

2021

Book Reviews

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Recommended Citation

Baker, H. Robert; Fortner, Laura Kate; Hargroder, Andrew L.; McMichael, Kelly; Nash, Jere; Privette, Lindsay Rae; and Bishop, James (2021) "Book Reviews," *Journal of Mississippi History*. Vol. 83: No. 3, Article 8. Available at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/jmh/vol83/iss3/8>

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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Armies of Deliverance: A New History of the Civil War

By Elizabeth R. Varon. College Edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. Maps, acknowledgments, timeline, notes, suggested readings, glossary, index. Pp. xxv, 531. \$29.99 paper. ISBN: 978-0-19-933539-8.)

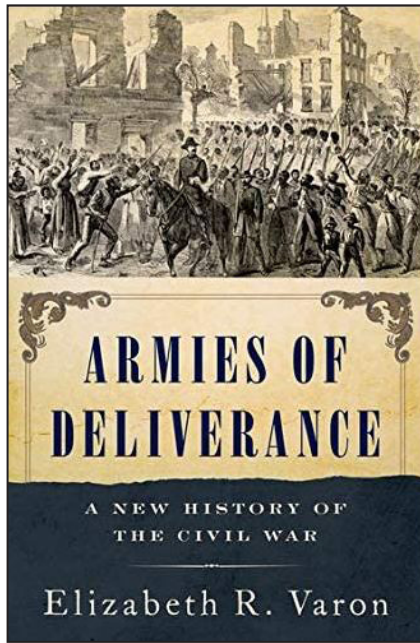
The Civil War remains the holy grail of American historiography. We know it is vital and central, but attempts to pin it down and give it coherence feel transient and vain. This difficulty has not been made easier by the wealth of recent research on the Civil War, a literature that has vastly expanded the cast of characters, the geographical scope of its origins, and the depth of its consequences. In her new book, *Armies of Deliverance: A New History of the Civil War*, Elizabeth R. Varon finds an organizing theme in the political-religious rhetoric of deliverance. Such rhetoric spanned the North-South divide. Northerners reasoned that the deluded masses of southerners needed deliverance from a slave power that had duped them, while Confederates insisted that secession was the only way to deliver (White) southerners from the corrupted civilization of northern radicals.

Varon carries this organizing theme throughout the book. Union policy in the early stages of the

war clearly made room for loyal southerners, including slaveholders, to return peacefully, even as Congress passed the First Confiscation Act and received thousands of African American refugees behind Union lines. Confederates interpreted such measures as proof positive that their own people needed deliverance from an invading

army that was determined to destroy its way of life. This call only intensified as African American troops appeared on the frontlines later in the war. Varon's treatment of policy goals and political disputes is nuanced throughout, mindful of how different constituencies within both politics read events in contradictory ways.

Varon also takes time to explain how historians have advanced conflicting interpretations of



events. She does so in a remarkably balanced way, without losing sight of the historical events themselves. The origin of General William T. Sherman's Special Field Order #15 is a case in point. Did the openly racist Sherman adopt the radical egalitarian field order to relieve his troops of the responsibility for caring for African American refugees from slavery? Or was it Secretary of War Edwin Stanton's work? Or did African American leaders who met with Sherman in Georgia shock him into a radical posture? Readers are invited to ponder these questions.

The book is written as narrative and concerns itself mainly with the battles, the politics, and numerous home fronts. The author is skeptical of the traditional narrative's tendency to locate "turning points," such as the Union victory at Gettysburg. Instead, Varon prefers the uncertainty and contingency that pervaded the war, yet her narrative still has flow and force. Her descriptions of the siege of Vicksburg and the battle at Antietam (and others) are not just vivid; they are moving. She achieves this effect without resorting to sentimentality, but rather by paying quiet but firm respect to the historical actors involved. Whether describing generals and soldiers on the battlefield or the southern women who led the bread riots, the human scale of the conflict is never far from view in *Armies of Deliverance*.

Varon's balanced appraisal of historical figures and modern historical controversies is admirable. General Robert E. Lee is given fair treatment. His numerous battlefield successes and the reverence with

which his troops regarded him are laid out next to his miscalculation at Gettysburg and his army's kidnapping of free African Americans during its invasion of Pennsylvania. Lincoln's leadership, especially as it pertains to emancipation and equality for African Americans, is similarly treated, without heavy-handed commentary. While this is generally a virtue, at times it can be a little frustrating. Lincoln's infamous Corning Letter, in which he defended a policy of silencing wartime political dissent as treasonous, overlooks the rather chilling implications for executive power and free speech.

