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The cover of Adrian Brettle's *Colossal Ambitions* shows a 1940 photograph of Windsor Ruins in Port Gibson, Mississippi. Built between 1859 and 1861 by enslaved individuals for planter Smith Coffee Daniell II, Windsor was one of the largest homes in the state. The architect designed the Greek Revival mansion with Gothic and Italianate elements, surrounded by a colonnade of twenty-nine Corinthian columns.

From the beginning, Windsor saw chaos and misfortune. Within weeks of moving in, Daniell died. During the Civil War, the Union army occupied the home, and only its fluted pillars and iron capitals remain from an 1890 fire. In the 1970s, Daniell's descendants donated the forty-five-foot columns to the state of Mississippi. Every year, people make the drive to see Windsor, which now occupies only two acres of a plantation that once comprised thousands. Plagued by the evils of the institution of slavery, the opulence of the mansion was diminished by war and ultimately destroyed—just like the ambitions of those who built it.

Throughout *Colossal Ambitions*, Brettle explains that prior to the loss of the US Civil War, “Confederate policymakers and spokesmen engaged in a surprising degree of sustained and often strikingly progressive planning to secure their nation’s emergence as a world power” (p. 1). Confederate planners invested in technology and infrastructure, and they advocated for free trade to bolster an international market that would benefit the institution of slavery. They immediately aimed to establish relations with the United States and possessed ideologies of “grandiose ambition and optimism” shaped by “history, culture, and faith” (pp. 7–8). As a political and intellectual history, the study draws from such sources as letters, speeches, and other writings by individuals like Confederate president Jefferson Davis and Mississippi “philosopher-statesman” L. Q. C. Lamar, as well as newspapers and periodicals.

According to Brettle, scholars have documented the South's interest in expansion without considering the extent of Confederates' confidence in international relations. While their ideas lacked a uniform trajectory of advancement, Confederates had ambitions to control large swaths of the American continent. Though Brettle also cites his contemporaries, like southern historian Stephen Berry, the study acts as a prequel to classic works of nineteenth-century history, like Gaines Foster's *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913* (1987) and later chapters of C. Vann Woodward's *The Burden of Southern History* (1960). In addition, Brettle’s work challenges W. J. Cash's stereo-
typical idea of the South as isolated and ignorant. While Confederate planners were often amoral or more than that, they engaged in deliberate and modern strategizing in nation building.

Through tracing Confederate planning during the war years from 1861 to 1865, a picture emerges of political ambitions based in a cruel economic system that fueled excess and greed. Brettle begins with the question of how a Southern nation would achieve an international presence. Secessionists looked to the future between Abraham Lincoln's election and the beginning of the war in April 1861, as they already sought to establish trade relations with Great Britain and the US. Lamar explained how not only preserving but also promoting and expanding slavery was vital to its existence, and Confederates hoped to claim territories in Cuba, the western US, and Mexico.

Confederate planners’ perspectives changed considerably between the outbreak of the war and early 1862. Powerful individuals argued for defense against federal incursion and referenced the American and French Revolutions. While prior wars had harmed slavery, some Southerners believed this one would support it. Brettle argues that planners believed “geography, slavery, and expansion together would enable the Confederacy to assume [a] commercially demanding position” (p. 58). Many thought the nation could even survive without British support, and Confederates renounced expansion into the US but planned for it when the war ended. They also held off on making claims in Mexico for the time being. In Cuba, Confederates supported Spain and the growth of slavery worldwide.

Throughout 1862, the nation builders realized that domestic self-reliance was a prerequisite of empire. Though war changed the nature of their ambitions, Confederates kept up an interest in expansion to stave off American influence. Some made efforts to industrialize cotton production, and diplomats continued to communicate with countries like Britain and Russia. Former Mississippi governor Henry S. Foote saw the benefit of incorporating Native Americans into the new nation. While Confederates never viewed Native Americans as equals, they hoped to include them in their empire. Davis surprisingly approved their representation in government. In the face of significant losses in war and complicated issues abroad, Confederates called for growth in sea power and industry. Planners were encouraged by winning at Fredericksburg but remained conscious of Northern advantages.

By 1863, powerful Southerners had accepted that the Union was fighting to end slavery. Despite failures at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, Confederates aimed to create a “racially hierarchical, growing, and socially stable republic” (p. 113). Some looked to how the new nation would achieve their ends in the event of peace with the US. Planners discussed questions of policy, specifically how they would rebuild, establish a navy and international trade, and secure relations with the US while promoting Southern interests. Confederates continued to weigh their interests to the south and west, while hoping to promote slavery in Brazil. Throughout the year, they became more focused on commercial interests and concerns about virtue.

The study concludes with the period from January 1864 through May 1865. Confederates began claiming to represent the stability of early America. Many tempered their ideological ferocity and considered working with the US yet maintained a steadfast dedication to slavery. Planners knew the nation had to be self-reliant in industry and commerce. As losses accrued, some tried to attract Northern support through Davis's argument that the US would benefit from giving up the South. They sought more support from Native Americans and Austrian archduke Maximilian in Mexico. In contrast to their own involvement, Confederates portrayed the US “promotion of republicanism abroad as a cynical disguise covering the reality of Union imperialism” (p. 174). Lamar in
particular believed in the Hegelian concept of “social progress” (p. 177). Many hoped Lincoln would lose reelection and the Confederacy could resist Union encroachment, but they lost confidence by the end of 1864.

The Southern war effort suffered after both Lincoln’s election and William Tecumseh Sherman’s March to the Sea, and planners grew less ambitious. They pushed the unfounded argument that all Black Southerners wanted to stay in the region and debated whether to admit enslaved individuals into the army. By spring 1865, Confederates ceased empire building and turned to what would become the Lost Cause. They made limited reforms and gave up the idea of an empire that was independent from the US, while advocating for republicanism and slavery.

In April 1865, Confederates contemplated how to proceed after the fall of Richmond and expected “liberal terms of reunion.” In the face of political instability and economic strife, some sprang to action. One individual called for “planning for the future,” preempting the strategy of home rule that would end in violence and disfranchisement for Black Southerners (p. 224).

As a whole, Colossal Ambitions shows how Confederates firmly held elaborate, global aspirations driven by a pursuit of wealth and power based in slavery. Eventually, the South was devastated in part by its commitment to the brutal system. Planners’ focus shifted from overblown imperial objectives to the defense of what they saw as their cultural identity and performance in war, which held damaging consequences for formerly enslaved individuals. While the book does not include this result of Confederate planning, the subject of the study was the planning itself, and another could pick up where it left off in 1865.

In 1945, New York-born documentary photographer Eliot Elisofon traveled to Mississippi. Formerly a photographer for the Federal Writers Project, Elisofon took photographs of everyday people and scenes that he hoped would honor the subjects. One of Elisofon’s photos shows a Black woman and three children in front of the burned columns of Windsor Mansion. They all look directly into the camera, with the woman slightly smiling. As writer Henry Miller wrote about places like Windsor in Air-Conditioned Nightmare, “It is all over now. A new South is being born. The old South was ploughed under. But the ashes are still warm.”[1]

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