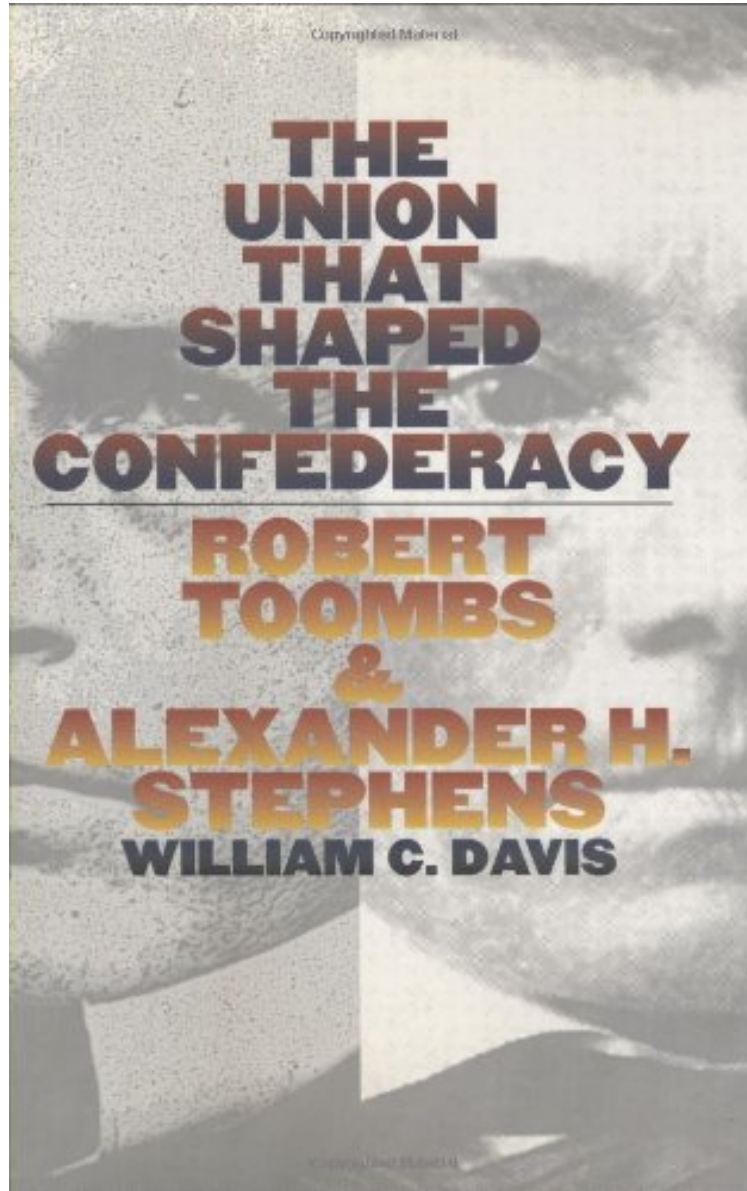


(Library ebook) The Union That Shaped the Confederacy: Robert Toombs and Alexander H. Stephens

