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# Confederate Reckoning



## Synopsis

Stephanie McCurry tells a very different tale of the Confederate experience. When the grandiosity of Southerners' national ambitions met the harsh realities of wartime crises, unintended consequences ensued. Although Southern statesmen and generals had built the most powerful slave regime in the Western world, they had excluded the majority of their own people—white women and slaves—and thereby sowed the seeds of their demise.

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## Customer Reviews

The Confederacy was formed as a slaveholding, white man's republic. The irony, McCurry argues, is that the people who were not supposed to play an active role in this new nation, namely women and slaves, ended up playing decisive roles in the Civil War South. Women, especially soldiers' wives, secured a place as active and legitimate participants in the political and social worlds of the South. Slaves not only did not actively support the Confederacy, but undermined it by running away, joining the Union war effort, and/or simply not working on the farms and plantations they lived on anymore. In this way, they became the Jacobins of the South. The thrust of this book is that the actions of these women and slaves expanded the realm of politics to those who did not have a vote,

but could still affect the policies and outcome of the war. McCurry shows, through both a synthesis of previous secondary work as well as primary sources, that the war brought women into close contact with their state and federal governments. Further, she argues, this changed the shape of American politics forever. Women, both North and South, were not active participants the way that they became during the Civil War. McCurry feels that southern women, though, were more assertive in demanding assistance from the Confederate and state governments. The women came to believe that the governments owed it to them to offer support while their husbands were off fighting.

McCurry shows that women were often successful in this, through rioting more than writing. This is a well-written, readable account that does have some good information. That being said, the main issue with the book is less the evidence or conclusions McCurry has reached and more the way it is presented.

This is one of the most original books on the Amer. Civil War that I've ever read and I've read a good many of them. McCurry asks not only why did the Confederacy lose the war, but maybe more importantly: why did they decide to risk war by leaving the Union, in the first place. Then she goes on to answer the question as to the loss of the war by focusing on two groups that have not been focused upon, to my knowledge, by any other historian: namely, average-to-poor white women (so-called "soldiers' wives") and African-American slaves, both men and women. McCurry points out that these two groups were not even considered when the "leaders" of the Confederacy started the "Revolution." However, along with the issues usually considered by other historians -- e.g., comparative population sizes, military strategy, tactics and weapons as well as battles -- those who were left out of the equation came to play a very decisive role in the prosecution and outcome of the war. The activities of the soldiers' wives and the slaves, made it impossible to prosecute the war efficiently; i.e., on less than two-fronts, all the time! In addition to the above I found this book most valuable because it answered two questions for me; one, I didn't even know I had and another that has always puzzled me. I'd always assumed, unconsciously, that the states of the Confederacy decided to leave the Union through legitimate, democratic means and that the vast majority of Southerners (except those in what is now West Virginia) supported that move. In *Confederate Reckoning*, I learned that in several of the states, the Planters used the same tactics used by the Klan in the post-Civil War period to coerce the exit upon those white Southerners who didn't agree with the move.

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