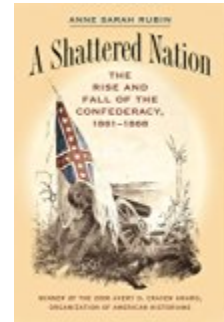


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Anne Sarah Rubin. *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. 336 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2928-8.

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## Confederates to the Bloody End: The Origins and Evolution of a Distinct Southern Identity

Anne Sarah Rubin provides readers with a well-researched and insightful account of Confederate nationalism that emerged and developed during the course of the Civil War and of the role that this newly formed nationalistic spirit played in shaping a distinctive southern identity during the years of Reconstruction. In an attempt to explain exactly what it meant to be a Confederate in the 1860s, Rubin examines the ideological origins of the Confederacy through the experiences and ideas of the men, women, and children who considered themselves loyal supporters of the Confederate States of America. Suggesting that this population of white Southerners dominated the political, social and ideological discourse of their nation during the 1860s, the author excludes Unionists and African Americans from her analysis of Confederate nationalism and identity. Drawing on the private and public correspondence of white Southerners, Rubin effectively moves beyond the traditional political and military perspective of nationalism and focuses upon the southern people's emotional and philosophical attachment to the Confederacy. By doing so, she reveals how white Southerners doggedly maintained their nationalistic spirit in the early years of Reconstruction (and well beyond) even though the weight of the U.S. military had shattered the Confederate nation in mid-1865. Rubin contends that the southern white's adherence to Confederate nationalism provided them with an ideological framework that eventually allowed the Redeemers to regain control of southern society and politics during Reconstruction. In essence, Confederate nationalism contributed to the ultimate failure of Federal reconstruction policies.

The first four chapters of Rubin's book are devoted to examining the complex and multifaceted ways that the southern people defined nationalism between 1861 and 1865. Using personal diaries, newspaper and journal articles, literary works, sermons, and a variety of other printed materials, the author illustrates how Southerners used diverse ideals to foster a patriotic fervor for their newly formed country. Rubin effectively argues that Confederates used the memory of the American Revolution to give meaning and credibility to their self-proclaimed war against northern aggression. Southerners repeatedly compared their leaders to Revolutionary War heroes and identified themselves as guardians of Revolutionary principles. By defining the war as an attempt "to recreate the glory of the Founders' nation," Confederates successfully avoided focusing on the real cause of the conflict—slavery (p. 15). Thus, white Southerners created a nationalistic spirit that appealed to both the slaveholder and non-slaveholder alike. The author also reveals that Confederates used Christian morality to bolster their sense of nationalism. Believing that they were God's chosen people, Southerners believed that the results of military engagements had divine meanings: battlefield victories were signs that God favored their cause, while military defeats were indications of God's wrath against the southern people's lack of faith and piety.

As the war progressed, military defeats and political turmoil challenged the noble ideals that Confederates used to forge their national identity. As the future of the Confederacy grew dim, many Southerners became

unwilling to put national interest before their own self-interest, a fact that undermined conscription, prompted men and women to question South's ability to win the war, and prompted soldiers on the frontlines to abandon their posts. However, Rubin contends that even though Confederate men and women "could not always live up to the patriotic demands of sacrifice and devotion to the cause," they "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" (pp. 64-65). One of the most demoralizing situations confronting Confederate nationals was taking the oath of allegiance to the United States. Citizens living in areas occupied by Union troops and Confederate prisoners of war had little choice but to comply with the wishes of their conquerors. According to Rubin, Confederates took the oath because of pragmatic reasons and not as a result of waning nationalism. Another example of southern pragmatism was witnessed in the debate over enlisting slaves in the southern army. Even though it would have undoubtedly led to the end of slavery as it existed in the antebellum period, many devout nationalists were willing to arm the slaves during the final days of the war, illustrating their desire to win the war at all costs and their deep commitment to southern nationalism.

The last three chapters of Rubin's study examine how Southerners forged a new identity from the ashes of Confederate nationalism during the early years of Reconstruction. Following the war, the author reveals that the "shock of defeat wore into a sense of angry resignation" as the southern people concerned themselves with the "rebuilding of their lives." Most white Southerners "realized that economic and social control, especially of the freedmen, could best be found by rejoining the Union," but they "self-consciously held onto aspects

of their Confederate past, in the process transforming Southern identity" (p. 141). The region's newly formed identity was founded on the old southern principles of white supremacy and the belief that white Southerners were the "true victims of Reconstruction" (pp. 141-143). As a result, southern whites engaged in an ongoing political war with the Federal government for control of local and state politics, a crusade that Southerners successfully waged for the next one hundred years.

Rubin offers readers a compelling account of Confederate nationalism, but her overall conception of southern devotion to the Confederacy is problematic. By concentrating the study on the writings of white Southerners who supported the Confederacy, the author provides a one-dimensional perspective of southern nationalism. Even though this book is well researched, it still only reflects the views of a minority of white Southerners between the years of 1861 and 1868. Readers will undoubtedly question the extent of Confederate nationalism among the diverse populace of the South. While Rubin reveals that southern identity was a "kaleidoscope of gray," various shapes of that kaleidoscope still demand further examination. Also problematic is the idea that southern nationalism materialized quickly during the early days of the Civil War. The author's thesis is too dismissive of southern ideology that existed in the decades prior to the outbreak of the war. A closer examination of how pre-war sectionalism contributed to southern nationalism is still needed. Nevertheless, these criticisms do not outweigh the overall merit of this study. Rubin has provided scholars with a laudable account of Confederate nationalism. More importantly, the author reveals that the Civil War did not end in 1865, but instead took new form. Serious students of southern history will want to add this book to their shelf.

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