on the global power dynamics of US food culture, as well as by drawing on the ongoing critical conversation on postbellum regional reconciliation begun by the work of Nina Silber in *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865–1900* (1993) and more recently continued by Jennifer Greeson in *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature* (2010) in its analysis of Stowe’s work “to use diet and agriculture, the production and consumption of regional U.S. foods, to make the South and the North ‘friends’ once again” (138). Its readings would also have benefited from greater attention to the wider cultural rhetoric of food and agricultural expansion against which its chosen authors wrestled. This is, nevertheless, a fascinating and much-needed book, and one that will surely broker important further avenues of study in the fields of both food studies and the environmental humanities.

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*Journal of American Studies*, 52 (2018), 1. doi:10.1017/S0021875817001530


The strength of this monograph resides in its extensive quotation of primary sources. The author, a chaired professor of southern history at the University of Alabama, has combed through extensive materials both public and private, creating a sort of anatomy of official and media propaganda and private rhetoric with which the Confederacy whipped up war fever in the years immediately leading up to 1860, bolstered morale and solidarity during the war years, and tried to explain away defeat afterwards.

The rhetorical purposes of the language amply quoted here are predictable. Like all wartime propagandists the writers seek to demonize the enemy, to justify their own side’s actions and to mobilize society for the pain and sacrifice exacted by a war fought on an enormous scale. Nor is there anything unexpected about the verbal techniques employed. Hyperbole and distortion surely head this list, as in this description of “the Puritan” Yankee created by a Georgia newspaperman: “More cruel than the Spaniard, more treacherous than the Italian, more blood-thirsty than the Turk, there is no wrong or humiliation, however atrocious, that his malignant ingenuity would not devise, and in which his savage nature, would not find diabolical pleasure” (16).

The author catalogues the inconsistent and even contradictory usages found in anti-northern discourse. In the run-up to the war, Yankees were weak and militarily inept, cowardly by nature and by upbringing alike. Yankees might go to war for mercenary reasons, but had no deeper motivations upon which to draw martial resolve. “This race of sharpers … have less fight in them than any white race now on the globe,” opined the Charleston Mercury, a source that frequents the monograph. When they came, northern successes could be explained away by the aforementioned “Puritan” diabolism that disdained the valorous rules of conduct adhered to by the “Cavalier” southern soldier. As the war ground on, the image of northern weakness (we’ll whip the cowardly Yankees, and quick) gave way to depictions of northern wickedness (the devils will stop at nothing to win).

Confederate vituperation expanded to include the treatment of civilians and POWs. Rape, pillage, plunder, and murder – again and again, wartime southern accounts emphasize the categorical wickedness of northern conduct. The Union use of black troops was alternatively depicted as both ludicrous (imagine a society so addled as to
believe that inferior blacks could constitute a legitimate fighting force) and monstrous, another contradiction. In his most cogent element of analysis, Rable discovers much Confederate language purporting that the North aimed not merely to win the war, but to enact abolition; then not just to impose Yankee values, but to actually exterminate the South. The author repeatedly points out that such demonization delayed surrender and made postwar reconciliation trebly difficult. If the “vandal spirit” of the North was bent on annihilation, it would be illogical and suicidal to surrender (77).

While the book provides an interesting compilation of key phrases, epithets, and images frequently used in southern discourse, it suffers from repetitiousness, uncertain organization, and stretches that lack analytical drive. Its clear, strong chapter titles would seem to mark out discreet themes to be pursued, but it is not always clear why the material under discussion in any given chapter could not just as easily be placed in another. Many a quotation in one chapter appears to be nearly identical to a quotation already used to illustrate some other topic elsewhere. This thematic murkiness is especially true of the first half of the study, while the last three chapters are more decisively delineated and more consistently on point.

The last half of the book, however, fails to sort the spurious from the valid. The hyperbolic and inconsistent qualities of Confederate discourse are well demonstrated, but there is not much discussion of the kernel of truth that they sometimes contained. In the instance of POWs, for example, it is one thing to imply that southerners seemed to overlook their own inhumane prisons. But southern hypocrisy and double standards do not negate the fact that northern treatment of POWs could also be substandard. Thousands of POWs suffered, wrote letters, returned home to tell of their treatment. To what extent, then, was POW discourse due to hysteria and propaganda, and to what degree did it record the actual state of affairs? Similar questions can be asked about broader aspects of the war. Should Confederates not have registered complaint about the total-war tactics employed by the northern armies in the South? By what criteria are such complaints to be divided into self-serving propaganda on the one hand, and legitimate grievance on the other? To what degree does anti-northern discourse register a response to the more modern, total methods of warfare that were not foreseen at the start of the war?

To my mind, the study does not sufficiently address questions of these sorts. It is a truism that the primary southern cause was evil and southern social structures were corrupted; the author has amply demonstrated that southern discourse was full of self-flattery and ridiculous anti-northern calumny; his point that slanderous imagery and hysterical language made reconciliation even more difficult is unexceptionable. Likewise, there is value in examining how southern self-deception both pre-dated and outlived the war. Perhaps it is fair to say that the study is strong in its presentation of historical materials but lacking in the thoroughness of its discourse analysis.

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Journal of American Studies, 52 (2018), 1. doi:10.1017/S0021875817001542


We Are What We Drink is both more and less than a study of the temperance movement in Minnesota between 1819 and 1919. Meyer’s approach is a resoundingly