



Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North

Jennifer L. Weber

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If Civil War battlefields saw vast carnage, the Northern home-front was itself far from tranquil. Fierce political debates set communities on edge, spurred secret plots against the Union, and triggered widespread violence, such as the New York City draft riots. And at the heart of all this turmoil stood Northern anti-war Democrats, nicknamed "Copperheads."

Now, Jennifer L. Weber offers the first full-length portrait of this powerful faction to appear in almost half a century. Weber reveals how the Copperheads came perilously close to defeating Lincoln and ending the war in the South's favor. Indeed, by the summer of 1864, they had grown so strong that Lincoln himself thought his defeat was "exceedingly likely." Passionate defenders of civil liberties and states' rights--and often virulent racists--the Copperheads deplored Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus, his liberal interpretation of the Constitution, and, most vehemently, his moves toward emancipation. Weber reveals how the battle over these issues grew so heated, particularly in the Midwest, that Northerners feared their neighbors would destroy their livestock, burn their homes, even kill them. Indeed, some Copperheads went so far as to conspire with Confederate forces and plan armed insurrections, including an attempt to launch an uprising during the Democratic convention in Chicago. Finally, Weber illuminates the role of Union soldiers, who, furious at Copperhead attacks on the war effort, moved firmly behind Lincoln. The soldiers' support for the embattled president kept him alive politically in his darkest times, and their victories on the battlefield secured his re-election.

Disgraced after the war, the Copperheads melted into the shadows of history. Here, Jennifer L. Weber illuminates their dramatic story. Packed with sharp observation and fresh interpretations, *Copperheads* is a gripping account of the fierce dissent that Lincoln called "the fire in the rear."

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