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Review of *Lincoln's Secret Spy: The Civil War Case That Changed the Future of Espionage* by Jane Singer and John Stewart

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Although Buckner is by necessity reduced to being one of many characters in the book’s antebellum and postbellum chapters, these portions are interesting and useful. The concluding chapters in particular provide insightful analysis of the politics employed by the former master class to preserve white supremacy and their power in the face of increasing black activism and poor white discontent.

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William Alvin Lloyd was an appalling man. During his erratic and almost sociopathic journey through the middle of the nineteenth century, he was a liar, a bigamist, a confidence man, and a shady minstrel show operator who frequently skipped out on hotel fares and wheedled free passes out of begrudging railroad executives. His only legitimate job was as a publisher of steamboat and railroad guides, but even then most of his profits came from extorting border state businessmen to take out ads or be accused of having unpopular political beliefs. Born in Kentucky, Lloyd spent significant time in New Orleans, Memphis, New York, and other cities.

Lloyd also claimed that he had been a spy for Abraham Lincoln. Although he never submitted a report—and Jane Singer and John Stewart quickly dismiss the idea that he had ever really intended to spy on anybody—once the war was over, Lloyd, one of his wives, and a lawyer named Enoch Totten tried to collect nearly $12,000 in salary (Lloyd claimed the president had made a verbal promise of $200 per month), interest, and expenses. Astonishingly, he was awarded $3,427. Even after Lloyd died a few years later, Totten came back for more, but numerous appeals and lawsuits failed.

Lincoln’s Secret Spy: The Civil War Case That Changed the Future of Espionage is a shrewdly researched book. Singer and Stewart combed dozens of newspapers to find the shadowy Lloyd in towns and cities throughout the South. He appears in ads, notices of mail received, and city court records. The most substantial sources are the numerous documents submitted during litigation of his claims and a series of letters he wrote to Jefferson Davis asking for help while he was imprisoned in Savannah in 1862, ironically, on suspicion of being a Yankee spy.

The book’s title bears little relationship to its contents. Lloyd was never a spy, and Lincoln appears only on the supposedly official pass allowing the scoundrel to cross Union lines. The repeated efforts by Lloyd and his associates to defraud the government did not actually change the practice of espionage; they simply led to a legal precedent that protected the government from claims made by individuals who had contracted secretly to perform secret work. That hardly amounts to an exposé, and the authors do not suggest what exactly was changed by the “Totten Doctrine,” as it came to be known. Indeed, the issue takes up only the last two pages of the book.

It is, of course, difficult to build a book of substance around the life of a man with no substance. The authors over dramatize the events they describe,
jumping back and forth from past to present tense and frequently ordering readers to watch, listen, or wait for the next thing to happen. Their first description of Lloyd is illustrative of the tone throughout the book: “Here was a man, a comet, streaking through decades with impudence and impu-
nity. A simmering broth of lust, indefatigable energy, greed, and larceny, he
was magical, priapic, musical, inventive, a survivor and a scoundrel” (p. ix).
In the end, Lincoln’s Secret Spy fails to live up to its heightened title and
florid prose, but it does offer an entertaining and lively glimpse of the greed,
turmoil, and banality that lurked on the margins of Civil War society.

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The Civil War Guerrilla: Unfolding the Black Flag in History, Memory, and
Myth. Edited by Joseph M. Beilein Jr. and Matthew C. Hulbert. New
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In The Civil War Guerrilla: Unfolding the Black Flag in History, Memory,
and Myth, editors Joseph M. Beilein Jr. and Matthew C. Hulbert have assembled
a collection of eight insightful and wide-ranging essays from both established
historians and rising young scholars. Together the authors explore the subject
of guerrilla fighters during the Civil War from several fresh interpretive angles
that incorporate the themes of race, region, ideology, and memory.

The book begins with “The Hard-Line War: The Ideological Basis of
Irregular Warfare in the Western Border States” by Christopher Phillips, who
argues that Missouri’s guerrilla fighters acted on ideological rather than per-
sonal motives. Phillips develops this point by showing how the federal govern-
ment’s conscription and emancipation policies radicalized the guerrilla war,
leading to an intensified irregular conflict in the war’s later years. In “Con-
trolled Chaos: Spatiotemporal Patterns within Missouri’s Irregular Civil War,”
Andrew William Fialka uses specialized software to create digital maps that
track guerrilla violence. Fialka determines that irregular warfare in central
Missouri actually followed rational and predictable patterns, showing that
Confederate guerrillas avoided attacking targets in areas dominated by fixed
garrisons. When troops from Missouri were moved to other theaters, Union
commanders compensated by shifting troops from large, stationary garrisons
to smaller, temporary outposts, which turned the communities around those
outposts into magnets for guerrilla attacks. These two essays complement
each other by emphasizing the purposefulness of rebel guerrillas.

Shifting eastward, two British historians—David Brown and Patrick J.
Doyle—have coauthored an essay that explains why a belligerent, guerrilla-
style opposition movement emerged to challenge the Confederate govern-
ment’s authority in the North Carolina Piedmont but not in the South Carolina
Piedmont. Brown and Doyle argue that the two regions entered the war with
“fundamentally different views of the Confederacy” because of socioeconomic
and political differences, including South Carolina’s greater dependence
on slavery and cotton, and the longer, more fractious secession process in
North Carolina (p. 73). Meanwhile, in the West, Confederate forces faced a
very different opponent, one that Megan Kate Nelson argues has received