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Kentucky and the Great War: World War I on the Home Front

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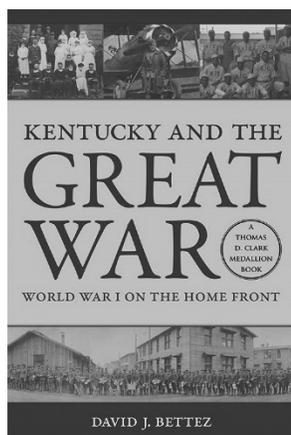
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This is an excellent collections choice for academic libraries and for faculty teaching in Appalachia studies. The diaries and personal letters are fascinating! A great resource for United States history collections and for reference studies on Appalachia. Cloth bound and heavily supported with references, notes and an Index.

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Kentucky and the Great War: World War I on the Home Front. David J. Bettez. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8131-6801-2 (cloth, \$45.00); ISBN 978-0-8131-6802-9 (web pdf, \$45); ISBN 978-0-8131-6803-6 (epub, \$45). 440 p.



This year marks the centenary of America's intervention into World War One. The United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917. In recent decades, the memory of this early twentieth century conflict has been overshadowed by other American military actions and wars. National surveys reveal that the majority of US citizens today have only a passing understanding of the events that led to the "Great War." Historians are being challenged to bring this event to life and demonstrate its continued relevancy to twenty-first century audiences. Looking beyond discussions of political alliances, military tactics, and diplomatic failings, many scholars are now examining home front mobilization and its effect on the lives of ordinary civilians and soldiers. Historian David J. Bettez explores the social and economic impact of American mobilization at the state level. Bettez's *Kentucky and the Great War: World War I on the Home Front* reveals how the state responded to specific local conditions to rally its populace for an overseas war.

To understand how Kentucky effectively overcame its own prewar social and economic divisions, Bettez's contends that it is critical to adopt a "ground up" approach. With 120 established counties in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, the author conducted research in more than half of the county seats. Bettez argues that this twenty-month long war had a lasting impact on the state's development. Through an examination of how community leaders,

government officials, and social organizations supported home front mobilization, he concludes that Kentuckians overcame their differences and coalesced for a "brief and shining moment" to rally to the call for patriotic collective sacrifice.

The scope of this study is ambitious; Bettez considers all aspects of mobilization. By organizing his chapters both by logically related themes as well as by the flow of wartime events, Bettez provides the reader with a clear and accessible narrative and timeline. Chapters are loosely grouped around such themes as: public responses to the outbreak of war, government efforts to move state agencies and the economy onto a wartime footing, state intervention into the lives of its citizens, and postwar efforts to commemorate the war.

David J. Bettez devotes the first two chapters of his work to examine how the state's social, political, and economic landscape influenced the public's response to the declaration of war. Through an analysis of newspaper accounts of the war, the author highlights many of the tensions found between urban and rural constituencies, agricultural and industrial interests, and racial and ethnic communities. While the United States declared itself to be neutral in 1914, Kentucky newspapers were filled with stories of neighbors donating monies to relief societies, traveling to Europe to help war victims, and in some cases volunteering to fight. Not surprisingly, with a large German and Irish immigrant population located in northern Kentucky, several newspapers were overtly sympathetic to Germany and skeptical of pro-British news accounts. With the declaration of war in 1917, Bettez documents how Kentucky newspapers pivoted to support the allied cause and beseech their readership to "do their bit." In the following chapter, Bettez considers how public appeals to patriotism were translated into calls for sacrifice, loyalty, and unity. Kentuckians flocked to patriotic rallies, volunteered for military service, and bought Liberty Bonds. At the same time, the author reveals a darker communal response to the declaration of war that included a push to remove all reminders of Germany in public spaces.

The success of American mobilization was dependent on effective government coordination and civilian compliance. Hindered by the lack of funds and competition with other national government wartime agencies, Bettez concludes that the Kentucky Council of Defense had mixed success in its efforts to promote of Liberty Bonds and military conscription. At the same time, he argues that the Council did have an impact on communities. The Council strove to bring wartime programs to the most under-served regions of the state. Bettez also found that state officials and local leaders were not above the use of financial incentives and political "horse-trading" to ensure the implementation of mobilization programs. Beyond the use of incentives and persuasion, Bettez found that Kentucky did employ its judicial system and police apparatus to suppress political dissent. Drawing on several widely reported court cases, Bettez documents the state's surveillance of "suspect" individuals and groups. He also found that newspapers frequently reported on public trials of sedition as well as

instances of communities carrying out vigilante actions against “spies” and “slackers.”

