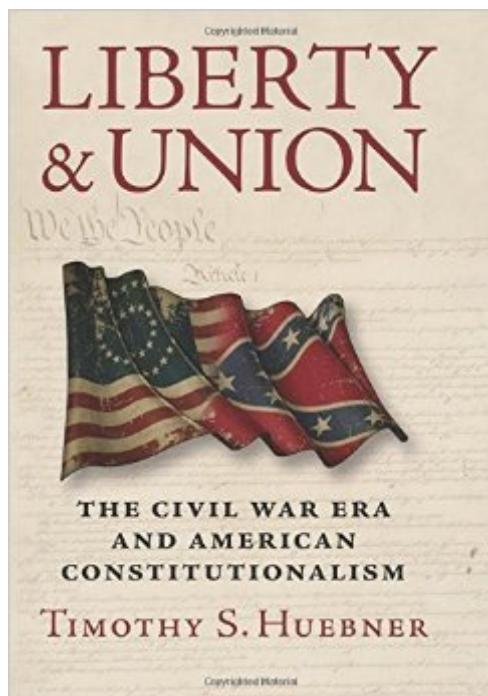


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Liberty And Union: The Civil War Era And American Constitutionalism



Synopsis

This book is about the relationship between the Civil War generation and the founding generation. Timothy S. Huebner states at the outset of this ambitious and elegant overview of the Civil War era. The book integrates political, military, and social developments into an epic narrative interwoven with the thread of constitutionalism "to show how all Americans engaged the nation's heritage of liberty and constitutional government. Whether political leaders or plain folk, northerners or southerners, Republicans or Democrats, black or white, most free Americans in the mid-nineteenth century believed in the foundational values articulated in the Declaration of Independence of 1776 and the Constitution of 1787" and this belief consistently animated the nation's political debates. *Liberty and Union* shows, however, that different interpretations of these founding documents ultimately drove a deep wedge between North and South, leading to the conflict that tested all constitutional faiths. Huebner argues that the resolution of the Civil War was profoundly revolutionary and also inextricably tied to the issues of both slavery and sovereignty, the two great unanswered questions of the Founding era. Drawing on a vast body of scholarship as well as such sources as congressional statutes, political speeches, military records, state supreme court decisions, the proceedings of black conventions, and contemporary newspapers and pamphlets, *Liberty and Union* takes the long view of the Civil War era. It merges Civil War history, US constitutional history, and African American history and stretches from the antebellum era through the period of reconstruction, devoting equal attention to the Union and Confederate sides of the conflict. And its in-depth exploration of African American participation in a broader culture of constitutionalism redefines our understanding of black activism in the nineteenth century. Altogether, this is a masterly, far-reaching work that reveals as never before the importance and meaning of the Constitution, and the law, for nineteenth-century Americans.

Book Information

Hardcover: 544 pages

Publisher: University Press of Kansas (June 28, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0700622691

ISBN-13: 978-0700622696

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 1.6 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (2 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #393,640 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #253 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Political Science > Constitutions #279 in Books > History > Americas > United States > African Americans > History #449 in Books > Law > Legal History

Customer Reviews

When I saw this book advertised in the New York Review of Books, I asked my local library to order it. And I am glad I did. I found this to be a well-written and informative book on the Civil War. There was plenty in here that either I did not know or that caused me to think about what I already knew differently. It seemed that by the time of the Dred Scott decision, the South had everything going for it - a Democratic president sympathetic to the South, a Supreme Court sympathetic to the South, a strengthened Fugitive Slave Act and the Dred Scott decision that ruled in favor of the South with respect to slavery in the Territories. And then it all began to unravel toward secession. The subtitle of the book is "The Civil War Era and American Constitutionalism." The author discusses the pre-war issues such as the Missouri Compromise, the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Dred Scott case, the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, the Kansas problem, nullification (by both SC with the tariff and later Wisconsin with the Fugitive Slave Act), secession; and war issues such as the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus (by both north and south) the Emancipation Proclamation, conscription, taxation, the Gettysburg Address (and how Lincoln used the word "nation" in the address when the word "union" had been used in the Constitution, by orators and in inaugurals); and post-war issues of Reconstruction. The author articulately weaves the politics, diplomacy, southern way of life, immigration and traditions of the day to round out the story of the Civil War. The book also has an extensive bibliography for further research and reading. I got the sense in reading this book that the author had a firm command of his subject. I recommend this book to any Civil War enthusiast whether well-read in the subject or a newcomer. I generally try not to do anything twice, but this is a book I'd consider reading a second time.

A fascinating, in-depth, well-researched look at the issues of the Civil War era as they relate to the U.S. Constitution. Thought-provoking and incisive, Timothy Huebner's work also serves as a comprehensive political history of America from the 1840s to the election of 1876.

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