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Review of *Seeding Civil War: Kansas in the National News, 1854-1858*. By Craig Miner

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Seeding Civil War: Kansas in the National News, 1854-1858. By Craig Miner. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008. xiii + 305 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95.

Recently several historians have helped us better understand the central role that Kansas Territory (1854-61) played in polarizing the North and South. Gunja SenGupta has analyzed the complex motives involved in antislavery and proslavery immigration to Kansas. Thomas Goodrich emphasizes the bleeding in "Bleeding Kansas" by portraying the era's violent characters and episodes. The sesquicentennial commemoration of the territory witnessed books on the doctrine of popular sovereignty by Nicole Etcheson and on the U.S. Army's peacekeeping efforts by Tony Mullis. Two essay collections have allowed these and other scholars to elaborate on the myriad issues involved, one edited by Virgil Dean on Kansas Territory, and the other by John Wunder and Joann Ross on the Kansas-Nebraska Act that started it all.

Craig Miner now makes a major contribution to this literature. *Seeding Civil War* is by far the most thorough and careful examination of how the press covered Bleeding Kansas. He has read articles in nearly eighty newspapers published between 1854 and 1858 in cities ranging from Bangor to New Orleans to San Francisco, as well as magazines, pamphlets, and Congressional debates. His research has convinced him that Kansas Territory may have been the most important proximate cause of the Civil War "more because of how events there were talked about in the national press than because of the significance of those events themselves." For four years American political commentators were obsessed with the profoundly divisive issues that Kansas raised, but the hyperbolic and sensationalistic manner of their writing prevented any possibility of compromise.

The book begins by discussing the ways some editors framed issues and manufactured opinions, while others expressed alarm at such rhetorical abuse. Miner then devotes chapters to the debate over the Kansas-Nebraska bill,

contemporary perceptions of the electoral irregularities and violence in Kansas, the religious perspective articulated by political preachers such as Henry Ward Beecher, the issue of slavery, the scapegoating of several unfortunate governors in the territory, and finally the enormous controversy surrounding the proposed Lecompton Constitution.

Miner reveals that he is both surprised and disturbed by what he discovered. He never expected to find so great a volume of journalism about Kansas, such a wide variety of positions on the issues, or as much thoughtful and moderate opinion. Nonetheless, the Kansas imbroglio, Miner concludes, was symptomatic of a political system that was too emotional, ambitious, and intolerant. "It seemed that freedom and democracy, however well they sounded, did not work of themselves and were not even so easily talked about without violent misunderstanding among people whose fundamental cultures differed."

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