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James Alex Baggett. *The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003. xvi + 323 pp. $23.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8071-3014-8; $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-2798-8.

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The Mind of the Scalawag

In *The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction*, James Alex Baggett synthesizes a vast body of scholarship and provides a reference work that historians will consult for decades to come. Although he restates much of what historians have learned from previous monographs dealing with Unionism during the Civil War and Reconstruction, Baggett performs a Herculean task by incorporating various secondary sources with his findings from thirty years of primary research. Baggett, in particular, explores the actions of white Southerners who opposed secession, reluctantly supported the Confederacy, and endorsed Congressional Reconstruction and the Republican Party. He outlines the development of the Republican Party in Southern states where the Party existed before the war and explains the Party's postwar defeat in the South. In doing so, Baggett, who "having always felt a part of what Carl N. Degler called the Other South," rehabilitates the reputation of the scalawag (p. xi).

Scholarship has not always treated scalawags kindly. A few decades after the Civil War, Southern writers and sympathizers considered scalawags' choices as traitorous and their postwar affiliation with the Republican Party as opportunistic, worthy of Southern contempt. Early twentieth-century historians, including Columbia professor William A. Dunning's students–Walter L. Fleming and Charles W. Ramsdell, to name two examples–offered critical interpretations (to say it kindly) regarding scalawag motivations and politics. A few contemporaries, however, dissented: O. P. Temple (a scalawag and judge from East Tennessee) and John R. Lynch (a black congressman from Mississippi), for example.[1]

By the 1950s, historians started countering the Dunning School interpretation, yet the studies dealt with either a community or a state and not the entire South. Some, such as David Donald, argued that scalawags were mainly business-minded Whigs from the Black Belt who desired national reunion (p. 5). Yet Allen W. Trelease found the number of scalawags to be the highest where Donald argued they were lowest: "in prewar Democratic strongholds of hill-county farmers" (p. 5). The first book-length study of scalawags did not appear until Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins wrote *The Scalawags in Alabama Politics* (1977). Likewise, as Baggett contends in *The Scalawags*, Wiggins argues that Southern Unionists were a varied lot, difficult to pigeonhole.[2]

Before discussing further Baggett's interpretation, his methodology deserves explanation. He has divided the former Confederacy (including West Virginia) into three regions: Upper South (including Tennessee, North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia); the Southeast (including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina); and the Southwest (including Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas). Some may criticize him for doing so, for compartmentalization can simplify a complicated past. Yet Baggett does so only after years of research; he understands sub-regional differences while emphasizing the commonalities of scalawags within each region and across the South. In all, he compares and contrasts 742 scalawags and 666 Redeemer Democrats from the 1850s to the 1870s.

Baggett's wide focus and methodical analysis revives what was commendable in traditional scholarship while including elements of social history. Baggett's far-reaching scope relies at times on secondary sources, and his use of social history methodology more than likely led him to conclude that scalawags acted collectively instead of as individuals. In his words, Baggett, however, writes "a collective biography" that turned out to be "an investigation of the elite" (pp. 7-8).

Baggett's study is organized into ten chapters, starting with the antebellum origins of scalawags and Redeemers and ending when the latter reclaimed the South for the white majority. According to Baggett's career-

long research, scalawags were less affluent and educated than Redeemers, and the social and geographic factors of the Upper South, Southeast, and Southwest influenced the political conditions that fostered identification with the Republican Party.

The first three chapters explain the ideological origins of scalawags. Before the Civil War, as Baggett explains in chapter 1, many scalawags were formerly Whigs, but that was not the sole determinant for identification with the evolving Republican Party; it was due to local circumstances. In chapter 2, readers learn, according to Baggett that few scalawags expressed concern regarding slavery and that circumstances turned many white Southerners into reluctant Confederates. As explained in chapter 3, when Union forces occupied more and more territory during the war, Unionist numbers and sympathy unsurprisingly increased as many reluctant Confederates supported a nationalistic effort to save the Union.[3]

The remaining chapters discuss the development of the Republican Party in the South and how Reconstruction policies eventually negated the many successes of the Republican Party and stymied the African American march toward freedom. Instead of ranging widely across the South, Baggett in chapter 4 focuses mostly on Tennessee and Louisiana and argues that Unionists proclaimed loyalties only when Federal forces occupied a community for some time. But more importantly, Baggett reminds readers that Reconstruction started before the war's end, and he distinguishes among the various types of scalawags in the wartime South–Northern-born citizens, ultra-unionists, poor whites, and blacks. Unionists were disillusioned almost immediately after the war's end, Baggett writes in chapter 5; they erroneously assumed that they would be recipients of patronage. The Reconstruction Acts, Baggett continues in chapter 6, gave lasting life to the Republican Party in the South, the Freedmen's Bureau, Equal Rights League, and Carpetbaggers. Much to the chagrin of many whites, Southern Unionists played an important role in forming the Republican Party. Scalawags endorsed legal equality, not racial and social equality. Shunning prewar labels and reluctant to define suffrage broadly, scalawags joined the Republican Party only after they understood that President Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction Plan had no chance, and they promoted black suffrage only to keep power. As the Republican Party moderated its views regarding amnesty of former Confederates, however, it enabled Redeemers to reclaim the South for the white man. As Baggett points out, Republican numbers remained more or less the same, but enfranchised former Confederates, who comprised a Democratic Party using a white supremacy platform to obtain and maintain power, outnumbered African American and scalawag votes.

In telling the experiences of scalawags, Baggett will overwhelm the lay reader with information and should have tied the wealth of facts together with a thematic emphasis; in other places, generalizations will prompt specialists to demand more evidence. At times, the work restates existing scholarship (especially regarding Alabama) and is not an enjoyable read. But it does provide a comprehensive history of white Southerners who supported Congressional Reconstruction and offers another window to view the episodic history of the Republican Party in the South.

The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction should be read by mid-nineteenth century United States specialists and assigned in graduate American history courses. Although Baggett struggles with juggling explanations of local variances among scalawags and generalizations concerning what united them, he provides an invaluable synthetic history for Civil War and Reconstruction historians or political historians trying to understand the actions and mind of the scalawag. Moreover, he has reminded the profession (and rightfully so) to contextualize individuals in time and place and has given a human element to the stories of Southern Unionists and Republicans during the middle period–they were not demons or demi-gods.

Notes

[1]. Walter L. Fleming, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1905); Charles W. Ramsdell, *Reconstruction in Texas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1910); O. P. Temple, *East Tennessee and the Civil War* (Johnson City, TN: Overmountain Press, 1995, c. 1899); John R. Lynch, *The Facts of Reconstruction* (New York: Arno Press, 1968, c. 1913).

[2]. David Donald, "The Scalawag in Mississippi Reconstruction," *Journal of Southern History* 10 (November 1944): 447-60, quotation on ; Allen W. Trelease, "Who Were the Scalawags?" *Journal of Southern History* (November 1963): 445-68, quotation on ; Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins, *The Scalawags in Alabama Politics, 1865-1881* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1977).

[3]. Baggett uses the term "reluctant Confederates" liberally, it seems, to identify anyone who had doubts concerning war or identified with the Republican Party during Reconstruction. Only the most rabid secessionist and the unreconstructed seem to have been truly Confederate.

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