative, almost like script dialogue. Many quotes are short, but others are quite long. Brands carefully pulls out the most salient sections from dense or lengthy sources (e.g., MacArthur's famous address to Congress on pp. 321-327), allowing enough space to carry the historical figure's own voice, but selective enough not to bog down the reader. These narrated longer excerpts can be used by teachers as sources for evidence or analysis in the classroom.

This book is not a comprehensive history of the Korean War. It focuses on events of 1950-1951, with only short discussions of preceding events or the rest of the conflict. Nonetheless, it offers historical generalizations of broader significance useful to history educators. Brands models how to practice multiple-perspectives framing of the past while still advancing a strong interpretation. Brands' narrative frames the Truman-MacArthur conflict as disagreement over how to respond to the first serious military test of the emerging Cold War. Many Americans longed for moral clarity and unconditional victory that MacArthur represented, but Truman and many other people around the world worried that unrestrained fighting in Korea would trigger a nuclear World War III. Brands concludes with his own interpretative generalization: "Truman's bold stroke in firing MacArthur...sustained hope that humanity might survive the nuclear age. The courage of Truman's decision had never been in question; six decades later, its wisdom was apparent as well" (p. 398). However, history never stops turning. If a nuclear-armed North Korea renews conflict in the near future, would Brands' interpretation still hold seven decades later?

The Pennsylvania State University

Scott Alan Metzger

Integrating the US Military: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation Since World War II, edited by Douglas Walter Bristol, Jr., and Heather Marie

Stur. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017. 253 pages. \$29.95, paper. \$29.95, electronic.

This fine collection of nine essays opens with a succinct introduction by Beth Bailey, Foundation Distinguished Professor of History at the University of Kansas. Bailey points out that while military leaders have resisted using its institutions as sites of social experimentation, “the various services often dealt with changes in ways that were serious, committed, imaginative, and well in advance of civilian institutions in the same historical moment” (p. 2). These changes involved women, people of color, and gays and lesbians agitating for equal rights within the military establishment. Though a vast historiography exists on equal rights movements, few scholars have investigated the military’s role in any of them. This volume helps fill that historical lacuna.

The essays are presented in chronological order, beginning with World War II and ending in the early twenty-first century. The first two focus on racial minorities, setting up an interesting comparison between two different groups. In “Terror, Anger, and Patriotism,” co-editor Bristol demonstrates how “discrimination, patriotism, and integration were connected in the stories of ordinary African Americans who joined the military during World War II” (p. 11). Eager to serve their country, particularly as a way of expressing citizenship, African Americans pushed back when they encountered discrimination, especially when it prevented them from being sent into combat. As James M. McCaffrey shows in “Nisei versus Nazi,” the same was true for Japanese American soldiers, who faced racial discrimination infused with fresh hatred over the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor.

After the war, the Army-Navy Nurse Act of 1947 guaranteed female nurses official military status. In “Does the Sex of the Practitioner Matter?,” Charissa Threat illuminates the problem this posed for men who wanted to join the Army Nurse Corps at a time when nursing had become a feminized profession. Female nurses worried, in turn, about losing any power they had gained working in a gender-segregated area. A year after female nurses achieved permanent status in the military, so, too, did all women who chose to serve. Tanya L. Roth examines “An Attractive Career for Women,” depicting the U.S. army as a site for debate about the role of women in a domesticity-centric Cold War America.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s negatively affected African American men’s views of military service. James E. Westheider’s intriguing essay “African Americans, Civil Rights, and the Armed Forces During the Vietnam War” highlights the disillusionment of black soldiers who routinely encountered racism and discrimination in the newly integrated army and casts the Vietnam War as a civil rights issue. Ongoing concerns about racism in the armed forces prompted the Department of Defense to create the Defense Race Relations Institute in 1971. In “Reform in Ranks,” Isaac Hampton describes the important and effective work of this little known organization through a set of oral history interviews with five of its instructors and directors.

