

Doomed From Within: Slavery Left The Confederacy Undermanned And Internally Divided

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Review

DOOMED FROM WITHIN

Slavery left the Confederacy undermanned and internally divided

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Freehling, William W. *The South vs. the South: How Southern Anti-Confederates Shaped the Course of the Civil War.* Oxford University Press, 2001-01-01. ISBN 195130278

Together with his own inimitable style of expression and fertility of mind, William W. Freehling has combined excellent research with a keen reading of recent works to offer an original theory for the Confederate loss in the Civil War. Author of the highly acclaimed *The Road to Disunion* and Otis A. Singletary Chair in the Humanities at the University of Kentucky, Freehling is too thoughtful to insist the war was won anywhere but on the battlefield.

In **The South Vs. the South**, he ably displays just how Union numbers overwhelmed the Confederacy. Through study of the activities of two large geographical and population groups-upper South whites and middle South slaves-he demonstrates the importance of those people's actions to the ultimate Union victory. In order to strengthen his theory, Freehling also discusses the basis for the upper South's neutrality, Lincoln's tortured racist path to the Emancipation Proclamation, and the arguments both North and South used for and against arming the slaves.

The first section of this splendid volume is devoted to what Freehling calls "white on white." For him, the neutrality of the border slave states made the Confederate war effort vulnerable to internal dissent. The loss of nearly half of the slave states' whites to neutrality and then support for the Union army's invasion diminished the geography and population that the Confederacy could tap for its defense. Unionism in slave border states on the eve of secession, Freehling claims, resulted from a steadily declining upper South slave population, which thereby freed the white people to move toward the mainstream of free labor life. The upper South, in turn, contributed to divisions within the

middle South, especially in eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina. Together, the loss of the white troops that potentially could have been raised in such areas greatly lessened the Confederacy's ability to defend itself.

But, the central focus of this volume-the section on slave laborers, or "black versus white"-is Freehling's major contribution to what doomed the Confederacy. Building on the research of Ira Berlin and others, Freehling maintains that Union use of contraband runaways slaves as garrison keepers, home guards, military laborers, and cooks added crucial numbers to strengthen the occupying forces of the northern army. Some newly made ex-slaves, along with northern blacks, also became soldiers in the Union army and helped to penetrate ever deeper into the middle and lower South. Freehling lastly describes the importance of black soldiers to Grant's siege below Petersburg, and how Sherman used and abused black people as he thrust into the Confederacy's heart.

To this discussion of black troops and helpers, Freehling adds the theory that the Confederate ability to fight was further undermined by the labor implications of a slaveholding society fighting a modern war. A too-successful slave labor economy had not only kept a cotton-sated England neutral, but more damagingly discouraged the South from diversifying its economy to build a modern military-industrial infrastructure. In addition, the industrial jobs that brought whites to the North meant that the South always fought undermanned. And, at the last, Freehling points out that, when a dreadfully understaffed southern army might have turned to black fighters for help, the South's own racism and inconsistent views of what black people could do made that venture impossible.

Freehling has thus written a rejoinder to those who doubt the centrality of slavery to the southern cause and to its conduct of the war. Perhaps even a stronger case could have been developed had Freehling studied other southern anti-Confederates, such as the southern loyalist or Tory leaders who also helped to undermine the Confederacy while remaining ambivalent about the future of slavery. But in this fine book, Freehling has made a major contribution to Civil War studies, giving the reader an evenhanded look at the physical and mental blight of southern slave culture, which precipitated a northern war of attrition against all of the southern people. He also has made a forceful case about the moral blindness of northern racism that undermined the peace process. Alas, proof of this assertion is ever present in our land.

Jon L. Wakelyn is professor of history at Kent State University. He most recently published Southern Pamphlets on Secession (1996) and Southern Unionist Pamphlets and the Civil War (1999). He is at work on studies of the Confederate leaders who turned against the Confederacy, and on the southern loyalists.