The book concludes with Lincoln's assassination, the brief tenure of Andrew Johnson as president, and the beginnings of Reconstruction. The war was over, but the theme of deliverance soldiered on. Johnson promised southern states deliverance from congressional overreach. Frederick Douglass praised Union troops and insisted on the righteousness of their cause, the deliverance of the nation from slavery. These themes continued into Reconstruction and beyond, both substantively and rhetorically in American politics.

Varon's new interpretation of the Civil War promises to be authoritative for some time. While it will not please everyone (nor should it, the interpretive stakes being what they are), it will introduce older and newer generations to a fresh interpretation of the war.

H. Robert Baker
Georgia State University

Hurtin' Words: Debating Family Problems in the Twentieth-Century South. By Ted Ownby. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018. Acknowledgements, illustrations, notes, index. Pp. xiv, 334. \$90 cloth, \$29.95 paper, \$22.99 electronic. ISBN: 978-1-46964-700-5.)

The names Snopes, O'Hara, Fairchild, Thomas, Finch, and DuBois play an important role in the efforts of historians and literary scholars to define and illuminate the long story of the southern family. Ted Ownby joins the ranks of notable interpreters of southern families by taking on the challenge of defining and placing family life within the larger history of the region. Southern legal and cultural history come together in his latest work, *Hurtin' Words: Debating Family Problems in the Twentieth-Century South*. Ownby demonstrates successfully how people in the South discussed and defined family problems in both African American and White communities. Changing definitions of family represented cultural disruptions and helped lead to many legal changes. Legal documents, church sermons, autobiography, southern literature, and southern rock lyrics serve as the core sources for this work and allow Ownby to present a unique take on family problems and the ever-changing definition of family in the South.

Hurtin' Words adds to the scholarship on family life by looking at the way people have communicated and discussed what constitutes family and the problems found within those conversations. By showing how

southerners addressed family life and problems, Ownby details the long and troubled road of shifting thought of the ideal family from a rigid, stable structure tied to landownership into a more fluid, open, and personal construct based on emotion. This work also provides new ways of linking African American and White family life to the civil rights and massive resistance movements.

Viewing the South as a multivocal and diverse region, Ownby approaches the topics of marriage, sex, divorce, familial abandonment, child rearing, and religion in a way that allows for race, class, and gender differences to form into a connected and comprehensive narrative. He uses the notion of family units being stable or in crisis to determine what family problems existed among different groups and the severity of said problems. This framework allows him to note the somewhat jarring differences between the definitions of family held by Whites and African Americans at the start of the twentieth century. Readers are able to see how these understandings morphed from rigid and land-dependent standards that allowed White families a sense of security and stability into families as networks of people who care for and respect each other, as seen in Black family reunions and modern feminist southern literature.

Ownby dedicates a large section of *Hurtin' Words* to discussing the concept of brotherhood because of the role it played in the era of the modern Civil Rights Movement. He uses changes in the definition of the word "brotherhood" to signal broader changes in the direction

and drivers of the movement. In the early stages of the Civil Rights Movement, the concept of brotherhood signaled the church-led pathway and possibility of a future where Whites and African Americans could live in harmony with each other under the “brotherhood of mankind” (106). However, massive resistance countered this ideology by insisting that African Americans were not their spiritual brothers. Brotherhood and sisterhood, therefore, ultimately came to acknowledge the connection African Americans maintained through their collective shared experiences that “meant rejecting white attempts to save African Americans or solve their problems . . . to redefine the strengths of family life among African Americans” (160).

Honoring the tradition of countless southern writers before him, Ownby follows the definition of family from its most narrow definition to its broadest interpretation. Written clearly, *Hurtin’ Words* is an interesting and accessible read for anyone interested in family structure, legal history, or modern southern culture. Discussions of Mississippi can be found throughout the work, particularly in the voices of figures such as Senator James O. Eastland, Tammy Wynette, Richard Wright, and *The Sweet Potato Queens’* series. *Hurtin’ Words* can comfortably fit on any bookshelf or spark deep conversation in any college course on the modern South.

