

Paul Escott, After Secession: J. Davis and Failure of Confederate Nationalism (1978).

1. Preparation for the Presidency.

Compared to Lincoln, Davis had more going for him on first blush.

3. Debate Over Centralization

Davis recognized need for building a strong central government from the army to the management of the economy. Davis did not allow the ideas of limited government to thwart his goal. He built an ambitious central administration. Compared to the U.S.' bureaucracy, the Confederate govt. was considerably larger in proportion to population.

Some features mentioned: suspension of habeus corpus;
(2) introduction of conscription in 1862 (3) impressment of slave labor for war-related projects. He failed however to bring the rr system under central govt. control. He shyed away from anticipated state resistance.

Escott deals with the ensuing resistance to Davis' bureaucracy-building.

Strict constructionists over the years were habituated to resistance from any centralizing power. Having cultivated an overexaggerated regard for the states, such men thought that the only way to treat the central govt. was to oppose it. Belligerent particularism was for them the only safeguard of liberty.

[Irony here, that was realized by some of the older slavocrats, that slavery's best chance to be preserved (for a time) was to stay in the Union and try a course of adventurism in the bid for independence.]

States' rights advocates and attacks on Davis gave them an opportunity to vent their anger and frustration (over the course of the war) against Davis. Escott notes that as war weariness set in and frustrations over defeat in the field accumulated, state politicians desperate to hold onto office could use the states' rights argument against Davis to try and cement their own positions at home.

4. The Quiet Rebellion of the Common People

This is a key chpt. in the book.

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Escott deals with the emergent class friction between the slaveholders and "their war" and the non-slaveholding whites of the South.

Areas of the common people, the plain folk of the South:

Ga.--the northern part of the state was hilly and not conducive to plantation slavery.

Va. It was the western part of the state. Bedford Ct. This was where Union sentiment was strongest and ultimately led to the separation of West Virginia.

Tenn. The eastern part of the state was a hot bed of Unionist sentiment.

No. Car. The Blue Ridge Mt. gave the western part of the state a topography and economy similar to eastern Tennessee.

Ala. A state with 45% black population. But in the northern portion in the wiregrass country there was opposition to secession. Strong Unionist sentiment that was somewhat militant from the very outset of the war. Ultimately, Unionists from northern Alabama formed the First Alabama Cavalry, U.S.A. a white regiment that served with Sherman in his march through Georgia.

Escott refers to the paradoxical nature of the antebellum South. It was both an aristocracy and a democracy. He uses Frederickson's concept of a "Herrenvolk democracy." Strong strains of Jacksonian democracy coexisted with aristocratic pretensions by the ruling class. But the ruling class could not take for granted the loyalties of the plain folk without playing upon racial solidarity and equality of all white men.

✓ It was the failure of Richmond to respond to the war-originated needs of the plain folks that ignited this "quiet rebellion." A falling away of support from the plain people for the South's efforts at independence. This rebellion was spurred by a sense of exploitation and injustice. .the knowledge that the wealthy classes were not making sacrifices equal to those of the non-slaveholding poverty-stricken common people.

Impressment: this practice hit some people much harder than others. Those who lived near rivers were subject to more seizures by Confederate cavalry and foragers. Same was the case with those who were closer to the scenes of battle.

Prices paid for the goods was too low. Especially aggravated by the soaring inflated Confederate economy.

Impressment details often produced a great deal of destruction. Complaints were not uncommon that "Yankees could not do more harm than our own soldiers have done."

Class bitterness and tensions surfaced with real and imagined unequal sacrifice.

Abuses of the wealthy and well-connected who avoided the draft; were assigned "bomb-proof" jobs in behind the lines assignments or with the over-grown Confederate bureaucracy and administration services., These exemptions favored the powerful or the friends and family of the slaveocrats.

For a time the Confederacy allowed for paid substitutes. This practice drew a lot of fire. Most of the substitutes ended up by deserting. Those advantaged were the wealthy again. Protest brought about an end to this practice but not until 1864. Then came the exemption of white men for every 20 slaves. This was the so-called "20 nigger law." Issues such as this opened up a breach between slaveholders and small non-slaveholding farmers.

As shortages appeared and price of food soared, people all over the South condemned speculation and extortion. Despite the complaints and reactions Richmond never tried very hard to deal with this abuse. These all added to the quiet rebellion. It took form not in overt crowd actions generally but in a quiet retreat from the war. One of the most damaging ways was in desertion. Dispairing letters from home was in many cases all it took. This accelerated after disastrous defeats like those at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in July 1863. By the end of 1863, Secretary Seddon estimated that one-third of the army was AWOL.

