



Civil War Humor

Cameron C. Nickels

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In *Civil War Humor*, author Cameron C. Nickels examines the various forms of comedic popular artifacts produced in America from 1861 to 1865, and looks at how wartime humor was created, disseminated, and received by both sides of the conflict. Song lyrics, newspaper columns, sheet music covers, illustrations, political cartoons, fiction, light verse, paper dolls, printed envelopes, and penny dreadfuls--from and for the Union and the Confederacy--are analyzed at length.

Nickels argues that the war coincided with the rise of inexpensive mass printing in the United States and thus subsequently with the rise of the country's widely distributed popular culture. As such, the war was as much a "paper war"--involving the use of publications to disseminate propaganda and ideas about the Union and the Confederacy's positions--as one taking place on battlefields. Humor was a key element on both sides in deflating pretensions and establishing political stances (and ways of critiquing them). *Civil War Humor* explores how the combatants portrayed Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln, life on the home front, battles, and African Americans.

Civil War Humor reproduces over sixty illustrations and texts created during the war and provides close readings of these materials. At the same time, it places this corpus of comedy in the context of wartime history, economies, and tactics. This comprehensive overview examines humor's role in shaping and reflecting the cultural imagination of the nation during its most tumultuous period.



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