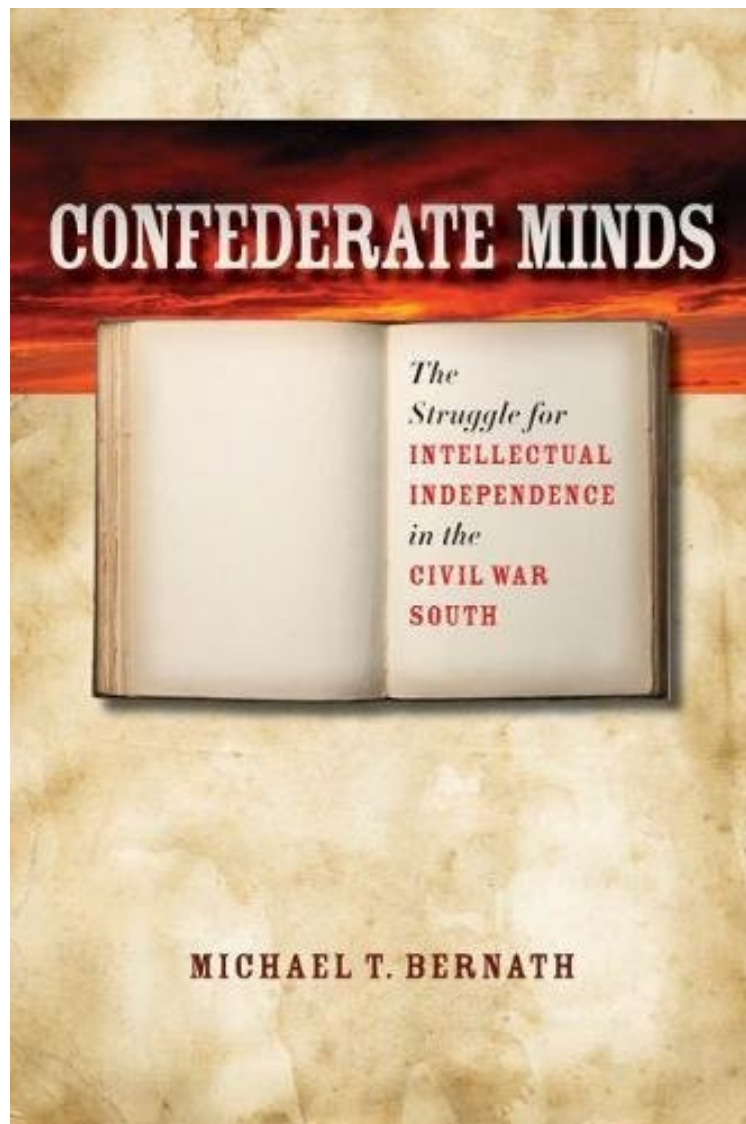


(Download pdf ebook) Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War South (Civil War America)

Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War South (Civil War America)

Michael T. Bernath

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Michael T. Bernath : Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War South (Civil War America) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War South (Civil War America):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Civil War Scholarship Gap FilledBy CustomerCivil War Buffs

whose narrow focus is directed to the battles will discover in this work a profoundly enlightening side of that significant period in American history. Not since Edmund Wilson's "Patriotic Gore" has there been a work that pays scholarly attention to cultural and social comment. Bernath's bibliography does demonstrate an extensive listing against which the previous comment is arguable. However, Wilson's critique is primarily directed to the literature of the time. Bernath's in-depth study looks at Southerner's general dependence upon nearly all forms of intellectual expression and print media published in the North. The war awakened north and south divisions in several areas but in the south some realized the lack of definition and expression of Southern intellectual "Minds" that, among other reasons, would demonstrate to the rest of the world that the South was a valid and identifiable culture. Although the author's title is "Confederate Minds ...", that which is developed within is not confined in significance to the war years but extends its implication well beyond to The South of the present day. "Confederate Minds" is neither a quick nor an exciting read. However, its content is "exciting" for those who wish to learn about and better understand the South then and now. The work deserves a place in Civil War collections to fill a gap in emphasis that is absent in most.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Cultural Nationalism in the Confederacy By Robin Friedman Studies of intellectual history in the Confederacy are somewhat off the common path. Due to the brief life of the Confederacy and its preoccupation with winning its independence in the Civil War, it has frequently been assumed that the Confederacy made little effort in the areas of cultural and intellectual life. This recent book, by Michael Bernath, "Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War South" (2010) offers a detailed examination of the extent and nature of Confederate cultural activity during the War. The book is based upon an extensive examination of original source material, books, magazines, pamphlets, and other printed matter, which until relatively recently has been scattered and difficult to access. Bernath is Assistant Professor of United States history at the University of Miami. He received his Ph.D from Harvard in 2005. This is his first book. At the time of secession, the South tended to be intellectually dependent upon the North. Southerners read mostly northern books and periodicals printed on northern presses. With the outbreak of the Civil War, southern editors, writers, and educators realized the Confederate nationhood required more than military success and political independence. The creation of a separate Confederate nation required cultural and intellectual independence as well with the creation of a literature capturing the dreams and character of the southern people and showing cultural independence from the North. With the war effort, the blockade, the shortage of men and material, the creation of a Confederate literature was a formidable task. Bernath argues that the southern cultural nationalists succeeded in part of their program even though they failed to achieve their ultimate goal of a distinctive southern literature. The nature and breadth of the subject makes this a difficult book which, as did its subject matter -- the creation of Confederate cultural independence -- has mixed success. Bernath needs to establish the breadth and scope of Confederate cultural effort, and he does so thoroughly by examining and discussing the histories of the many periodicals, secular and religious, journals, novels, histories, poems, plays, textbooks and other materials published during the Civil War years. This is important to Bernath's task, but it makes for dry reading at times. The book becomes much more interesting when Bernath discusses what it was Confederate cultural nationalists hoped to achieve. Confederate cultural nationalists hoped for the development of a literature that would capture the validity of the South's peculiar institution of slavery, but they also wanted more. The nature of Confederate cultural nationalism proved nebulous and ill-defined. In an early chapter, Bernath discusses the critique of northern culture that Confederate intellectuals offered to show what southern literature should not become. The Confederate cultural leaders saw the North and its literature as showing "inherent fanaticism" or "self-righteousness gone mad" (p. 37). Their criticism was directed against abolitionism, of course, but also included other "isms" which emphasized individualism ("womanism, free lovism, transcendentalism, vegetarianism, socialism, spiritualism, and much more) which fostered personal autonomy, egalitarianism, the breaking down of boundaries and, for the South, social chaos. Proponents of Confederate cultural nationalism saw the role of the South in creating a conservative, measured and heroic literature backed by traditional religious faith. Bernath points out that Confederate writers distinguished between what they termed a "literature of knowledge" and a "literature of power". The former encompassed day to day, quotidian writings that taught "how to" do something or provided modest, passing entertainment or edification. This type of literature required diligence to produce but not creative inspiration. The "literature of power" in contrast was transcendental and timeless and captured the heart of a people and through it something universal in the human condition. With all the difficulties it faced, the Confederacy produced much in the way of a "literature of knowledge" as individuals responded to the call for a national literature. However the Confederate intellectual leadership, as well as Bernath, recognize that the Confederacy did not produce a "literature of power". A small number of poems and essays pointed towards that direction, but the endeavor failed. The book is at its best when it documents and engages with Confederate efforts in the areas of fiction, poetry, criticism and history, rather than when it merely catalogues them. Bernath argues that Confederate cultural nationalism failed in part because the notion of a separate southern identity was itself vague and tenuous. But he clearly admires southern intellectual leaders for their efforts and for what they managed to achieve in the harshest of circumstances. Bernath also shows how the Confederate efforts were in part carried forward and in part changed by the "Lost Cause" story of Confederate history that became prominent following the Civil War. The development of a great Southern literature