The historian of Con. desertion, Ella Lonn (Desertion During the Civil War), concluded that desertions played an important factor in the ultimate failure of the Confederacy. Most of these deserters from from the poorer classes of society. This fact reflected that many soldiers were voting against the govt. in Richmond for failing to meet their needs and build the kind of morale necessary to promote the spirit of Confederate nationalism.

By 1863 this decline in morale was Davis' foremost domestic problem. The key was governmental action--bold, decisive, in the form of concrete steps to relieve the needs of the suffering of the people. Responsible authorities had to prove that they could make a difference in the conditions of life. This responsibility rested mostly w/ Davis and the executives of the state, and their future responses to the challenge had a crucial influence on the future of Con. nationalism.

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5. Leadership and Loyalty

Two of the major failures on Davis' part was to go along w/ Seddon's recommendation to repeal the "20 nigger law"; the failure to support legislation that would exempt small farmers w/ dependent families from service; and failure to take effective action against speculation. These were grave mistakes. Richmond increasingly became part of the problem and not the solution in the eyes of poorer plain folks of the Con.

Remainder of chp. deals with the states moving in with help and relief when it could. The most pronounced example was Gov. Joe Brown of Ga.

6. In Search of An Ideology

Describes the shift in wartime ideology from uplifting nationalism to concocting a fear psychology after the set backs of 1863.

7. Fighting Against Disintegration

8. Slavery and Confederate Purpose

Nov. 7 Davis proposed that the CSA purchase and train 40,000 black laborers, who would be promised emancipation and future residence within their states as a reward for faithful service. First legislative step toward the recruitment of blacks for the Confederacy.

This proposal followed the results of Lincoln's re-election?

Planter class as a class opposed this adamantly. Confederates & planters were willing to give up their husbands, brothers, friends, often without a murmur to the army; but they dug in when it came to their slaves. Planters were tenacious in their opposition. The press followed their lead.

The Con. congress passed a law for recruitment of slaves but without the emancipation provision. The greatest opposition came from the planters. The law was never effective. Escott speculates on the reasons for the opposition. Some had to do with the belief that after the war was over and the Union reconstructed that the South would be permitted to keep her slaves. Because this would be a likely condition for ending the war. Because of their reading of the Hampton Roads conference and Lincoln's dangle around the issue when he suggested to the Southern delegation that after the war the courts could determine what the future of the EP would be. Then there was Sherman's assurances. . .

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But for many planters the reason was that slavery was the core of Con. purpose. It was the South's primary concern. It was the reason for the war. Most slaveholders went to war to protect slavery and stubbornly maintain that goal. As they had fought the Republicans, and CSA impressment, and then the recruitment of slaves. Their action showed that their basic comment was to slavery rather than independence and Confederate nationalism.

✓ 9. An Assessment of J. Davis as Political Leader

Davis involved himself too much with military matters allowing the domestic problems to build without proffered solutions. scott writes that Davis must be judged harshly on this. He was not sensitive enough to the problems of morale and failed to enlist enthusiastic support from the people for his goal of Con. nationalism. He proved insensitive to the problems of ordinary southerners, who suffered greatly from inflation, shortages, speculation, and impressment. Richmond often made these problems heavier. . . Explanation was that Davis' was too sensitive to hisa critics from the states' rights camp. He was made cautious by their drumming criticism. . . He held back from aiding the poor but did not win the confidence of his critics. He was limited also by his own class perspective. . . Davis family did not suffer from shortages, etc. Davis spent too much time absorbed in military matters and in low-level administrative matters. he could not delegate power. Davis was isolated much of the time in Richmond except for the whirlwind tours into the "countryside" to press the flesh and raise popular morale. But he soon forgot or laid aside what he saw and there was no follow up.

Thus, the great failure of the Davis administration lay in domestic affairs, in his inability to create the internal unity and spirit essential for the growth of Confederate nationalism.

But the failure was his alone.

The planter class proved to be contentious and narrow, unimaginative and inflexible, and only weakly committed to southern nationalism. Whatever the cause, the record of the entire Confederate leadership was a sorry one. Their goal was independence. . . but as the war carried on they seemed only devoted to the protection of their priveleges and slavery. They wanted to keep their way of life as it had been, unchanged through a colossal war and unaltered in a world being transformed. They were trapped in the past They were a ruling class but not a leadership class.