Laura Kate Fortner
Delta State University

Illusions of Emancipation: The Pursuit of Freedom & Equality in the Twilight of Slavery. By Joseph P. Reidy. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019. Acknowledgements, illustrations, map, notes, index. Pp. 1, 506. \$39.95 Hardcover, \$29.99 E-Book. ISBN: 978-1-4696-4836-1.)

Over 150 years after its bloody end, the American Civil War remains the most contested event in our nation’s historical memory. Its cause, conduct, and end invariably rise to the surface of modern American political discourse. Of the war’s many incidents and controversies, none draw more impassioned rhetoric and sentiment than slavery and emancipation. The war’s most important legacy, the ending of chattel slavery, looms large at the center of our nation’s most divisive issues: the future of Confederate monuments, the teaching of American history in public schools, the protection of civil rights, and the question of reparations. Though the study of emancipation has inspired several generations of dedicated historians, it eludes much of the general public in the darkness of misunderstanding.

Joseph P. Reidy’s *Illusions of Emancipation: The Pursuit of Freedom & Equality in the Twilight of Slavery* emerges as one of several recent works to bring the story of slavery’s end into full light. As a part of the Littlefield History of the Civil War Era, *Illusions* is primarily a synthesis. Reidy draws from primary and secondary sources and combines the insights of a generation of scholarship into a comprehensive work on the

war and emancipation. The author's central argument is that slavery did not end overnight but through a process that developed unevenly, at different times and places throughout the course of the war. Slavery's destruction involved untold millions of people. Its central actors were the abolitionists and enslaved people who compelled the leaders of the United States Army and government to pursue emancipation as a war aim. Through their efforts, the United States secured military victory and abolished slavery. However, within several years, differing expectations of what freedom meant among former slaves, northerners, and southerners "gave rise to a recurring" and often brutal "cycle of hope and frustration" (21). For example, the United States Army's presence in the South after the Emancipation Proclamation did not always fulfill enslaved peoples' expectations of freedom. In February 1864, General William T. Sherman led a campaign from Vicksburg to Meridian, Mississippi, liberating and escorting some eight thousand former slaves to safety. Though they had escaped bondage in Meridian, the freed people experienced dreadful conditions at refugee camps located in and around Vicksburg. For most who remained at the camps, their liberation was worth the meager conditions of refugee life. Yet, as Reidy argues, ultimately the war's outcome and the destruction of slavery failed to secure the promises of freedom—"the illusions of emancipation."

The author's major contribution to Civil War historiography is the thematic framework he uses to structure and convey his findings.

Reidy organized *Illusions* into three sections, each representing a different lens through which members of the Civil War generation experienced and interpreted the war and emancipation. The trinity of Reidy's method is time, space, and the home. Historians have long employed the notions of time and space to explain their subjects. Yet, Reidy's use of the "home" as an interpretative lens is unique and provides the most insightful portion of the book. For free Americans, the nineteenth century home generally represented order, family, and respectability in a world of chaos. For slaveholding southerners, the home meant something specific and exclusive: the plantation mansion. They viewed the home as the pinnacle of wealth, mastery, and harmony in their slave society. For enslaved people, the struggle for freedom represented as much an escape from bondage as it did the creation of a home of their own, a place of refuge, order, and respectability. Reidy's framework successfully portrays how war and emancipation figuratively and quite literally destroyed the order associated with some homes while opening up the possibility of new ones for others.

Reidy's work should appeal widely to Mississippians as its principal setting is in the former Confederate states and its main actors are southerners. The author offers several passages revealing how the war and emancipation fundamentally transformed Mississippi communities such as Vicksburg and Meridian. Overall, Reidy offers the world an illustrative and comprehensive work on how emancipation was

made possible and how Americans interpreted that revolutionary event. *Illusions of Emancipation* is a powerful account from which scholars and the general public will greatly enhance their understanding of our nation's greatest crucible.

Andrew L. Hargroder
Louisiana State University

Civil War Monuments and the Militarization of America. By Thomas J. Brown. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019. 384 pp., 6.125 x 9.25, 87 halftones, notes, bibl., index, Paper, \$29.97, 978-1-4696-5374-7.)

The 2017 removal of the Robert E. Lee memorial from Lee Circle in New Orleans made clear to the public the connection between Civil War commemoration and the national embrace of militarization and White supremacy. Though activists, journalists, sociologists, and historians had demonstrated this connection, there had been little pressure from the public for politicians to act, but a groundswell movement following the election of President Donald Trump and an increase in hate crimes brought a moment of reckoning. Thomas J. Brown in *Civil War Monuments and the Militarization of America* traces this history by documenting Civil War memorials from the 1860s through the 1930s and linking the change in American's attitudes toward war remembrance with an increasingly militarized society.

