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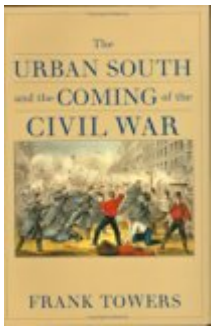
Frank Towers. *The Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2004. xi + 285 pp. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8139-2297-3.



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In *The Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War*, Frank Towers examines the complex interaction between southern ideology, sectional issues and partisan municipal politics in the years just before and after secession. Using the three largest cities in the South, he draws a rich and complex picture of the roles played by a growing urban population, skilled workers and municipal politics in separating these urban areas from the rest of the South. As secession loomed, southerners viewed Baltimore, St. Louis, and New Orleans with suspicion and also used the raucous political scenes in these cities as examples of the dangers of free labor, partisan politics, and mob rule.

In "The Specter of Mob Rule: Secessionists and the Southern Metropolis," Towers opens with an analysis of the southern defense of slavery that included condemnation of urban economic life and majority rule that resulted in class-based politics. Many southern political observers feared this development because working-class whites might become able to seize political power from slave-owning elites. They often painted a picture that pitted poor, non-slaveholding whites against those whose wealth and success rested on slavery and deference. In reality, most southern cities remained closely tied to plantation agriculture and rural interests. Southern fears surrounding urbanization and the evils that attended it focused on St. Louis, Baltimore, and New Orleans but these cities did not exist outside the pattern of urbanization in the South. Instead, they illustrated the future of growing southern cities and thus caused more anxiety as their political and social patterns ever more resembled northern cities. These new patterns did not eliminate secessionist sentiment in these cities but it did mean that partisan party politics played a crucial role in determining how urban populations faced the crises leading to the Civil War.

The next chapter, "From Urban Paternalism to Free Labor: The Reconfiguration of the Social Order, 1800-1860," traces the evolution of southern municipal society. Working and employment patterns shifted dramatically as urban populations grew. Urban elites had long relied on paternalistic relationships to control urban workers. Towers defines this paternalism as a system

where "a powerful patron ... dispensed favors to a subordinate client who reciprocated with loyal service" (p. 37). This pattern survived in smaller cities but began to break down in the larger cities where economic development led to a growth in immigration and free labor. There, workers sought greater control over their labor and political support for their demands. Towers clearly illustrates that the interplay of forces varied widely from city to city. Slaves, free black workers and free white workers struggled with changing conditions that set the cities apart from the rest of the South but also from each other. These unique political climates reflected the rapidly evolving social relations in each city. Increasingly assertive behavior by the working class began to erode traditional political and social alliances. Social alliances altered more than the political ones until external forces intervened and new party formations appeared.

By 1846, politics in the South had begun to change very rapidly. This period witnessed the introduction of the American Party into southern politics. In "Reform and Slavery: The Realignment of Jacksonian Parties, 1846-1855," Towers states that this new party did not mean immediate, radical change but rather new ways for traditional political power to try and reform southern politics. It did not replace older forms of competition immediately, but instead worked within traditional frameworks to gain supporters. The annexation of Texas in 1845 and the subsequent war with Mexico brought to the fore tensions over the expansion of slavery that seriously weakened the Whig Party's ability to satisfy the northern and southern wings of the party. Voters began to search for alternatives while Whigs clung to power and looked for ways to heal the rifts in the party. In the three largest southern cities, ethnic relations and labor concerns, as well as sectional anxieties, actually fractured support for both established parties and cleared the way for the upstart Know Nothings. In particular, the weakness of the Whigs meant the loss of patronage, which, along with the rural Democratic opposition to labor issues, increased the appeal of the American Party. Nativism and anti-Catholicism in the party fit well with southern ideology and reflected the concerns of workers over the effect of immigration on wages. Thus, both elites fleeing the ruin of the Whigs and working-class urban voters could find homes in the new party. Know Nothing support for slavery also resonated with both groups as did its pro-Union stance. But by 1856, southern urban workers became disenchanted with the continuing elite control of politics that sought their support but granted them little actual power in return.