had to wait until the 20th Century. At that time, as Bernath points out, it became a gothic literature of guilt and loss, created both by the descendants of former Confederates and by the descendants of the former slaves of these individuals. This book is a good study of Confederate intellectual history that left me wanting more. Robin Friedman³ of 3 people found the following review helpful. Independent, Southern tone, original and peculiar to itself By James W. Durney You can always find a debate over whether the Confederate States of America were a nation or not. Those involved often cite international law, ability to hold territory or function as a government. This book presents a unique view of this question. The author looks at the CSA not as a government, a member of the international community or an army but as an intellectual unit. The question might not be if the CSA was a nation but if they saw themselves as a nation. This book is a history of the Confederacy's attempt to establish a new national intellectual identity. The North dominated American publications, education and theater. Nationally and regionally, Southern intellectual products are considered inferior, stifling their voice. With secession, Southern publishers, educators and artists gain a captive market trying to step up and fill the void created by the loss of Northern imports. This book is a history of how they tried to do this, where they succeeded and where they failed. The author is very fair in his evaluation. The glass is neither half-full nor is it half empty. He tells the story in an evenhanded manner allowing the participants to evaluate their efforts. If I felt he was leaning one way, in the next chapter, I felt he was leaning the other way. This is a large complex story, with a number of characters and many activities. Newspapers have a major part of the story. We cover the weekly and monthly journals more than the daily papers. The dailies were concerned with current news while these papers were comment and literary papers. The book covers the full range from literary to religious to agricultural. This allows us to see the problems of publishing and the manners involved in borrowing. We trace the progress of the war through relocations and closings. Financial considerations caused by the blockade and inflation play a part in this story. Another major area is education. As Northern textbooks disappear, Southern authors rush to supply basic needs. Male teachers and students enter the army and women step forward as teachers. The volume of book publishing was a surprise. In addition to thousand of textbooks, novels and histories are published right up to the end of the war. Educators like editors, struggle with shortages, draft laws and the war. These people show a dedication to preserving and expanding the school systems in spite of the ravages of war. They manage to provide basic education to the children during the war right up to the bitter end. Theater, poetry, fiction may not have flourished but many valiant attempts filled the papers, books and the stage. The author looks at each of these not only in Richmond but also throughout the CSA. This book shows how much intellectual activity occurred and how it was across the CSA. Every major city has theaters, an active publishing industry and schools. This is a unique look at the Confederacy. The names are new, many of the locations are not major centers and the struggles are different. The chapter titled "Conclusion" is almost worth the price of the book as the author looks at their efforts, Reconstruction, the Lost Cause and beyond. This is not an easy, quick or fun read. The author writes well but intellectual prose is not the easiest to follow. Nineteenth Century prose, always difficult, will require rereading. This is a rewarding read. It is stimulating opening and area of the war that we do not often see. This is a detailed look at the home front in an essential industry and the development of a nation.

During the Civil War, Confederates fought for much more than their political independence. They also fought to prove the distinctiveness of the Southern people and to legitimate their desire for a separate national existence through the creation of a uniquely Southern literature and culture. In this important new book, Michael Bernath follows the activities of a group of Southern writers, thinkers, editors, publishers, educators, and ministers--whom he labels Confederate cultural nationalists--in order to trace the rise and fall of a cultural movement dedicated to liberating the South from its longtime dependence on Northern books, periodicals, and teachers. This struggle for Confederate intellectual independence was seen as a vital part of the larger war effort. For the Southern nationalists, independence won on the battlefield would be meaningless as long as Southerners remained in a state of cultural vassalage to their enemy. As new Confederate publications appeared at a surprising rate and Southerners took steps toward establishing their own system of education, cultural nationalists believed they saw the Confederacy coalescing into a true nation. Ultimately, however, Confederates proved no more able to win their intellectual independence than their political freedom. By analyzing the motives driving the struggle for Confederate intellectual independence, by charting its wartime accomplishments, and by assessing its failures, Bernath makes provocative arguments about the nature of Confederate nationalism, life within the Confederacy, and the perception of Southern cultural distinctiveness.

