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Jonathan M. Atkins. *Parties, Politics, and the Sectional Conflict in Tennessee, 1832-1861.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997. xviii + 371 pp. $38.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87049-950-0.

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During a conference session several years ago, a member of the audience asked me to comment on East Tennessee's behavior during the Civil War. After all, the query continued, East Tennessee was in many ways like Southwest Virginia, the topic of my paper that day, yet the two regions had behaved in radically different ways after Fort Sumter. In response, I stammered something about Tennessee being a unique case, referred briefly to the state's well-known sectionalism, and looked to my fellow panelists for rescue. They did no better. What all of us were coming to realize was that traditional explanations of East Tennessee's rampant Unionism, based on the region's relative lack of slaves and intrastate divisions, had become suspect in the light of other research on the sectional crisis throughout the southern mountains. Other states contained mountain regions populated largely by non-slaveholders and were rent by sectionalism as well, yet none reacted in the manner of the Volunteer State, whose men ended up volunteering in large numbers for both armies. What else had shaped East Tennessee's response?

Jonathan M. Atkins's new monograph helps answer the question. Atkins maintains that Tennessee's behavior was in large part a function of republican ideology and party politics. In this most detailed examination of the second two-party system in antebellum Tennessee, Atkins contends that the political ideologies and experiences of Tennesseans in the thirty years prior to the war not only conditioned most to greet secession with suspicion but to welcome it after Abraham Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers. Even East Tennessee acted for the most part within the confines of party traditions and expectations. Downplaying both sectionalism and slavery, the author instead stresses republican ideology regarding the defense of liberty against the machinations of aristocrats and the demagogues of the moment. Far from cynical clap-trap, repeated appeals to liberty struck a chord with Tennesseans and set the stage for secession.

Atkins begins in 1832, as native son Andrew Jackson, enjoying nearly universal support in Tennessee, launched his attack on the Second Bank of the United States and brought upheaval in the body politic. Pro-bank advocates, afraid to confront Jackson, instead focused on vice president and heir apparent Martin Van Buren, charging that the Democratic party under the Little Magician's direction had become the corrupt tool of spoilsmen. They offered Tennessean Hugh Lawson White as a more worthy successor to Old Hickory. Democrats responded from within the same ideological universe, claiming that they really represented the people while the White forces were the corrupt tools of Henry Clay and the Money Power. White did well at home in the 1836 election, although he fared poorly nationally. Prefiguring three decades of division, Middle Tennessee remained true to the Democrats while East and West Tennessee supported White. The Panic of 1837, blamed on Van Buren, strengthened the White forces even more. Ultimately, the Whigs, as White's backers had become, secured control of state government. Thus, within seven yers, Tennessee had seen the creation of a vibrant two-party system, one that survived until the mid-1850s.

The Whigs did well in Tennessee as long as economics remained at the center of debate. Economic recovery, however, sapped the potency of "hard times" as an issue just as slavery was moving to the center of national debate. Tennessee wanted a reasoned response to the northern abolitionists; nothing hurt the Democrats more than successful Whig attempts to link them to Jackson's hated *bete noire*, John C. Calhoun. Both parties ritually attacked the other as the tool of abolitionists and maintained that they offered the best defense of the South's constitutional rights. In 1851 the Whigs reached the pinnacle of their statewide power by securing control of the state government and gerrymandering the state to assure their future. Unfortunately, just at that moment, the national Whig organization was on the verge of collapse. Most Whigs affiliated with the American party after the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and then, after that group's demise, styled themselves the Opposition. Democrats

capitalized on the Whigs' misfortune, but also toned down their southern- rights rhetoric and returned to republican appeals, notably through the elevation of Andrew Johnson. As the election of 1860 approached, most ex-Whigs supported longtime party leader and native son John Bell.

Southern secession presented Tennessee with a momentous decision. It was one voters made within the familiar context of their political world. States-Rights Democrats, led by Isham Harris, demanded immediate secession so fiercely that they alienated voters conditioned to be wary of high-handed demagogues. The activities of "King Harris" and his followers created a backlash, and ultimately a majority of voters rejected secession. Tennessee might have remained in the Union had not the Lincoln administration embarrassed Unionists with its policies. Fort Sumter and Lincoln's call for volunteers wrecked Unionism across much of the state, although it failed to damage it in the majority Whig areas of East Tennessee. There, slavery was less of an issue, so the traditional political symbols of liberty, aristocracy, and corruption held greater power.

Strongly influenced by the work of scholars Daniel W. Crofts, Michael Holt, Marc W. Kruman, Lacy K. Ford, and especially J. Mills Thornton–the book is a revised dissertation written under Thornton's direction–the author offers an interpretation that not only reflects current interest in the power of republicanism but also provides a useful vantage point from which to view Tennessee history. The book's most useful contribution is the meticulous narration of state politics Atkins provides. Generally proceeding statewide election by election, the author lays out Tennessee's political world in great detail. It is a rather traditional depiction and lacks the sort of sophisticated statistical analysis many readers have come to expect in such studies. The book disappoints in dealing with East Tennessee during the secession winter, and the audience member at my session probably would remain unsatisfied with Atkins's continued reliance on the standard explanation grounded in the relative unimportance of slavery in the mountains. Among other sources, the author would have benefited greatly from W. Todd Groce's dissertation on Confederate East Tennesseans, which clearly demonstrates that the region's secessionist leaders, Democrats to be sure, were not members of the slaveholding gentry but rather young, commercially-oriented men living along main lines of trade and communication. Numbers of slaves alone cannot fully explain that region's actions, and a well-nuanced consideration of East Tennessee remains to be told. Aside from these reservations, this is a useful, well-researched work that offers much to scholars of the period.

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