

George C. Rable. *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994. Pp. x, 416. Cloth, \$34.95. ISBN 0-8078-2144-6.

Anyone acquainted with the Southern side of the civil war knows that there is no shortage of literature pertaining to the peculiar political environment which existed below the Mason-Dixon Line before and after Fort Sumter. And in one fashion or another a fair amount of the ground covered by this volume has been previously surveyed. Nevertheless, the current offering is unique in that it is "an analytical narrative that explores the interactions among political culture, events and leadership." More precisely, it examines and assesses the framework and interplay of "state and national politics" by focusing on "political culture in its own right rather than . . . as a possible factor in Confederate defeat."

The central theme of *The Confederate Republic* concerns the South's struggle to effect a reactionary revolution against traditional political practices and behavior in an antiparty atmosphere while simultaneously engaging in a full blown war for independence. Remarkably, the author maintains, Southerners were able to go some distance toward achieving the former objective, although losing the all important latter goal.

This probe of Rebel politics reveals that two major forces were at work between 1860 and 1865—those of national unity and those of states' rights (libertarianism). And there are other shades of ideology identified as well. What all these variations of views had in common was that they argued over what the role and powers of government ought to be in a true republican setting, especially as such authority related to the states and to individuals.

It has long been known, of course, that personal and philosophical diversity of opinion did much to hamper the Southern cause, socially, economically, and militarily. What strikes the reader so vividly, however, is how deep, inflexible, strident, and even savage many of those opposing convictions were. On the other hand, there were individuals who were naive, impractical, unrealistic, and given to romantic folly. Yet, interestingly, a conclusion is reached which runs against the tide of conventional historical judgment—namely, that such "controversies . . . did not destroy the southern nation" but rather proved to be "a source of strength."

Although an overall commendable accomplishment, Professor Rable's work harbors elements of unevenness. For example, there is a noticeable imbalance when it comes to investigating the entire Confederacy. There were, after all, eleven states (thirteen, if you count Missouri and Kentucky) in that compact. Yet this text is largely dominated by issues, debates and personalities in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. And the same is true when it comes to sampling the impact and influence that state and national leaders had on ordinary Southerners. An expanded use of newspapers, diaries, and correspondence collections might have enhanced the flavor and fabric of this discussion by integrating or contrasting the thoughts of small slave owners, yeoman farmers, women, and common soldiers with those who occupied more lofty stations. Except for a handful of references to educators and clergymen, such voices are largely silent.

Stylistically, the text generally flows in fresh and lively fashion, although there are occasions when subject redundancy, overworked vocabulary, and the use of modern buzzwords or jargon upset the rhythm of the format.

On a practical plane, this book should have application to a cross-section of the social sciences, especially those which seek to fathom the long standing Southern penchant for social and political psychosis. Certainly, *The Confederate Republic* must be seen as an essential prelude to understanding the evolution of Dixie politics from the Reconstruction era to modern times. For as Rable has so correctly recognized, the "competing and sometimes contradictory political values" which characterized "the Confederate experience remained important in Southern politics long after the Confederate republic had disappeared."

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