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STUDENT, PROFESSOR CO-AUTHOR CIVIL WAR BOOK

PROJECT POWERS JOURNEY TO LAW SCHOOL.

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | April 11, 2025*Read time: about 2 min*

Reagan Connelly can say something that most of her peers cannot: she is a published author.

Connelly worked with [American Studies](#) Professor Dr. Jonathan White and co-edited the book, [“From Dakota to Dixie: George Buswell’s Civil War,”](#) which hit bookstores this month.

“Honestly, it’s still kind of surreal,” said Connelly, now in her first year at George Mason’s Antonin Scalia Law School. “Dr. White and I have been working on this project for so long, so seeing it in physical form sitting on my desk is a crazy experience. I am really excited to see our hard work pay off.”

The book draws from the diaries of George Buswell, a Civil War soldier who witnessed the mass execution of 38 Dakota warriors in 1862, and wrote at length about his perspectives on the war, race relations and American politics.

The deep dive into Buswell’s diaries began back in 2021 when White stumbled upon them while doing Civil War research at the

Huntington Library in San Marino, Calif.

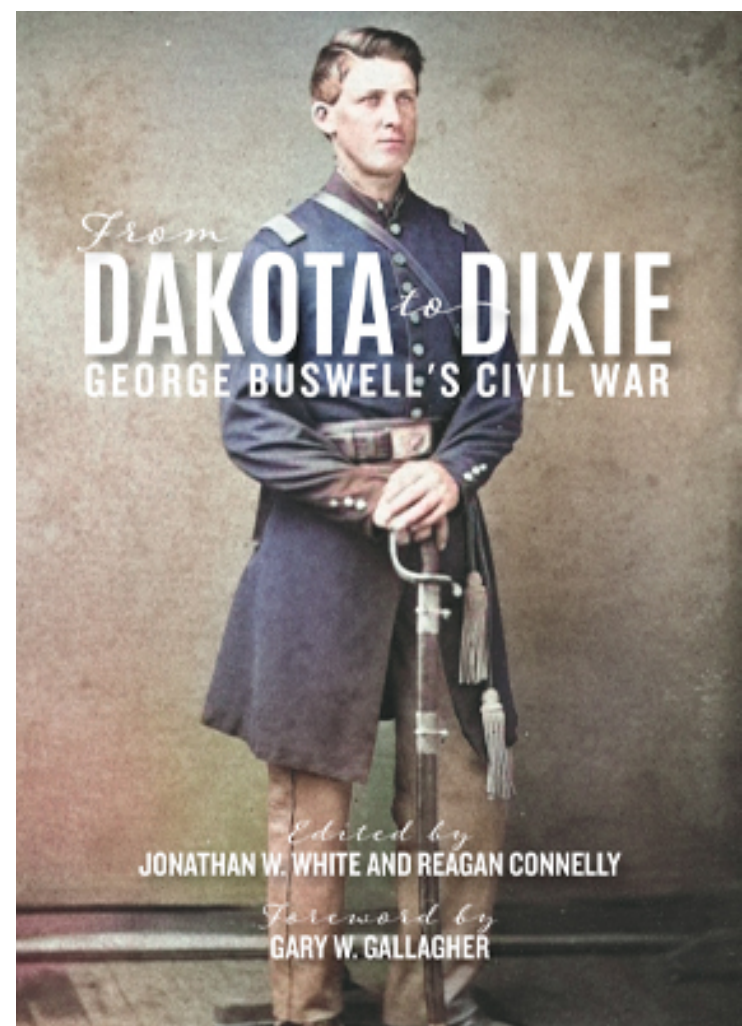
White knew immediately that he had found his next book subject. And he also knew exactly who he wanted as a co-author: Connelly, '24 [Political Science](#) and American Studies. During the first semester of her freshman year, Connelly took White's Encounters with the Constitution class. She excelled academically, and impressed White with her focus and preparation. She was perfect for the job.

"I called Reagan the night I found the diaries (at 10 p.m. ET!) and told her about the potential to publish them as a book," White said.

Connelly jumped at the offer, never expecting to be invited to lend her name and energy to a book.

"I hadn't done anything like this before, but I knew it was a great chance to work with a professor I admired and gain good experience," she said.

White and Connelly, then a junior fellow with the Center for American Studies, got to work. Connelly spent countless hours transcribing the diaries from cursive to type formats. During that summer, Connelly, a [Summer Scholar](#) through the [Office of Research and Creative Activity](#), added footnotes for each person and major event mentioned in the diaries. From there, the book began taking shape. After several rounds of edits, the book was published.



"I think it's really special for a student to have their name on the title page of a book. It gives them a great sense of accomplishment, and it can also be really helpful for getting into graduate or law school or for landing a job because it shows that they can complete a major task – something that took years to finish," White said. The project, Connelly said, shaped her years as a Captain and also proved that "projects like this are hard work, but they are worth it."

"It was an integral part of my CNU journey," she said. "I think research is vitally important to the CNU experience, especially if you are a student considering graduate school. The skills I gained and the experiences I had early on in my career because of CNU and research are irreplaceable."

The opportunity, she said, "helped me to make connections with professors and grow in research and writing skills. It also became something I could talk about in interviews or on law school admission essays."

It offered Connelly clarity and a chance to write her own next life chapter. She is pursuing a career centered around constitutional liberties. When she graduates, she hopes to be in public interest litigation.

"I want to work in a capacity where I am defending those liberties daily," she said.