# The Union That Shaped the Confederacy: Robert Toombs and Alexander H. Stephens

*William C. Davis*

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**William C. Davis : The Union That Shaped the Confederacy: Robert Toombs and Alexander H. Stephens** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Union That Shaped the Confederacy: Robert Toombs and Alexander H. Stephens:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Excellent and Readable Look at Leading Confederate Politicians By Kevin M. Derby William C. Davis has always been able to craft an entertaining and readable book while offering new insights into the Civil War. While he is probably best known as a military historian, Davis is also a sharp biographer and political historian. That's certainly on display in "The Union that Shaped the Confederacy" which looks at Alexander Stephens and Robert Toombs. Davis had tackled these Georgians before in his splendid "A Government of Our Own" which looked at the founding of the Confederacy. In this book, Davis shows how the two Georgians were strong allies and friends despite completely different, often contrasting, personalities. Davis shows how this strange alliance shaped politics as the state, regional and national levels over the decades and their complex--and ultimately disappointments--with the presidency of Jefferson Davis and the Confederate experience in general. Best of all, the author offers vivid portraits of the two men. Highly recommended. 6 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Narrow and personal focus help ruin the Confederate Govt. By Daniel Hurley Toombs and Stephen exemplify the problems within the Confederate government. These incredibly close friends of the strong Georgia delegation were powerful national political figures whose bitterness over personal issues, Toombs, and Stephens' strict constitutional views undermined the Davis administration. Stephens never seriously worked with the dominating Davis and was later opposed to the administration over constitutional issues in the face of bigger war emergencies. Toombs loses the opportunity to become the first President by his bellicose enthusiasts for the office coupled with drink which lowers his place in the new government and raises Stephens' star. Excellent description of both men including Toombs rise as Secretary of State, his anti-Davis stance and his mercurial and short military career. The author also covers the end of the era of both men including Stephens' attempts to rewrite history in a light more favorable to him than his actions were in reality. These two powerful men and closest of friends could not see the big picture of the war seeking their narrow views in spite of the war effort. Together with Governor Brown of Georgia, they represented a crisis of independence within the Confederacy that no doubt contributed to the fall of the Confederate government. 11 of 12 people found the following review helpful. What a Delightful Little Book! By David M. Smith What a delightful little book! And frankly, I don't often use the term "delightful" in a book review. \*The Union That Shaped the Confederacy\* is a swiftly-paced, lightly written work that details the friendship of a pair of Georgians - Robert Toombs and "Little Alec," Alexander Stephens. It is very important to know exactly what you are not getting with this book. You will not get a standard biographical treatment of Stephens and Toombs, and author Davis makes this abundantly clear from the outset. You will not receive great insights into the minds and thinking of these two men, but will come to appreciate the antebellum, war-time, and post-bellum periods of American history as these two men saw it. William C. Davis does not attempt to make his subjects either heroes or villains on the Confederacy's stage. They were what they were - friends who for the most part held similar political beliefs, worked for the same ends, and became, as the war progressed, more and more bitterly opposed to the administration of Jefferson F. Davis. Because of the nature of the work, the reader receives a slice of Civil War-era history from a perspective he or she would not likely get. Along the way, one receives insights into the functioning (and dysfunction) of the Confederacy's Executive Branch, as well as the building of the "loyal opposition" to Davis's administration. We see the strengths and weaknesses of these two prominent Georgians, as they struggled to establish a new nation out of the old. Davis's writing style is loose and fast, and almost reads as if a good friend is telling a story of another pair of friends. To some, this may be distracting, but I found it to be just part of the story. \*The Union That Shaped the Confederacy\* can be read quickly, with a great sense of satisfaction. This book comes highly recommended.

One was a robust charmer given to fits of passion, whose physical appeal could captivate women as easily as cajole colleagues. The other was a frail, melancholy man of quiet intellect, whose ailments drove him eventually to alcohol and drug addiction. Born into different social classes, they were as opposite as men could be. Yet these sons of Georgia, Robert Toombs and Alexander H. Stephens, became fast friends and together changed the course of the South. Writing with the style and authority that has made him one of our most popular historians of the Civil War, William C. Davis has written a biography of a friendship that captures the Confederacy in microcosm. He tells how Toombs and Stephens dominated the formation of the new nation and served as its vice president and secretary of state. After years of disillusionment, each abandoned participation in the government and left to its own fate a Confederacy that would not dance to their tune. Davis traces this unlikely relationship from its early days in the Georgia legislature through the trials of secession and war, revealing how both men persevered during the war and developed a deep animosity for Jefferson Davis. He then chronicles their postwar lives up to the emotional moment when Toombs stood eulogizing his long-time friend at his funeral, just four months after Stephens was elected governor of the Georgia they had loved as much as one another. Drawing extensively on primary sources, including Stephens's voluminous letters and Toombs' widely scattered papers, Davis tells how two men of different temperaments remained friends, out of step with all but a few and occasionally even with each other. He concentrates on their Confederate years, when the fraternity they shared had its greatest impact, to show how they embodied both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Confederacy. While there are biographies of each man, none convey the significance—or the depth—of their friendship. Davis shows us how they loved the South as it once was, the Union as

