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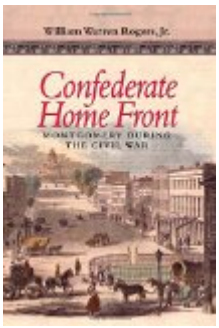
William Warren Rogers, Jr. *Confederate Home Front: Montgomery During the Civil War.* Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1999. xiv + 208 pp. $29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8173-0962-6.



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The First Confederate Capital Faces the Civil War

The initial question a reader asks about a book on Montgomery, Alabama, during the Civil War is whether the author determines if it was wise for the Confederate government to abandon this community of 9,000 inhabitants and move to Richmond, Virginia, a city nearly four times larger but located far closer to the potential war front. Not only does William Warren Rogers, Jr. directly answer this question, but he also provides an excellent portrait of the urban Confederate home front.

The book generally is arranged chronologically with Rogers first describing the community on the eve of the war and then tracing its brief history as the Confederate capital. Once the capital is relocated to Richmond, Rogers follows a largely topical format covering such issues as how Montgomery functioned during the war as a military post, the problems of labor, and the administration of the city. It concludes with the formal surrender of the city on April 12, 1865.

Rogers describes the decision to remove the Southern capital as one in which Montgomerians "had no bearing" (44). He concedes, however, that the Confederate "Congress was generally guided by sincere and legitimate differences rather than by self-serving considerations" in reaching its decision (44). In "combination" Montgomery's "high prices, the mosquitoes, the heat, or constraints of space" all shaped the decision to relocate (45). Although Rogers never directly evaluates the wisdom of the decision in terms of the wider war effort, he makes it clear that once the capital was removed Montgomery did not prove to be the safer location which proponents of keeping the capital in Alabama had argued. Indeed, in the spring of 1862, like Richmond, northern Alabama faced invasion. The difference, however, was that Montgomerians were far less militarily prepared: "Montgomery did not have a single artillery piece in place, had few men able to offer resistance, and had failed to anticipate the enemy's arrival apart from discussing the problems presented by some cotton bales" (118). Preparations did not improve much in 1863 and by the summer of 1864, as General William Sherman's forces were encircling Atlanta, a Union

offensive was mounted into eastern Alabama under the command of General Lovell Rousseau. By July 15th, "anxiety reached a new level" as "the specter of marauding Yankee cavalrymen galloping down city streets--now began to seem inevitable" in Montgomery (122). It was only "in the wake of the threat posed by Rousseau," according to Rogers, that Montgomery began to construct fortifications, largely with the aid of slave labor (124).

While Montgomery would hold off the external threat of Union forces until the end of the war, Rogers ably uses the Southern Claim Commission records to prove that the community also faced a far less visible internal threat. Montgomery Unionists, who "transcended class lines" and were largely composed of men of "northern backgrounds," Rogers finds, "defied the local consensus but not openly" (105-106). Indeed, the Unionist Daniel Starr, a Connecticut native who had lived in Montgomery throughout the 1850s, paid the ultimate price when, as the result of being in an inebriated condition, he revealed his true allegiance. After holding him in jail for a brief period, "unknown parties seized and lynched" Starr (112). Rogers' disclosure of the "unspoken and carefully guarded covenant" of Montgomery Unionists alone makes this book worth reading (115).

Far too often reviewers criticize books essentially because they feel that the author did not write the book they would have written. Hence, it should be stated that this clearly is not the book this reviewer would have written. There are too many points where Rogers could have provided more specific information, particularly of a quantitative nature. For example, when discussing labor in wartime Montgomery, he simply notes, "Most whites did not own slaves" (66). Well, this fact was not unique to Montgomery; surely the slave and free schedules of the 1860 manuscript census reveal a fuller picture of the city's system of slaveholding as well as other socio-economic measurements. However, Rogers' goal is not to provide statistical portraits. Instead, his compelling narrative of how white and black Montgomerians faced the conflict transcends a narrow scholarly audience and reaches out to many more general Civil War readers. This achievement deserves commendation.

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