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The exploits of this unit have been brilliantly captured by Alan T. Nolan, who is best known for his highly controversial book Lee Considered. Nolan was one of the first scholars to write a modern regimental history when he published The Iron Brigade in 1961. Even though Nolan was not schooled in the burgeoning social history movement that was gaining popularity among academics, he showed a remarkable sensitivity to recovering the voices of ordinary soldiers. Like many social historians, Nolan was interested in the daily lives of people and how they helped shape the course of the Civil War. Unit histories, as Nolan saw them, should be history from the bottom up. He tended, however, to dismiss the role of ideology as a motivating force among the Midwestern men, an argument that has been overturned by scholars like James McPherson who believe that common soldiers were highly political. Nonetheless, Nolan offered future scholars new ways of understanding the experience of the rank and file. His discussions of soldier interactions with Southern civilians, their perceptions of slavery, and their varied response to reunifications were new and important lines of inquiry that scholars are still pursuing today.

Nolan’s Iron Brigade, furthermore, reminds us that Civil War units were more than soulless chess pieces controlled and manipulated by generals and politicians. These outfits were made up of political beings whose beliefs and ideas still deserve our attention if we are to make greater meaning of the heroism that both sides displayed on great battlefields like Gettysburg.
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groups coped with the bloody battle in their backyards and reveals the strengths each brought to their situation.

Each group was a victim of discrimination or contempt. The Germans were called cowards and sought to redeem themselves in battle; women were considered weak and helpless but were expected to maintain their households; and African Americans’ fear of enslavement and subsequent flight to safety annoyed their employers, who expected them to conduct business as usual.

Using five individuals from each group as representative spokespersons, Creighton allows them to flesh out the human story behind the carnage. Through letters, diaries, oral histories and newspaper accounts, the participants share their stories, while Creighton provides the backdrop of events leading up to the battle and the aftermath, when the troops moved on.

Creighton places the immigrants, women and blacks in the context of how they were seen, and not seen, by the Anglo-Saxon male majority. Overcoming barriers of language, culture, race and gender, Gettysburg’s forgotten residents finally gain their voice in this book.

The Colors of Courage includes some conjecture in the absence of documented facts, but overall, Creighton’s assumptions and conclusions are credible. She offers a refreshing look at three hitherto unrepresented participant groups in the Battle of Gettysburg. This book is a welcome departure from military tactics and battlefield strategies, and deals with the real people who had to contend with war on their doorstep.

Susan Hamburger
Bellefonte, Pa.


Michael B. Ballard’s new book on the Vicksburg campaign offers a refreshing experience. The research is exhaustive, and the writing is lively. It may not be surprising that a Mississippi historian would put a slightly Southern slant on the campaign, but Ballard’s point of view is in keeping with modern scholarship. This is not a history that romanticizes the Lost Cause, nor is the author dismissive of Grant, although he does not seem very fond of him.

What this narrative excels at is presenting the human side of history. The letters and memoirs of the men in the ranks as