they thought it ought to have been, and the Confederacy of their dreams that never came to be. They lost all three, but through five decades of crisis, they never failed each other.

From Publishers Weekly From its beguilingly clever title to its concluding quotation from Wordsworth, this study of a Civil War friendship is captivating. Virginia Tech's Davis, author of more than 40 books about the War Between the States, charts the friendship of two leading Confederate statesmen, Robert Toombs, who was nearly made president of the Confederacy, and Alexander H. Stephens, who became its vice-president. The pair met as young lawyers, but they were as different as could be: Stephens, a frail, bookish sort, clawed his way up to the law from a humble background, while Toombs, a tall, powerful hulk of a man, was to the manor born and a touch dissolute. But the two became fast friends, rising in the ranks of Georgia politics together. Although their friendship was threatened by their disagreements about secession Stephens thought it imprudent, while Toombs did not once the South actually seceded, the two men reconciled and were among the founding fathers of the New South. Nevertheless, as the Confederacy foundered, Stephens and Toombs set themselves increasingly in opposition to Jefferson Davis's leadership and "rebelled against their own revolution, not because they rejected its ends but because they could not stomach the means necessary to achieve that goal." After the war, Stephens was arrested and Toombs fled the country, but, under the lenient rule of President Andrew Johnson, both men were allowed to return to their homes in Georgia. Significantly, as the author demonstrates, though their cause failed, their union remained intact. There are a few nits to pick with this book one wishes the author would stop referring to Stephens intermittently as "Little Aleck." But on the whole this is an engrossing read that will stand out in the crowded field of Civil War studies. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Prolific author Davis (*The Cause Lost: Myths and Realities of the Confederacy*) has written more than 40 books on the Civil War. This time out, he has compiled a dual biography of two Georgian politicians. The "Union" of the title refers to the important friendship between these two men, from their days in the Georgia legislature in the 1830s, to the U.S. Congress, and, after secession, to the Confederate government, in which Toombs would serve as secretary of state while Stephens served as its vice president. Davis skillfully explains their unique bond and how it was affected by the political, social, and historical events leading up to and through the Civil War. Here, the reader is exposed to the raw emotion of this tumultuous time, when politics brought these men together to play key roles in the Confederacy and the postwar South. The author analyzes and criticizes the numerous mistakes made by Confederate leaders and military commanders in this important contribution to Civil War literature. This thought-provoking political biography is recommended for its authoritative narrative and meticulous research. Public, academic, and special collections should consider. David M. Alperstein, Queens Borough P.L., Jamaica, NY Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Veteran Civil War scribe Davis returns to a specialty--the leaders of the Confederate government. Opposites in temperament and physique, equable, cerebral, 100-pound Stephens and vitriolic, martial Toombs were of one mind on the rights of the South. As members of Congress in the crisis-wracked 1850s, both pressed such Southern positions as the expansion of slavery into the territories. Their friendship originated in youthful lawyering and politicking in Georgia, which Davis recounts up through the parts both men played in Georgia's secession convention. The book's central topic, however, is Stephens' and Toombs' contributions to the drafting of the Confederate constitution and their service in the government it created. But for libationary overindulgence, Toombs might have become the Confederate president instead of Jefferson Davis; Stephens did become vice president; and both friends became critics of Davis. An interesting work on its subjects, this is more overtly scholarly than Davis' other recent book, *An Honorable Defeat* [BKL F 15 01]. Gilbert Taylor Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved