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Review of *The Devil Knows How To Ride: The True Story of William Clarke Quantrill and His Confederate Raiders* By Edward E. Leslie

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The Devil Knows How To Ride: The True Story of William Clarke Quantrill and His Confederate Raiders. By Edward E. Leslie. New York: Random House, 1996. Maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. xxii + 534 pp. \$30.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

Edward E. Leslie has written a provocative book about one of the most notorious characters of the American Civil War. He has certainly achieved his goal of offering "an anecdotal history of William Clarke Quantrill, the guerrilla band he led, the enemies he fought, and the war they waged on the Kansas-Missouri border." This is one of the fullest treatments of Quantrill yet. Leslie's research is impressive; and he does an admirable job of shredding past myths about his subject. The

first four chapters cover the ground of "Bleeding Kansas," a time when this "quiet school-teacher" from Ohio came to the new territory for a fresh start. Leslie traces Quantrill's conversion from a staunch Free Stater to pro-slave sympathizer as a result of his experiences in the Mormon War and the Pikes Peak gold rush. Then Leslie explores Quantrill's fame—or infamy—as a Confederate guerrilla, along with devoting two full chapters to the brutal raid on Lawrence, Kansas, on 21 August 1863.

The author is particularly strong in suggesting the motivation of Quantrill's followers, such as George Todd, who usurped Quantrill's leadership in 1864, or the crazed, callous Bill Anderson, whose butchery at Centralia, Missouri, is almost beyond depiction. A great many of these men had family members who were terribly affected by border warfare and Union policies throughout western Missouri. But not so Quantrill; and what comes through is a sensationalized story of a violence-prone man. For example, Leslie overplays "bleeding" Kansas, and fails to consider the work of William Unrau and Craig Miner, who argue that the endeavors of Euro-Americans' to strip Indian peoples of their land was the real story of the territorial period.

Leslie's book provokes two reactions, which are captured in how two priests responded to conducting ceremonies for Quantrill's remains. One refused to have anything to do with a man whom he called "that bastard." The other stated, "I was honored to do the service . . . [to] slap down some of the politically correct people. This man was a human being and deserves a decent burial regardless of what he may have done." Yet to take offense at Quantrill's doings is not the same as reading present-day morality into the past, lest we forget that people during the Civil War, both Confederates and Unionists, found him reprehensible. My great-grandfathers fought for the Union, and I now attend a church whose origins are steeped in abolitionism and the underground railroad. Consequently, the past shapes my interpretation of Quantrill rather than "political correctness." And like the priest

who refused Quantrill's last rights, I find a sympathetic treatment of him personally objectionable, but intellectually defensible. Reading Leslie's book will stir a reader's emotions and sense of history, but this is useful, revealing as it does how the past lives with us in the present.

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