

Code Name: Caleb by John A. Bray --- Review courtesy of Avignon Press, 2012

Being in the middle of tutoring my teenage niece on U.S. History and having just watched the new Steven Spielberg film, *Lincoln*, I was more eager than I usually would have been to read a Civil War spy thriller. *Code Name: Caleb* by John A. Bray is no political thriller, but a fairly plausible and remarkably historically accurate tale about a young Union soldier recruited to perform clandestine activities among the Southern sympathizing “Copperheads” of New York.

Although *Code Name: Caleb* is not billed as a young adult book, the story to which it seemed most similar was the classic revolutionary war story, Esther Forbes’ *Johnny Tremain*. Unlike the youthful Johnny Tremain, Johnny Madigan, the hero of *Code Name: Caleb* is a young man, his age being indefinite, but probably in his late teens or early twenties and the adventures in which he participates are highly dangerous, requiring Johnny to become a killer himself, although always in self-defense. The activities of the Copperheads are true to history, consisting of counterfeiting, arson, and stealing and smuggling arms, sometimes in collusion with Southerners working in Canada.

The Union had an extensive espionage and counterespionage service during the Civil War, as did the Confederacy. Lincoln’s suspension of habeas corpus allowed those suspected of spying by the counterespionage service to be jailed indefinitely without a trial. In what appears to be the time-honored way of spy services throughout history and up to the present, the Union intelligence service played fast and loose with the laws in their pursuit of behind the lines spies and terrorists. In fact, opposition to Lincoln’s war, particularly following the Emancipation Proclamation, which made the abolition of slavery a prominent issue in the North’s prosecution of the war, was widespread and public in many areas of the north and especially among some groups, such as the Irish. Opposition to the draft in New York included not only riots and arson, but the lynching of blacks.

Author Bray manages to capture the flavor of the era in his depiction of the New York working class. Johnny Madigan’s identity as a Union spy must be kept much more secret than his supposed opposition to the draft and the war, which is common in his neighborhood and workplace. We are given a keen insight into the mindset of those who opposed the war, although living in the North.

Code Name: Caleb is also a love story and in fact, not a simple one. While Johnny cherishes his young, innocent courtship of his childhood love, Deidre, he is attracted to the seductive Letitia, the granddaughter of the mastermind of the Copperhead illicit activities in New York City. Letitia herself is a complicated woman, unsure where her loyalties lie, politically, and torn between obedience to her grandfather and her yearning for Johnny. The romantic subplot of *Code Name: Caleb* provides an entertaining sidelight to the story and contributes its own share of suspense.

I enjoyed *Code Name: Caleb*. It is a sequel to the earlier, *Ballad of Johnny Madigan*, which is available from Amazon as both a paperback and Kindle book, but which I have not read. I have a strong suspicion that the real audience for *Code Name: Caleb* will be teens and young adults who are looking for a character in their own age range and a rollicking adventure story, which has the added attraction of bringing the history they are probably having to study in school alive to them in an exciting way.

Code Name: Caleb is available in paperback from Avignon Press and as a Kindle ebook from BeWrite books. ** *Reprinted with permission from Publisher*