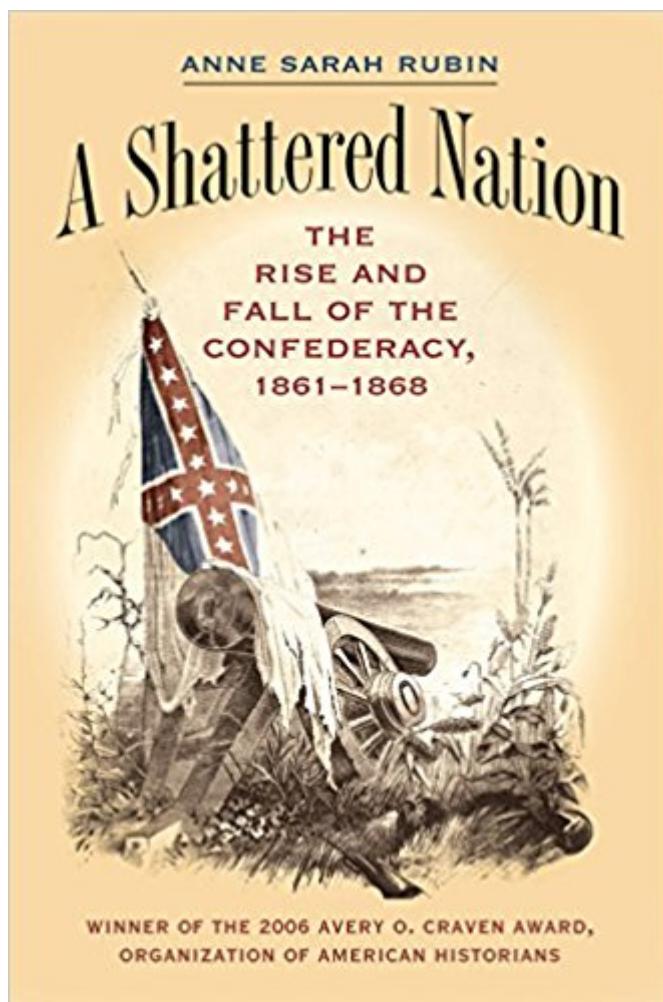


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A Shattered Nation: The Rise And Fall Of The Confederacy, 1861-1868 (Civil War America)



Synopsis

Historians often assert that Confederate nationalism had its origins in pre-Civil War sectional conflict with the North, reached its apex at the start of the war, and then dropped off quickly after the end of hostilities. Anne Sarah Rubin argues instead that white Southerners did not actually begin to formulate a national identity until it became evident that the Confederacy was destined to fight a lengthy war against the Union. She also demonstrates that an attachment to a symbolic or sentimental Confederacy existed independent of the political Confederacy and was therefore able to persist well after the collapse of the Confederate state. White Southerners redefined symbols and figures of the failed state as emotional touchstones and political rallying points in the struggle to retain local (and racial) control, even as former Confederates took the loyalty oath and applied for pardons in droves. Exploring the creation, maintenance, and transformation of Confederate identity during the tumultuous years of the Civil War and Reconstruction, Rubin sheds new light on the ways in which Confederates felt connected to their national creation and provides a provocative example of what happens when a nation disintegrates and leaves its people behind to forge a new identity.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book explores not the political wrangling nor the military action of the war, but the perceived identity of the South as a real "nation," not just a group of states trying to be free from the Union. The analysis is drawn largely from letters and diaries, as well as regional newspapers or literary

magazines. As a northerner, I was not unfamiliar with the issues, but I came to sense more deeply the strong sense of alienation the South felt during this period and their strong sense of rightness and superiority--religiously, intellectually, culturally, and otherwise--over against the shallow, boorish, materialistic, greedy, lustful Yankees. A strength, or weakness (depending on one's presuppositions) is the focus on viewing the issues through the eyes of women--or sometimes as men writing pseudonymously as women to make their views more palatable to Yankee eyes. The inner conflicts of a defeated people trying to make sense of the new reality post-war are illustrated through their writings. Debates over the rightness of choosing northern publishers or manufacturers for the products of southern culture was a new issue to me. The cut-off date of 1868 seems somewhat arbitrary, as many of the issues discussed remained front and center through the longer Reconstruction era.

Rubin did a fantastic job of discussing the afterward of the war, especially in South Carolina, and what daily attitudes were, especially among the women. I don't think she discussed the men too much, so I couldn't give her four or five stars since she skipped half of the population! But, there's much that Rubin offers in understanding the immediate Reconstruction mindset, and I felt like most books like hers only focus on the pre-war and/or war years, and not the post-war years. So this was a bit refreshing, but without a wide enough perspective.

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