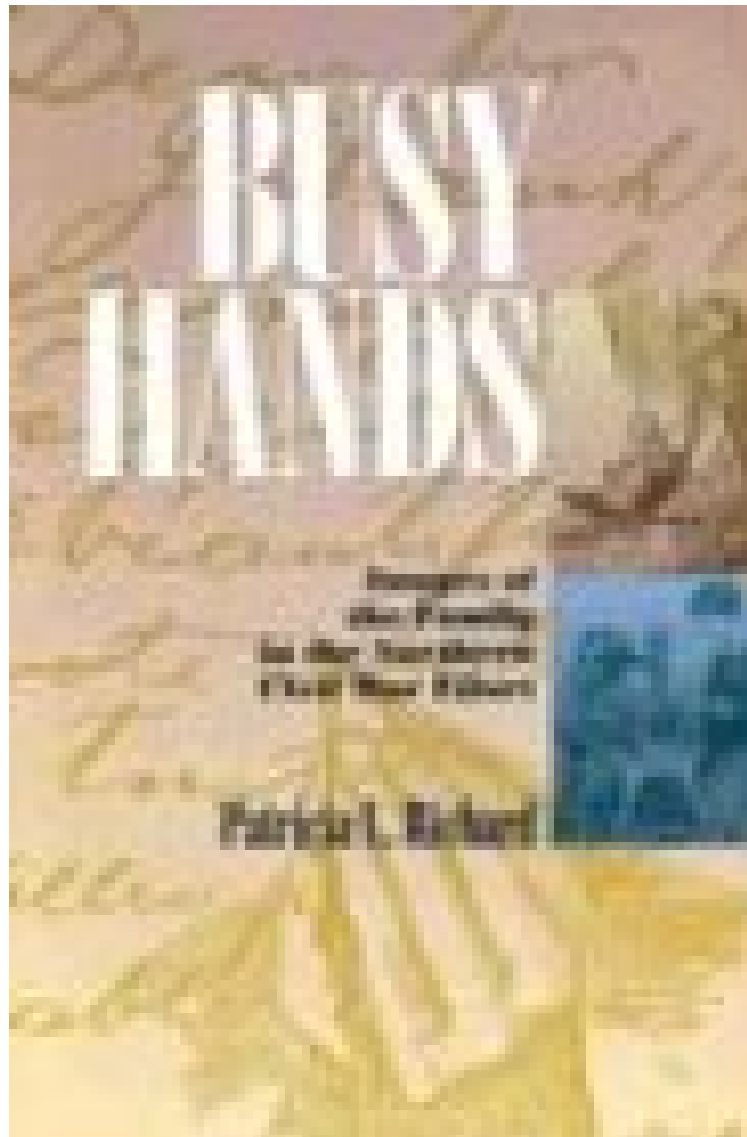


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Busy Hands: Images of the Family in the Northern Civil War Effort (The North's Civil War)

Patricia Richard

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By Randy Hammond There are some interesting anecdotes in this work but it fails the test of history when touching on the root causes of the conflict. Books like this are unfortunate. It is an amateurish presentation; characterized by a lack of historical depth and a meandering writing style that ultimately leads only to inert cases supportive of the author's opinion. The author's history is uni-dimensional, lacks perspective and, importantly, simply ignores the facts. The slavery argument conveniently fits into the world of those of the ilk of writers like this author. She is a simply another revisionist who latches ahold of the simplistic and beats it to death. Perhaps the author believes `to the victor goes the spoils', providing justification for her historical license and her revisionism? The revisionists yammering about the sole or root cause of the Civil War as being slavery is tired and historically inaccurate. She would do well to expand her narrow view and consider the Emancipation Proclamation wasn't issued until 1863, when the conflict was well underway. Better yet, let's consider the words of Lincoln himself in a letter written to Horace Greeley in 1862: "If there be those who would not save the Union, unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time destroy slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that." It defies reason that a Commander-in-Chief would prosecute a civil war, our Civil War, over what was considered an esoteric issue of the time. Particularly one who penned the above. Also, it is incredible to consider that hundreds of thousands of dirt poor Southerners would leave their homes and families behind to engage in a conflict that had little to do with them. Slavery wasn't their fight. For the author to project opinions regarding motivations on them is myopic and not credible. There are volumes upon volumes of documents that provide a Southern view contrary to that projected on the Southern leaders by the author. Many of the political and military leaders of the Confederacy wrote extensively after the war about their motivations. Slavery is a mere footnote and unless it was all a coordinated and grand conspiracy, I don't know what else you can attribute it to except that the winner writes history. The author clearly and smugly believes she occupies the moral high ground when, in fact, it is merely an exercise in self-aggrandizement. The slavery issue is simplistic, easy and creates a moral divide between North and South. It is convenient, expedient and, frankly, intellectually lazy. The real history of this period is much more complex. This is a history book only in the sense it provides a brief glimpse into life during the times. If you're seeking a scholarly examination you should look elsewhere.

Focusing on middle-class women's contributions to the northern Civil War effort, Patricia Richard shows how women utilized their power as moral agents to shape the way men survived the ravages of war. *Busy Hands* investigates the ways in which white and African American women used images of family and domestic life in their relief efforts to counter the effects of prostitution, gambling, profanity, and drinking, threatening men's postwar civilian fitness. Drawing on letters, diaries, and memoirs of Civil War nurses, sanitary workers, soldiers, and the soldiers' aid societies, Richard develops a new perspective on domestic influence on the war, as women sought to save soldiers from the dangers of the military world.

About the Author Patricia Richard is Assistant Professor of History at Metropolitan State College of Denver.