The Vietnam War set into motion changes in how the military defined gender roles through job assignments. Co-editor Stur tracks post-1975 gender integration

in “Men’s and Women’s Liberation,” demonstrating how the old John Wayne masculinity myth was rejected by a new generation of soldiers influenced by writings in GI anti-war newspapers. As more women joined the service, military policy had to address a variety of family matters, including reproduction and pregnancy. In “Mobilizing Marriage and Motherhood,” Kara Dixon Vuic shows the extent to which personnel needs shaped these policies, placing the armed forces in the thick of the modern women’s rights movement.

Wrapping up the volume, Steve Estes ponders “The Dream That Dare Not Speak Its Name.” He traces the failure of gay rights activists to achieve equality in the military as long as they centered their arguments on comparisons with racial and gender discrimination. The need to optimize military efficiency provided the key to ending Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy.

The editors’ conclusion serves as a tidy bookend to Bailey’s introduction. Bristol and Stur identify overcoming discrimination as a core part of military tradition, and they reiterate the validity of comparing the experiences of African Americans, Japanese Americans, women, and gays in the military. The book’s incisive introduction and conclusion, well-chosen articles, chapter abstracts, and scholarly endnotes make it an easy choice for upper-level undergraduate courses in U.S. military history, race and ethnicity, and gender relations. Graduate students, particularly those in military history programs, will find this a useful starting point for ideas for research projects and/or for building a reading list.

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

Theresa Kaminski

Gateway to Equality: Black Women and the Struggle for Economic Justice in St. Louis, by Keona K. Ervin. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2017. 269 pages. \$60.00, cloth. \$48.00, electronic.

In her study of black women and their struggle for economic survival in St. Louis during the Great Depression, Professor Keona K. Ervin examines how “people along the margins of society...used the few resources they had to improve the conditions of their lives” (p. 5). In doing so, her study provides a fresh and nuanced examination of urban black women’s political activism in a crucial era of American political history, one which found her subjects struggling not only for economic equality, but also dignity. Specifically, Professor Ervin argues that working-class black women, often dubbed the least likely to politically organize based both on their status as working class and as black women, contributed greatly to the political and social struggles for equality and freedom simply by their existence and ability to survive in both economically and racially trying times, namely, the 1930s and 1940s.

Ervin contends that while most books on black women’s activism center on the immediate post-WWII era through the 1970s, such studies leave a glaring absence of scholarship on Great Depression-era resistance, 1940s wartime activism, and post-war organizing specifically with relation to the War on Poverty. Throughout

her study, Professor Lewis addresses the tendency among many of her peers to define American labor history through the eyes of white males, thus negating the contributions of women and racial minorities. She contends that previous examinations centering on white males and unions are short-sighted, especially in light of the activism seen in her study of St. Louis, which proves definitively that black women were social and labor activists, despite their absence from many studies on the subject. Ervin hopes that her study will illuminate not only the efforts of those women in a city like St. Louis, but also the Midwest and nation as larger spectrums. Covering occupations including domestic servants, defense and garment workers, and youth activists, Ervin's study brilliantly shows that not only is labor history not limited to white males, but even those occupations traditionally associated with black women do not properly encompass their economic and social contributions, showing with depth how black women worked in other industries in large numbers and emerged as working-class political contributors.

Perhaps the greatest strength of Professor Ervin's analysis is her ability to expertly navigate within the often-confining spaces of racial, labor, and gender study to provide an analysis that, while she admits is first one of labor, encompasses consideration of all three areas. Deftly and with ease, she demonstrates how it is not possible to view black women in St. Louis during this era strictly as women trying to survive day to day. Within that survival, Ervin argues, there is an inherent relationship to the larger social and economic movements of the time based on the fact that, if nothing else, these women needed to influence the programs and laws that affected them to better them and continue using them to survive. As such, this becomes not just a study of labor, it also becomes one of activism and political influence on the local and state levels. In a time where labor studies often focus on unions and white male politicians, one that looks at the activism of working-class black women is a welcomed and refreshing look at an otherwise often stale historiography. Moreover, Ervin successfully presents St. Louis as one of the few cities of its kind, a so-called "Southern-Northern city" that holds characteristics of the Northern rustbelt alongside Southern political and social racism. The fact that St. Louis did not have a large-scale industry that dominated the landscape, such as was the case in Chicago or Detroit, women were able to gain employment in a variety of industries, thus accentuating their employment and exposure to labor and political outlets.

