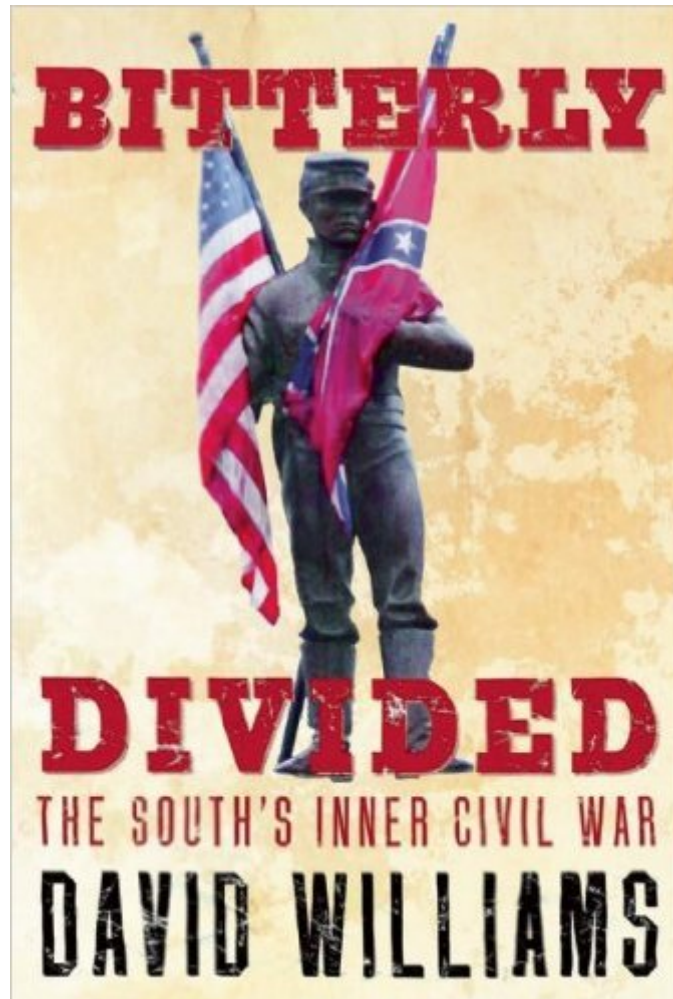


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Bitterly Divided: The South's Inner Civil War



Synopsis

Bitterly Divided lays bare the myth of a united confederacy, revealing that the South was in fact fighting two civil wars—an external one that we know so much about and an internal one about which there is scant literature and virtually no public awareness. A fascinating look at a hidden side of the South's history, historian David Williams shows the powerful and little-understood impact of the thousands of draft resisters, Southern Unionists, fugitive slaves, and other Southerners who opposed the Confederate cause.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I studied under a professor at a Louisiana university who was doing similar research to Dr. Williams. The facts on the ground in Louisiana were similar to what Dr. Williams describes, but there was not apparently any real Unionist sentiment amongst the poor farmers, who were largely apolitical. Rather, there was the sentiment that their families would starve if drafted into the Confederate armies, because most of them were subsistence farmers who raised a small cash crop on the side, whose families depended upon their labor to have food on the table. As a result many Louisiana men of draft age lit out for the swamps and came out only to labor in their fields when their lookouts (generally small children) reported no press gangs in the area, and press gangs that entered the swamps did not exit (possibly an inspiration for the film "Southern Comfort"). Note that Union troops foraging through the countryside to take food from families for the use of the army often came under attack from the same gangs of men who were evading the Confederate press gangs, we found descriptions of such actions in a number of family letters on both sides, so it is not that they were

ardent Unionists, it was more that they were ardent "keep food on my family's table"-ists. In short, Dr. Williams's facts appear to be correct. But he may be overstating the depth of Unionist sympathy in the Deep South (as vs. the border states), where the facts seem to be more along the lines of Jefferson Davis (who had been appointed President by the secession convention -- not by popular vote -- based upon the fact that he'd adopted a new hat for the U.S.

Another nail in the coffin of the Lost Cause, this book shows how little united the Confederacy actually was. Did you know, for example, that half a million Southerners fought for the Union? How about that half of Lee's army had deserted *before* Gettysburg? Williams is particularly good at throwing light on why the South was so divided. He traces it all, basically, to class war - "a rich man's war and a poor man's fight." He shows how planters led the South into secession (and kept the government in their hands to the very end), did their best to stay out of the fight (are you familiar with the 20-slave exemption?), used their muscle to get the poor into the fight (the draft and impressment), and helped starve the new nation (by planting cash crops instead of food and by scamming the government). The only reason I'm not giving this 5 stars is that a lot of the evidence is very incidental - an editorial here, an incident there, a letter over there. I, personally, would have liked to have seen more numbers. For example, of the 300,000 white Southerners who fought for the Union, how many were from border states, how many from the mountains? I do realize that those numbers might be a little hard to come by. I also feel that the sheer number of incidents the author marshals are probably more than enough. The cumulative effect really is quite overwhelming. Another thing the incidental approach was good for (though I'm not sure this was the author's intent) was getting across how awful the war could be for the Unionists (actually, for all concerned). There was very little chivalry involved in the massacres, beating of women, forced marches of Indians, shooting of black prisoners, etc.

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