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## Book Review: Kentucky Confederates: Secession, Civil War, and the Jackson Purchase

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BOOK REVIEWS:

**Matthew E. Stanley review of *Kentucky Confederates: Secession, Civil War, and the Jackson Purchase*, by Berry Craig, *Journal of Southern History*, LXXXI, No. 4 (Nov. 2015), 990-91.**

Upon hearing several Lexington-centric papers during a panel on Civil War Kentucky at a national conference a few years back, one shrewd audience member asked (good-humoredly), "Is there any Kentucky history outside of the Bluegrass?" Berry Craig's *Kentucky Confederates: Secession, Civil War, and the Jackson Purchase* offers a resounding answer – yes. Although the bulk of the state's institutional resources (and thus its scholarship) reside elsewhere, *Kentucky Confederates* makes a convincing case that even though far western Kentucky was a wartime social and political outlier, its story is far from marginal.

Consisting of eight counties wedged between the Ohio, Mississippi, and Tennessee Rivers, Kentucky's Jackson Purchase was the most Confederate portion of a mostly Unionist state. Termed "the South Carolina of Kentucky," the region boasted a growing antebellum slave trade (unlike the rest of Kentucky) and elected the state's most outspoken secessionist politicians (p. 1). Craig claims that Kentucky's early neutrality led to a strengthening of secessionist feeling in the region. Because of their strong Confederate sympathies, residents of the Jackson Purchase organized the Mayfield convention in May 1861, which established

a precursor to the state's Confederate government formed at the Russellville convention. Although Craig is interested primarily in political matters, he competently addresses the region's military and strategic significance. When Confederates threatened to violate Kentucky's neutrality in early September 1861, Union troops quickly seized the region's metropolis, Paducah, thwarting any possibility of secession. The "Charleston of Kentucky," Paducah was also the site of a small battle in March 1864, in which Confederates under General Nathan Bedford Forrest failed to retake the city (p. 133). Writing against an old but common Lost Cause historiography (propagated by state historians like E. Merton Coulter) that demonized Union "occupiers" such as General Eleazer A. Paine more for antislavery attitudes than for actual war crimes, Craig cites continued guerrilla activity as evidence of unwavering support for the Confederacy in the Jackson Purchase (p. 183).

Craig insists "most of the rest of the state moved toward the Purchase perspective following the Emancipation Proclamation and the enlistment of African American soldiers" (p. 293). Indeed, whereas the Jackson Purchase, the "stepchild of Kentucky politics," had been incongruous with much of the state during the war, the region's staunch secessionism and white supremacy blazed the trail for Kentucky's postwar era – one dominated by former Confederate politicians and business leaders, rebel monuments, and Lost Cause symbolism (p.1). In a border region rife with contradiction, the supreme irony was that

Confederates, so ostracized during the war, ultimately won a considerable portion of the peace.

*Kentucky Confederates* relies heavily on deeply partisan period newspapers, yet Craig treats this material with care, using competing publications to highlight ideological divisions within the state. Although he consults election returns and estimates the number of military volunteers (Confederates far outnumbered white Union volunteers in the region), sharper quantitative analysis might have bolstered his argument about the Jackson Purchase's "out-and-out" secessionism (p. 3). Similarly, while Craig addresses why the Purchase diverged from the rest of the state, his explanation of geography, migration, and a growing slave trade could be strengthened by census data and more secondary scholarship on cultural geography. Nevertheless, *Kentucky Confederates* is scholastically significant and proficiently executed Kentucky and Civil War Border history.

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