Despite her expert analysis, the only point that seems to be lacking in her otherwise brilliant study is a more extensive analysis of how her study relates to the larger historiography. Specifically, how it fits with more nationally centered studies from the same era. Ervin proves that black women had a key role not only in surviving in St. Louis during this era, but also in influencing it politically. How St. Louis fits in the larger Midwestern and national histories was not totally revealed. This minor point notwithstanding, Professor Ervin's study provides not only a fresh approach to black women's labor history, but also political and social history and should be mandatory reading for all scholars of black women's labor, social, and political history.

Democracy's Schools: The Rise of Public Education in America, by Johann N. Neem. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017. 240 pages. \$54.95, cloth. \$22.95, paper. \$22.95, electronic.

Democracy's Schools is a welcome addition to the Johns Hopkins University Press' *How Things Worked* series. Initially, the topic seemed out of place compared to other titles in the series such as *How Families Made Farms on the Nineteenth-Century Plains* and *Home Fires: How Americans Kept Warm in the Nineteenth Century*. However, Neem's handling of the subject matter is true to the series' cause of explaining how and why things worked as they did. In this instance, the "thing" is America's process in building a public school system between the Revolution and the Civil War.

In part, *Democracy's Schools* seeks to reacquaint Americans with a purpose of public schooling. This purpose goes beyond the "college and career readiness" currently emphasized by the Common Core State Standards Initiative, now adopted by 42 of the 50 states. Neem argues public school was originally designed for "preparing citizens and enabling each person to pursue her or his happiness" (p. 1). As such, public schools were not limited to the instrumental task of passing on information and skill. Instead, public schools were a collectivist expression of American's investment in the self-making process of future generations.

Four main themes are explored throughout Neem's narrative. He argues early American schools were rooted in local control, focused on preparation of citizenship and self-culture, prone to political disagreement, and continuously balanced rights of individuals with that of the social order. In exploring these themes, he presents various avatars of two competing ideologies. On the one hand, liberal reformers sought to expand access to education while believing all children deserved an equal education. On the other, everyday Americans resisted both the cost and encroachment of intellectualism in their lives and communities.

The slim manuscript serves as an ideal introduction to understanding the relationship between democracy and education in the early United States. Graduate-level teacher preparation courses, such as multicultural foundations of education, or other college-level interdisciplinary courses rooted in education and history would be an ideal audience for the text. Chapters are arranged loosely chronologically and work to explain *how* key concepts such as citizenship and self-culture contributed to the process of democratizing public education. This directness is further enhanced by subheadings and carefully selected brief historical vignettes. The resulting narrative is accessible to a wide audience without losing a critical edge. Those that utilize "Episode 1: The Common School, 1770-1890" from the documentary *School: The Story of American Public Education* will find Neem's work either a wonderful supplement or perhaps a fresh replacement. Instructors interested in having students grapple solely with the idea of the purpose of school would be fine in using only the introduction and Chapter 1.

The text would also be useful for college-level survey U.S. history courses. In this context, the manuscript provides a relatively narrow "case study" for students to explore larger trends and tensions during the antebellum period. Education serves as a prime example of the interplay between politics and social life, as well as how national and local tensions manifested in local institutions. For this

audience, the entirety of the manuscript would likely be preferable. However, be prepared to supplement the material with further primary source materials.

Neem's fondness for the topic is apparent from the very start. He concludes his preface by noting, "I am thankful for my public school education" (p. x) and goes on to dedicate the book to his teachers. Thankfully, this bias does not lead itself to a particular vision or prescription of what current education policy is or should be. Instead, Neem reemphasizes historical tensions and passes neutral judgement, writing of public schools, "We should watch over them, and reform them when they fail us" (p. 175). As such, the text would be of use to policymakers seeking to rethink the foundations of this public good without fear of predetermined answers to current events.