Brown establishes the early

Jeffersonian emphasis on the virtuous yeoman farmer, which reigned as the supreme vision of manhood through the early 1860s. This conceptualization, however, changed as war commemoration swept the nation in the latter half of the nineteenth century. While these monuments began as a means of remembering the dead, they ultimately served to glamorize war and justify imperialism. No longer did the farmer represent the height of civic virtue, states Brown. Instead, the soldier claimed this position and stood as an example of moral rightness, and the military came to be seen as the template for an organized society.

Examining the dynamic between a militarized or a civilian citizenry, Brown analyzes the process of monument erection to uncover the often highly political nature of memorialization. Focused primarily on northern monuments, which consisted of not only statues, obelisks, and arches but also lesser known memorials such as buildings, libraries, and parks, Brown includes some discourse of southern memorials but more as counterpoints to those erected in the North. Similarly, Brown offers examples of monuments outside these regions, including monuments in Iowa and Nebraska, again, primarily in relation to how they compare to commemorations in the North. Mississippi monuments mentioned by Brown include those in Jackson, Oxford, Poplarville, Raymond, Ripley, and at the University of Mississippi and the Vicksburg National Military Park. Additionally, Brown explores the ways in which artists' visions for

these monuments were often at odds with political and military leaders and even, occasionally, the widowed wives of the men being memorialized. For Brown, the process of creating a memorial is, perhaps, more important than the memorial itself.

Dividing the book into three categories of common soldier monuments, leadership monuments, and victory monuments, Brown explores how the conflicting visions for Civil War monuments represented a society in transition. He argues that initially, beginning with attempts to commemorate the American Revolution, Americans rebelled against the representation of a militarized society by refusing to erect statues that showcased military might. By 1920, this attitude had completely reversed itself as the frenzy for such memorials pervaded commemoration efforts to the point that even southerners who lost the Civil War yet erected monuments that represented martial strength. Brown also explores how the Civil War commemorative process influenced the way Americans chose to memorialize the Spanish-American War, World War I, and World War II. Conversely, he addresses how these wars, along with the professionalization of the military and the consolidation of federal power, changed the messaging around the Lost Cause mythology, which eventually dominated the narrative of Civil War commemoration, thus leading to and reinforcing the militarization of American society.

Civil War monuments have served many purposes since their initial creation, from sites of grief to visual markers of White supremacy.

Brown's observations in *Civil War Monuments and the Militarization of America* contribute new insights into the growing literature on Civil War commemoration and the connections between these monuments and the changing nature of American society. He reframes the discussion of these memorials, demonstrating how the monuments are a form of cultural representation that link the Civil War with the creation of the military-industrial complex and the never-ending wars of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

Kelly McMichael
Independent Scholar

Reconstruction Politics in a Deep South State: Alabama, 1865–1874.

By William Warren Rogers, Jr. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2021. Acknowledgments, illustrations, notes, bibliography. Pp. 1, 439. \$54.95 cloth. ISBN: 978-0817320744.)

Author of three earlier books on Reconstruction and the Civil War in Georgia and Alabama, University of North Georgia professor of history William Rogers has written what can only be called the comprehensive history of the politics of the Democratic and Republican parties during the nine years that followed the end of the Civil War in Alabama.

While Rogers does include a short chapter describing the ways in which ex-slaves embraced freedom during Reconstruction, the remainder of the book is reserved for those who want to dig deep into the inner workings of

the two state parties as they sought to control Alabama's state government. While there is the occasional mention of an issue with the economy or a policy coming from Washington that influences a political decision in Alabama, the bulk of the book recounts in great depth the actions of Alabama politicians—the White ones, almost all Democrats, who wanted to nullify Congressional Reconstruction and the Black ones, all Republicans, who had to have known their very freedom was at stake in the battle they were engulfed in.

