

Divided Loyalty: Was California An Outpost Of Confederate Resistance?

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Review

DIVIDED LOYALTY

Was California an outpost of Confederate resistance?

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Talbott, Laurence Fletcher *California in the War for Southern Independence*.
Hale & Co., ISBN 966946405

Studies of Civil War history relative to the Trans-Mississippi West are not as extensive as for other regions of the United States. California particularly is neglected, at least in book-length treatments as Laurence Talbott asserts in **California in the War for Southern Independence**. Talbott goes on to contend the Union side of the story has been "well recorded" while the history of those who supported the Confederacy has received "only fleeting, and often hostile recognition."

Nor does he see this topic as parochial in scope in that he paints California as a "microcosm of the United States in political and cultural diversity." Carrying on his interest in broader themes, Talbott makes an argument that California was a border state. Most importantly, he maintains: "There was a large minority of Californians who would have been glad to see California join the Southern Confederacy, or secede from the Union, and form a separate Pacific Republic. . . ." The author qualifies this last thesis by noting that the large pro-Confederate minority "lived mostly, but not entirely, in Southern California," yet elsewhere he asserts "enclaves of Southern Sympathy were ubiquitous."

To demonstrate this alleged strong Southern proclivity, he spends nearly one-third of the volume on a series of brief biographies focusing on six key individuals who elected to depart California to serve the Confederacy. The most notable of this group was Albert Sidney Johnston. While interesting, these biographies do little to carry forward the author's contentions.

The remaining chapters of the monograph are left to demonstrate his theory that a "large majority of people were held in check . . . waiting in vain for their

army of liberation to cross the Colorado and grasp their waiting hands. . . ." To this end he cites statistics that three-eighths of the state's population supported secession, while indeed "there were 16,000 Knights of the Golden Circle" who were well organized and "all full of hate for the Union." If these figures were true, why did the pro-Southerners not organize and strike against the 16,000 federal volunteers in the Golden State?

Here the author's use of *The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* as his sole evidence for these statistics comes into question. Indeed, the ORs represent the major primary source cited by the author. In the main he relies heavily on secondary references. Even then, some of the cited works are poorly researched. Further, certain key secondary sources have been ignored or glossed over.

Thus, the book is a synthesis drawn almost entirely from published materials. Given this fact, and the high cost of what is a modest 5" x 8" work with flimsy pulp covers, this book probably is destined to be purchased by only the most dedicated Civil War bibliophiles.

John P. Langellier received his Ph.D. in military history from Kansas State University. He has written dozens of books, monographs, and articles related to military involvement in the West, including "War Comes to San Francisco," which appeared in the Spring 1999 issue of Columbiad.