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Review of *Civil War on the Missouri-Kansas Border* By Donald L. Gilmore

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Civil War on the Missouri-Kansas Border. By Donald L. Gilmore. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2006. 384 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, select bibliography, index. \$29.95.

Donald Gilmore seeks to redefine our understanding of the conflict on the Missouri-Kansas

border during the Civil War era. He contends that biased histories have long portrayed Kansans as innocents who suffered depredations at the hands of lower-class Missouri bushwhackers—a pejorative term that historians continue to use. These histories place special emphasis on William Clarke Quantrill, whom they almost invariably depict as a demonic leader of savages. According to Gilmore's corrective, if anyone should be blamed for the atrocities of the border war, it should be the abolitionist Kansans. Kansans, including Jim Lane, James Montgomery, and "Doc" Jennison, had declared war on Missouri well before 1861. In raids into Missouri from 1858 to 1861, they stole slaves and destroyed property. Their destruction only increased with the onset of the Civil War. Ultimately, they reaped the violence they had sown. Gilmore contends that many middle-class Missourians, with their way of life destroyed, had little alternative but to enter into guerrilla warfare. Thus, Quantrill's infamous 1863 raid on Lawrence, during which his men killed 150 civilians, must be viewed in the context of Kansans' repeated raids into Missouri. Gilmore adds that Missouri guerrillas did not attack randomly and solely for plunder but instead served as adjuncts to the regular Confederate army, playing valuable roles in disrupting Union communications and keeping Union soldiers occupied.

Gilmore's generally well-written work adds to our understanding of the Civil War in Kansas and Missouri. Nonetheless, it is flawed. First and foremost, Gilmore has created a straw man, challenging a scholarly viewpoint that no longer exists. Almost twenty years ago, Michael Fellman in *Inside War* (1989) offered readers an in-depth look at this spiral of guerrilla violence, yet his work does not appear in Gilmore's bibliography. Its absence, coupled with the absence of others, including Nichole Etcheson's *Bleeding Kansas* (2004), Thomas Goodrich's *Bloody Dawn* (1991), and William Piston's *Wilson's Creek* (2000), weakens Gilmore's contention that he is confronting current scholarship. Second, Gilmore, who repeatedly chastises other authors for using

value-laden terms in describing Missourians, makes the same mistake himself in attacking Kansans. While constantly defending the virtues and explaining away the excesses of the Missouri guerrillas, he never hesitates in casting aspersions on his villains, the Kansans. This process culminates in his efforts to explain and practically to justify Quantrill's assault on Lawrence.

Overall, *Civil War on the Missouri-Kansas Border* has added to our understanding of this period, but Gilmore's work is neither as path breaking nor unbiased as he portrays it.

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