For those readers who know their Mississippi Reconstruction history, Alabama was two years ahead of Mississippi in gaining readmission to the Union, and the Democrats there took back control of state government in 1874, the year before Democrats in Mississippi accomplished the same feat. The chapter describing the 1874 takeover is aptly titled "We will never submit to social equality." The "we" of course referred to White Democrats. The 102 footnotes attached to this chapter reveal an extraordinary amount of original research while the narrative would be compelling reading for any political junkie. By 1874, Washington in general and Grant in particular had largely tired of providing support to Black Republicans in the South. White Democrats took advantage of that national change of heart in Alabama in 1874 just as surely as their counterparts did in Mississippi a year later. Knowing that, while reading Rogers's account of that pivotal election, leaves one with the sense that the only reason Reconstruction "failed" was because of a lack of will

from the nation's capital.

Early in the book Rogers quotes a voter saying, "Whigs and Democrats used to abuse each other very fiercely in speeches and newspapers but such things scarcely ever affected our social relations," and then makes clear that the politics and the campaigns that took place in Alabama during Reconstruction were something different. Rogers described it as "a distinct brand of politics emerged, characterized by an elemental fury and waged with ferocity," and makes sure his readers understand the source of the "elemental fury" animating White Democrats: their belief that African Americans really were inferior human beings and, thus, had no business participating in a government, much less controlling the government, that adopted laws and spent money on behalf of the entire state and its population. To quote the author: "The transcending question of race ultimately posed the greatest obstacle to sustained [Republican] party success."

Rogers gets it right in his Epilogue: "A war had been fought to preserve the racial order, and a new struggle, which Democrats determined would end differently, was underway." The "Lost Cause" doesn't stand a chance against this well-written and well-researched chronicle of Reconstruction in Alabama.

Jere Nash
Jackson, Mississippi

Fugitivism: Escaping Slavery in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1820–1860. By S. Charles Bolton. (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2019. Acknowledgements, appendix, notes, index. Pp. x, 302. \$34.95 cloth. ISBN: 978-1-68226-009-9.)

In the long historiography of slavery, historians have employed a variety of terms to describe an enslaved person who left their place of bondage. Those who left temporarily are sometimes referred to as truants. Others, seeking a more permanent freedom among the southern wetlands, might be deemed maroons. But there is no term to distinguish the difference between urban and rural escapees, nor is there a way to differentiate between those who traveled north and those who remained in the area. In each case, these individuals are simply referred to as runaways. First used among enslavers to identify absent labor, the term “runaway” has been employed by scholars to mean much the same thing. But historian S. Charles Bolton contests the usage, arguing that it oversimplifies the experiences, motives, and goals of enslaved escapees. His book, *Fugitivism: Escaping Slavery in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1820–1860* endeavors to rectify this oversight. By offering up the term “fugitivism,” Bolton hopes to emphasize “not only the ubiquitous nature of slave escapes, but also their collective impact on the South” (4).

Traditionally, historians have emphasized slave escapes as an act of resistance, meant to undermine the institution that held them

in bondage. This interpretation, according to Bolton, is incomplete because it focuses “more attention on slavery rather than on the slave” (8). Fugitivism, while certainly an act of resistance, was also an individual choice motivated by personal desires for freedom, happiness, and self-actualization. As such, Bolton’s work does not simply consider escapees as rebels, but also as people who were “willing to take dangerous risks to improve their physical, material, and psychological well-being” (8). To accomplish this, Bolton’s study seeks to integrate the traditional narrative of escape with a careful consideration of the physical environment and historical context of an escapee’s flight. In doing so, he has crafted a rich study that highlights the complex array of factors that made fugitivism a unique experience for each individual.

Fugitivism consists of eight chapters, each with a different thematic approach. The study begins by examining the cultural differences associated with enslaved peoples who sought permanent freedom versus those who temporarily fled from their work. Contextualizing these distinctions within the writings of Frederick Law Olmsted, Bolton demonstrates that even anti-slavery advocates disapproved of temporary fugitivism, associating it with laziness rather than a quest for freedom. The second chapter, by contrast, examines the legal and social evolution of slavery in the Lower Mississippi River Valley, particularly in Louisiana. Because Louisiana was a colony of both Spain and France prior to becoming part of the United States, this chapter offers an important opportunity to

consider the ways in which slavery was practiced and patrolled between all three governments. Following these early chapters, *Fugitivism* examines varying aspects of the escape experience. This includes an analysis of escapees' different destinations, the importance of the Mississippi River, and the plight of urban runaways. The last three chapters highlight the ways fugitivism shaped southern society by examining themes such as slave stealing, violence, and the Fugitive Slave Clause.