In the later part of his study, David J. Bettez discusses how Kentucky targeted and recruited individual groups to meet specific labor needs as well as to deepen patriotic support for the war. Bettez notes that the state strategically leveraged prewar women’s social networks to promote a call for service and sacrifice. For example, Sallie Bruce, a leader of several women’s groups and a proponent of women’s suffrage, was selected to chair the Kentucky Division of the Women’s Committee. Committee members themselves mobilized their personal and professional networks to promote food conservation, war work, and the Liberty Loan campaign. Bettez also found that the Kentucky Division forcefully expanded its charge to include child labor laws, compulsory education, and children’s health and well-being issues. In the case of African Americans, Jim Crow laws and white supremacist violence complicated calls for unity. Despite segregation laws and police surveillance, Bettez found that African-Americans in Kentucky did not hesitate to hold patriotic assemblies, raise monies for war relief, work in war industries, and serve in the military with distinction. Mobilization efforts in Kentucky also included enlisting churches and institutions of higher education in maintaining public morale. In the case of colleges and universities, they also were asked to provide curriculum for the training of officers and other specialized war work.

The shift to a wartime economy in Kentucky required state and federal officials to adopt a more interventionist stance in the planning and production of food and industrial goods. Faced with a severe agricultural labor shortage, the state of Kentucky promoted the recruitment of young boys, women, students, and non-essential workers. Additionally, they encouraged the hiring of recent immigrants and African-Americans to work in its coal fields. With a rapid growth in coal production, workers demanded higher wages and safer working conditions. To minimize the disruption of wartime coal production, the state and federal government intervened to quell labor strife with the use of labor mediators or in some cases the deployment of National Guard troops.

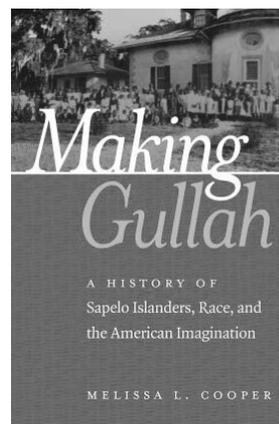
The author finds that implicit within the state’s wartime appeal to service was a promise to honor and remember those who heroically fought and died. Long before the November 1918 Armistice was announced, civic and government leaders in Kentucky were considering how to best remember the sacrifices of the fallen. Like other American states, Kentucky sought to construct war monuments as well as document the mobilization and the actual conflict. Each county in the state was asked to create a history of its contributions in support of the war.

David J. Bettez’s *Kentucky and the Great War* provides the reader with a detailed study of home front mobilization. I believe that it is a significant contribution to the historiography of World War One. Bettez effectively shows how the effort to equip and sustain the American military expeditionary force required extraordinary efforts

and sacrifices of its civilian home front population. Furthermore, he convincingly demonstrates how a modern industrial war requires a significant change in the relationship between the state and its citizens.

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Making Gullah A History of Sapelo Islanders, Race, and the American Imagination. Melissa L. Cooper. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017. ISBN 978-4696-3268-1 (pbk., \$29.95); ISBN 978-1-4696-3267-4 (hardcover, \$85); ISBN 978-1-4696-3269-8 (ebook, \$19.99). 304 p.



Growing up in the South and having opportunities to visit and vacation on the South Carolina and Georgia Coasts, I developed a fascination with the “Gullah people, Gullah language, Gullah arts and Gullah music”. Melissa L. Cooper presents an historical and current snapshot of Sapelo Island’s Gullah evolution. She extolls today’s Sapelo Island native peoples as dedicated to their island home. Through a series of determined passion for the land, passion for their families, and a passionate refusal to be considered as slaves and less than citizens of their coastal land.

While facing the invasion of wealthy entrepreneurs, real estate tycoons, and plantation owners who saw them as slaves akin to Africans to be bought and sold, Gullah peoples endeavored to continue to buy and form parcels of land on Sapelo for their families and friends. Always the Gullah continued their traditions of arts and a separate language.

Today, as Cooper points out, each year in October, thousands of visitors flock to Sapelo Island to see the festivities of an annual Cultural Day. Here Gullah people present music, dancing, artistry, dialectic readings in the Gullah tradition. This is a fund raising event sponsored by the Sapelo Cultural and Revitalization Society. It is estimated that the sweet grass baskets and rag dolls are great treats sought by visitors. Local cuisine is offered on the grounds of the Farmers’ Alliance Hall.