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Sex and the Civil War: Soldiers, Pornography, and the Making of American Morality. By Judith Giesberg. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017)

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Sex and the Civil War: Soldiers, Pornography, and the Making of American Morality. By Judith Giesberg. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. Acknowledgments, introduction, illustrations, epilogue, notes, bibliography, index.—Pp. xiii, 135. \$29.95)

Sex and the Civil War examines “the U.S. government’s antipornography campaign and those who resisted it” during the four years of the American Civil War (p. 9).—In four short chapters, Judith Giesberg describes antebellum production of obscene literature, how men’s reading and consumption of such materials during the war, the impact of that literature on Anthony Comstock during the conflict, and finally the long reaction against obscene literature during and after the war.—All of this culminated in New York’s antiobscenity law of 1868 and federal passage of the Comstock Act of 1873.

Giesberg successfully describes the popularity of obscene publications during the 1850s, focusing on booksellers like Thomas Ormsby and John Atchison and writers like George Thompson.—Their prosecution in antebellum New York proved ineffective at eliminating and suppressing obscene books and prints before and during the Civil War.—The appearance of new forms of visual pornography like the cartes de viste, growing concerns about what constituted “manhood” and “courage” during the war (p. 64), and the ineffectiveness of the evangelical U.S. Christian Commission—**[See similar phrasing in final sentence of this review, but there it’s the “U.S. Sanitary Commission.” Two different ineffective commissions, or same commission but misidentified in one place?]** during the war contributed to and reflected the popularity and prevalence of pornography.—The war also proved to be an overwhelming personal crisis of masculinity for Anthony Comstock, who remained convinced of the pernicious dangers of obscene literature and other “traps for the young” for the remainder of his life.

Giesberg, however, minimizes important continuities regarding obscenity between the antebellum and postbellum eras.—She never discusses the politicized pornography of the flash press in the 1840s, exemplified by weekly newspapers like *The Whip*, *The Libertine*, and *The Rake*.—The prosecution of the flash editors in the antebellum era later served as the foundation for establishing the

constitutionality of the Comstock Law.—In *U.S. v. Bennett* (1879), New York appellate judge Samuel Blatchford relied on existing court practices in New York state dealing with obscene libel and the common law tradition that reached back to the flash press trials of the 1840s.—More importantly, the flash and other “racy” publications embodied an alternative and liminal underworld ~~that~~^{which} persisted throughout the nineteenth century.—Indeed, an unspoken “libertine republicanism” celebrating unfettered male sexual expression and the pleasure principle, which characterized the flash press of the 1840s, pervades much of Giesberg’s discussion about male Civil War sexuality.—She describes an interior male world which valorized male heterosexual indulgence and retained an anticlerical hostility to social groups defined by their religious beliefs.—Giesberg’s discussion of the ineffectiveness of the U.S. Sanitary Commission and the later evangelical reaction of Anthony Comstock reinforces the continuity and persistence of these values throughout the mid-nineteenth century.

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