Ultimately, *Fugitivism* offers important contributions to the scholarship of slavery and enslavement in the United States. By contextualizing his work in the Lower Mississippi River Valley, Bolton demonstrates how the region's colonial background and geographical features created a unique environment for fugitivism. Furthermore, he illustrates how the practice of selling, stealing, and capturing escaped slaves, not only contributed to the regions' characteristic violence, but also exacerbated sectional tensions on the eve of the Civil War. And while there are times in which the book's narrative flow obscures the historiographical importance of the author's argument, Bolton's writing style makes the work accessible to both general interest readers and scholars alike. In short, *Fugitivism* does a tremendous job in reclaiming the voices, experiences, ambitions, and dreams of enslaved Americans who sought to find their own freedom.

Lindsay Rae Privette
Anderson University

Bernardo de Gálvez: Spanish Hero of the American Revolution. By Gonzalo M. Quintero Saravia. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. Acknowledgements, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. Pp. xi, 602, \$38.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781469640792.)

By the time of the American Revolution, the Spanish Empire was on the decline. However, the Spanish still had a significant presence in the Americas and, following the defeat of the French in the Seven Years' War, were the chief rival of the British in the New World. Wishing to strike a blow against the British, the Spanish entered the American Revolution on the side of the colonists. Though their efforts were not as lauded as the French, the Spanish were instrumental in the War for Independence. Led by Bernardo de Gálvez, supreme commander of the Spanish forces in North America, the Spanish conducted military campaigns against British fortifications along the Mississippi River and later against Mobile and Pensacola. These raids hindered the British ability to concentrate all of its forces against the thirteen rebelling colonies and allowed the Continental army to survive. In his sweeping and extensive biography of Gálvez, Gonzalo M. Quintero Saravia paints a picture of a competent and innovative career military man who is perhaps the best kept secret from the American Revolution.

Bernardo de Gálvez was an adventurer who enjoyed his military career full of action and daring. He rose rapidly through the Spanish

ranks, assisted by the patronage of his uncle, Jose de Gálvez. Bernardo's life offers a view of an individual deeply influenced by Enlightenment values as he was instrumental in the design and implementation of Spanish colonial reforms as well as the creation of new military technology. Gálvez reorganized Spain's northern frontier, bringing peace to a region rattled with Indian raids, corruption, and incompetence. At age thirty-three, Gálvez assumed his office as acting governor of Louisiana. There, Gálvez "transformed the province's rebellious French population into a bastion of the Spanish Empire in North America" (6). Gálvez's organized and strong leadership allowed the Spanish peace of mind when it came time to fight the British as they no longer had to worry about the local population.

In administering Louisiana, Gálvez fielded many accomplishments. He founded new towns and introduced new crops while overseeing the migration of settlers from the Canary Islands and Malaga. He managed to reorganize existing military units and created new ones and championed a policy of religious toleration. He also advocated for the principle of "public happiness," a form of welfare for poor peasants as Gálvez saw it as the duty of the government to take care of the governed. Perhaps Gálvez's most impactful policy during his time as governor was his stance on Native peoples. Having fought against the Apaches earlier in his military career, Gálvez understood the need to be impartial and acknowledge previous wrongs done to the indigenous population. With a more relaxed policy, Gálvez hoped that the Apaches

would not feel threatened, which he deemed the main reason for previous attacks on Spanish settlements.

Most importantly, Gálvez facilitated most of the covert aid provided by the Spanish government to the American rebels. Though Spain was not a formal ally, Gálvez's movements against the British in the Southeast, as well as his providing of weapons, money, and other aid, helped the American war effort and proved to be a great benefit.

Quintero Saravia's biography of Gálvez draws its sources from Spanish, Mexican, and American archives. His extensive footnotes and near one-hundred-page bibliography reveal just the massive undertaking in this book. Though at times a bit dense, Saravia paints an impressive portrait of a revolutionary figure in every sense of the word. The book is accessible and does not take for granted any prior knowledge of the subject. At times, Saravia sometimes ventures too far into the life of Jose de Gálvez than he does Bernardo, but given the importance of Bernardo's uncle to his career, it is understandable. Saravia succeeds in "casting a light on the last decades of the Spanish Empire" through the eyes of a charismatic and passionate man (8). Though Gálvez lives on in America through places like his namesake Galveston, Texas, he is not as widely known. Perhaps Saravia's book will enlighten those who wish to learn more about the relatively known figure who played a pivotal role in the American Revolution.

James Bishop
Louisiana State University