For scholars in the field, Neem's work breathes new life into aspects of the common schools era, particularly in the exploration of early Americans' desire for self-making and self-culture through public institutions. However, the scope, purpose, and audience of the manuscript limits the depth of presentation and analysis. For example, marginalized communities are hinted at throughout the manuscript and even addressed specifically in the final chapter, "Containing the Multitudes," but this is far from being all-inclusive of the complexity and diversity experienced by various groups. *Democracy's Schools* is both an elegant manuscript in its own right and a useful teaching tool in the appropriate classroom context.

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Steven Drouin

Wild by Nature: North American Animals Confront Colonization, by Andrea L. Smalley. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017. 334 pages. \$49.95, cloth. \$49.95, electronic.

Andrea Smalley's *Wild by Nature: North American Animals Confront Colonization* explores the historical importance of wild animals in shaping the North American colonial experience. Her specific focus on *wild* animals encountered in North America by Europeans and Anglo-Americans allows for the retelling of familiar histories with a new interpretation of events. Her book is not only an exploration of the place of animals in historical change, but also demonstrates changing attitudes about animals from early colonial settlement in the New World to the closing of the "frontier" with the extermination of plains bison herds.

Smalley introduces her work by situating it in the "animal turn" in historical studies. The "animal turn," exemplified by early works such as Jon T. Coleman's *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America* (2004) and explored in the ongoing Reaktion Books Animal series, like Brett Mizelle's *Pig* (2011), questions traditional definitions of historical "agency," making animals legitimate subjects for understanding historical contingency and change. Smalley puts special emphasis on the symbolism of wild animals for European settlers in the New World, in how they both represented a new nation and were inhibiting factors to civilization. Smalley uses beaver, wolves, fish, deer, and bison, specifically, to explore the theme of wilderness in the context of animals. Even her title, grammatically positioning

animals as primary actors in colonial encounters, reaffirms the significance of animal agency in Smalley's rendering of North American history.

The uniqueness of her scholarly lens makes this book an interesting choice for classroom reading. The primary utility of Smalley's book is in the compartmentalized, well-researched chapters, devoted to each of the animals mentioned above. Less ideal for a graduate-level seminar, the chapters work well for undergraduate and even advanced high school readers, as each chapter demonstrates well-written and densely researched explorations on individual animals and their place in American colonial history. Importantly, each of these chapters also opens up many questions about historical methodology in addition to historical analysis. Paired with a more traditional political or cultural interpretation of these same historical moments, Smalley's book represents one side of dramatic dialogue between wildly different historiographic traditions that could be useful for instructors of more advanced undergraduate readers.

Unfortunately, the themes which Smalley engages with most frequently also predispose the book for reading in undergraduate classrooms, but not graduate-level seminars because of the well-worn nature of Smalley's argument—that animals have agency in historical change—and the pitfalls that accompany such an argument. There are two problems that appear in Smalley's work. First, in several cases, the granting of historical agency to animals obfuscates the agency of too-readily ignored peoples whose agency we can guarantee and is not up for debate: the agency of indigenous actors. In several places in Smalley's book, she places animals as a primary challenge to colonial power; however, it was indigenous actors who were obviously integrated within complicated trade networks through which animals were merely moved, but which animals had little actual control of navigating, such as with the beaver fur trade.

Secondly, while granting agency to the environment, and to animals, is an ongoing debate in historical studies, environmental and animal historians often ignore the difficulty of making such claims without providing a definition for the type of "agency" scholars are using. When historical actors consider animals and animal products to be influential in their decision-making, or to pose biological and environmental barriers, that does not give those animal variables agency. Rather, they just become another variable in limiting or allowing historical change, but action without intention is not necessarily historical agency. Smalley's work is meant to change the definition of agency by giving it to animals, but in the case of animal agency, scholars must create broader definitions to avoid the common pitfalls of assigning animals too much power in human interactions.

While this weakness in Smalley's argument exists, it opens doors for discussion in the classroom. Introducing the notion of animal agency gives undergraduate students a platform upon which to engage in debate, define historical agency, discuss what qualifies as historical change, and allows for students to take a side. While not wrong to ascribe agency to animals, engaging with ideas about non-human animal agency actually tells us more about the requirements for action in historical figures. So instead of telling students what agency is or is not, reading Smalley's book or a single chapter may allow for them to decide for themselves.