Make[s] provocative arguments about the nature of Confederate nationalism, life with the Confederacy, and the perception of cultural distinctiveness.--The Courier It is stimulating and opening an area of the war that we do not often see. . . . A detailed look at the home front in an essential industry and the development of a nation.--TOCWOCA bridge between scholarship on antebellum southern culture and studies of Confederate nationalism.--Journal of the Civil War Era Deeply researched and gracefully written. . . . [An] excellent study.--Register of the Kentucky Historical Society [Bernath's] meticulous research, detailed description. . . and insightful analysis of Southern culture make Confederate Minds invaluable to students and scholars of Southern intellectual and cultural history.--Canadian Journal

of History Highly recommended.--Choice The scope of [Bernath's] research is impressive, and his findings are worth exploring.--North Carolina Historical Quarterly Bernath's study is a must read for those interested in southern culture-making during the Civil War era.--Southwestern Historical Quarterly Provides meaningful insight into an understudied aspect of the Confederate experience. . . . An excellent book that deserves wide readership.--Civil War Book Confederate Minds is the most comprehensive and the most sophisticated assessment of Confederate intellectual history we have.--Tennessee Historical Quarterly The list of publications Bernath consulted . . . is close to definitive. . . . Good books like this one will stimulate debate and further research. Bernath's study will be required reading for historians of the Confederacy and nineteenth-century South.--H-Net s Nicely written and well-organized. . . . The greatest strength of this book is the author's impressive ability to synthesize and present a vast quantity of diverse writings. Anyone interested in the nature and fate of the Confederacy beyond the battlefield will find this thoroughly researched work to be rewarding and highly informative.--Florida Historical Quarterly A remarkable array of evidence.--Journal of Southern History Thanks to Bernath's study, the soil now is rich for future research into the Civil War's complex intellectual history. Scholars of the Civil War, southern history, and American intellectual history should be grateful for this fine contribution to the field.--West Virginia History [Confederate Minds] is well written, amply researched and tightly argued. For those interested in the attempted development of a distinct Confederate culture, this book is a welcome contribution.--Civil War News This valuable work finally puts to rest the notion that the Confederacy was an intellectual wasteland and that Confederates had nothing to say aside from their rebel yell.--Journal of American History A valuable book. It represents an enormous amount of research that will teach students of the Civil War a great deal about an important group of individuals who sought to realize Confederate nationalism.--Georgia Historical Quarterly A valuable look at the Confederate experience of war from a unique point of view.--The of Politics A solid first book. . . . His discussion of how the Confederacy's intellectual class lamented their lack of original contributions is superb.--Virginia Magazine A very clear and forcefully argued treatment of the drive for cultural independence in the Confederacy. It is based on exhaustive study of periodicals, pamphlets, and all kinds of printed matter produced during the Civil War. A most original and significant contribution to southern intellectual history and to the history of the Confederacy.--George C. Rable, author of *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!* This carefully and exhaustively researched book brings into sharp focus the sheer number--and the sheer persistence--of editors and educators who sought to create an intellectual culture in the South. Bernath's admirable study corrects anyone who thinks that wartime turmoil shut down the full-throated cry of antebellum Southern partisanship.--Steven Stowe, author of *Doctoring the South: Southern Physicians and Everyday Medicine in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* From the Inside Flap During the Civil War, some Confederates sought to prove the distinctiveness of the southern people and to legitimate their desire for a separate national existence through the creation of a uniquely southern literature and culture. Michael Bernath follows the activities of a group of southern writers, thinkers, editors, publishers, educators, and ministers--whom he labels Confederate cultural nationalists--in order to trace the rise and fall of a cultural movement dedicated to liberating the South from its longtime dependence on Northern books, periodicals, and teachers. Bernath makes provocative arguments about the nature of Confederate nationalism, life within the Confederacy, and the perception of southern cultural distinctiveness.