

### A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868

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## Review

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**Rubin, Anne Sarah** *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868*. University of North Carolina Press, \$34.95, hardcover ISBN 807829285

Gathering the shards

A felled nation and the rise of Southern nationalism

The only fault of Anne Sarah Rubin's study of Confederate nationalism is the somewhat misleading title of her book. **A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868**, conjures the oft drawn upon images of southern defeat, disillusionment, loss and subjugation. In doing so, the title works against the main aim of this study, which is to highlight the endurance of southern nationalism through Confederate defeat and Reconstruction. Drawing upon the diaries, correspondence, newspapers, journals and literary texts of white southerners of all classes, Rubin moves away from the traditional political and military studies of nationalism to look at the peoples' emotional attachment to the Confederacy. She argues that while its institutional framework remained weak, a symbolic or sentimental Confederacy endured long after the political State ceased to exist. Unlike most works on Confederate nationalism, Rubin strengthens her argument by extending her analysis in to Reconstruction. The nation, Rubin notes, may have been shattered, but Confederate ideology provided white southerners a compass that slowly guided them back to their antebellum position at the top of the social and political hierarchy.

Rubin has divided her study into two parts: the war and Reconstruction. Part One explores the ways Confederates nurtured their allegiance to their new nation and then faced a variety of challenges to it (8). Rubin argues that southerners created a national culture by drawing upon the usable American past, and injecting it with fear about the end of slavery and northern domination. In the first flush of war, Confederates borrowed the iconography and ideology of the American Revolution to give credence to their new State. They praised

Confederate president Jefferson Davis as the second George Washington, identified with the courage of their forebears, and cast themselves as guardians of the Revolutionary cause. This construction of Confederate nationalism shifted the focus of the war away from one to protect slavery and refashioned it into a war to recreate the glory of the Founders' nation(15). Rubin notes that Confederates also drew upon religion to nurture their connection to the cause, linking their national identity to an understanding of themselves as God's chosen people. Military defeats and victories were inextricably tied to God's greater plan, and rituals such as days of fasting and prayer reinforced this connection.

Rubin argues that as the war wore on, the lofty revolutionary and religious ideals that had framed a white southerner's connection to the Confederacy were tested by military defeat, political turmoil, and a growing list of casualties. She challenges Drew Gilpin Faust's thesis that the great failure of Confederate nationalism was in the peoples' decision to put self before self-sacrifice by highlighting their reluctance to do so. This tension between individual choice and national good, Rubin explains, underpinned conscription, shirking, and desertion. Men shirked and deserted, she states on page 65, and women let them. With all of this, however, Confederates still wished they could do better and be better. They tried to convince themselves and each other to live up to their ideals, even as they failed to do so. Holding true to their faith in the cause, many Confederates believed they could take the oath of allegiance yet still remain loyal to the Confederate nation. While they may have appeared disloyal, Rubin stresses that the reluctance of many southerners to put self before State demonstrated the extent of their emotional attachment to a faltering nation.

The real strength of Rubin's book is her examination of southern nationalism after General Lee's surrender at Appomattox. Part Two of her book examines the ways southerners redefined their identities during Reconstruction by incorporating the tenets of Confederate ideology into their understanding of themselves as Americans. Rubin argues on page 117 that the sheer emotionalism of Confederates' response to the end of the war gives the lie to the notion that Confederates had lost their sense of national allegiance. Without a nation, however, southerners were forced to renegotiate a new identity in the face of Federal occupation and financial hardship. Rubin contends that southerners employed a strategy of accommodation: they sought to secure the benefits of American citizenship while also finding ways to honor their Confederate heritage. They advocated industrialization, lionized images of the self made man, and encouraged the use of northern capital in an effort to rebuild the South. By

temporarily accommodating northern investments, Rubin explains that southerners used their enemy's capital to get their region back on its feet--all the while planning to cast such interests aside when they were no longer needed. Similarly, Rubin argues that the willingness of many southerners to take the oath of allegiance after the war can be viewed as a concerted southern effort to regain political control, and most importantly, to secure local control over the free black population. Southerners worked to attain full political and economic rights as American citizens while maintaining an emotional and cultural connection to their Confederate past (246). This effort to preserve southern distinctiveness under the banner of the American nation ultimately led to the emergence of a New South based on old ideals.

Rubin's fresh analysis is strengthened by her decision to punctuate the chronological structure of her book with interludes, or small case studies. These topical pieces on foreign recognition, defeat at Vicksburg and Gettysburg, peace, the oath of allegiance and the imprisonment of Jefferson Davis, are all less than ten pages long, and allow Rubin the opportunity to examine pivotal issues in more depth. She is to be praised for this innovative approach, which adds vitality to the book.

The Confederacy may have been a shattered nation in 1865, but Rubin proves conclusively that southern nationalist feeling was merely negotiated to fit the postwar political and economic landscape. Her focus on the social and military issues that affected nationalist feeling during and after the war is admirable, however, a greater engagement with the ways class issues affected Confederate nationalism would have been interesting indeed. How did the northern blockade of southern seaports influence the nationalist sentiments of soldiers and citizens of different classes? What impact did the Confederate governments' failure to provide relief to the poor have on feelings of Confederate loyalty? And how did class shape the ways southerners thought about and contributed to the Confederacy? A greater examination of these issues would have allowed Rubin to push her analysis a little further to examine how nationalist feelings differed depending on a white southerner's age, class, gender and place of residence. Nevertheless, Rubin is to be congratulated for producing a thoroughly researched and well conceived book that pushes the boundaries of southern nationalist scholarship well beyond the demise of the Confederate States of America.

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