"Southern Free-Labor Politics: Workers and the Urban Opposition, 1856-1859" addresses the growing partisan conflict and attendant power of the working-class voters in the South's biggest cities. Outside these cities, Democratic dominance and proslavery rhetoric grew stronger but in the urban settings other issues and groups took precedence. Workingmen gained new power in municipal politics and forced city officials to attend to their demands. Their opposition to the Democratic Party also caused problems outside these cities. The workers began to practice a style of political behavior that violated southern conventions of honor and deference. Democrats could thus brand the party as a threat to law and order. Mob rule seemed to threatened southern society as election riots intensified in these three cities. Riots also enabled Democrats to label working-class political behavior as a threat to southern unity. In addition, working women's participation in political gang activities further confirmed the threat to southern norms of proper behavior. However, American Party political groups seldom showed support for ending slavery or improving the lives of free blacks and often viewed African Americans and immigrants both as threats to better wages and working conditions and as weapons used by greedy elites against the working man. Despite this, Know Nothings gained substantial strength in all three cities.

"A Revolution against Party Politics: Reform and Secession in Baltimore" examines the growing secession crisis after 1859. American Party adherents had to carefully differentiate their party from secessionist Democrats while avoiding charges of abolitionism and betrayal of southern values. Democrats used such charges to weaken support for Know Nothings, but these tactics also served to increase partisan urban battles. In Baltimore, the political divisions added to the debate between Unionists and Secessionists. However, while these groups were seldom clearly divided along party lines, none showed support for the Republican Party or Lincoln's election. As secession loomed, the city struggled to respond. Threats of federal occupation drove most Baltimore politicians to unite in opposition but not to the point of unanimously supporting secession. However, urban politics seldom followed smooth, predictable paths. Some Baltimore workers resented federal action and often viewed secession as preferable to military occupation. Despite that, Democrats continued to characterize the battle against Know Nothing gangs as defense of the South and rejection of northern influences. Many of the Know Nothing political gang members did finally support unionism and enlist in the federal army. Federal occupation also led to repression of secessionists and consolidation of Know Nothing power in municipal politics.

Towers's last chapter, "Redefining Southernness: Secession and the Civil War in Slave State Cities," examines the equally complex situation in New Orleans and St. Louis. In both cities, Towers finds that secession became part of the divisive party politics already present. This resulted in a brand of social upheaval not present in most of the South. Political parties organized hostility into channels that avoided the personal feuds and grudges that characterized other areas, and added to the separation of these cities from the experience of many other southerners. It continued to set their political frameworks apart from the rest of the South throughout the war. The American Party flourished and pro-Union activities continued in all three cities much longer. Even after the war, the disjunction between urban politics and rural interests persisted. Municipal political coalitions often contained immigrants and African Americans for at least a brief period. As time went on, other southern cities grew to resemble these three cities, where politics continued to speak for more people and represent more viewpoints than in rest of the South.

The Urban South presents a very complex picture of municipal politics and the relationship to sectional issues in the antebellum South. In very rich detail, Tower traces the complicated evolution of partisan politics, working-class demands, and electoral conditions that sets the three cities apart and raised southern anxieties about these cities as spearheads of northern social, economic, and political relationships. In fact, the intricate detail and involved interactions make generalizations very difficult. Towers's impressive research and analysis gives both the broad context and personal illustrations that reveal and confirm these unique urban contexts. He places these frequently neglected or ignored municipal environments back in the South and explains their role in antebellum and secessionist sentiment. His analysis also adumbrates and helps explain political developments in later years. Southern suspicion of working-class political activities continued and business and social elites constantly sought ways to end it. For example, as early as 1879, the city of New Orleans experimented with an early commission form of government. When the businessmen in the city of Galveston put a commission in place in 1901, this government gave political power to the business interests but also gave other cities a way to limit working-class participation. Progressive literature constantly lauded the commission form of city government as the end of political partisanship, corruption, and political machines. Southern cities that lacked strong political machines used all the rhetoric of antebellum Democrats and their fears of partisan politics in

ways that often seems mystifying until this account. The continuity of southern suspicion towards urbanization and working-class activism from the antebellum era through the Populist revolt to the Progressive reforms becomes much clearer when this book is added to southern historiography.