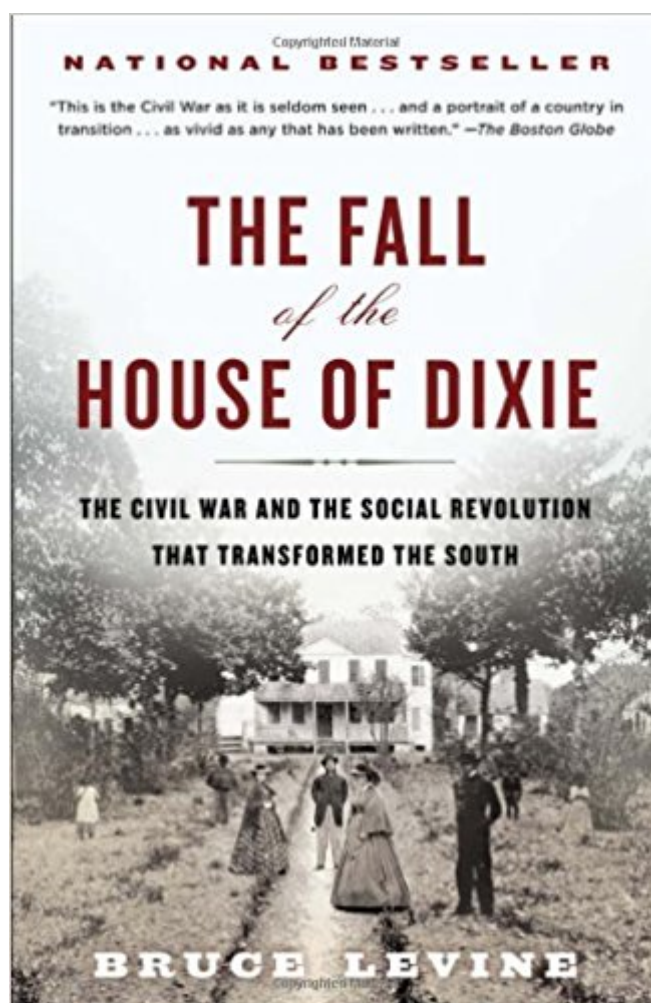


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The Fall Of The House Of Dixie: The Civil War And The Social Revolution That Transformed The South



Synopsis

In this major new history of the Civil War, Bruce Levine tells the riveting story of how that conflict upended the economic, political, and social life of the old South, utterly destroying the Confederacy and the society it represented and defended. Told through the words of the people who lived it, *The Fall of the House of Dixie* illuminates the way a war undertaken to preserve the status quo became a second American Revolution whose impact on the country was as strong and lasting as that of our first. In 1860 the American South was a vast, wealthy, imposing region where a small minority had amassed great political power and enormous fortunes through a system of forced labor. The South's large population of slaveless whites almost universally supported the basic interests of plantation owners, despite the huge wealth gap that separated them. By the end of 1865 these structures of wealth and power had been shattered. Millions of black people had gained their freedom, many poorer whites had ceased following their wealthy neighbors, and plantation owners were brought to their knees, losing not only their slaves but their political power, their worldview, their very way of life. This sea change was felt nationwide, as the balance of power in Congress, the judiciary, and the presidency shifted dramatically and lastingly toward the North, and the country embarked on a course toward equal rights. Levine captures the many-sided human drama of this story using a huge trove of diaries, letters, newspaper articles, government documents, and more. In *The Fall of the House of Dixie*, the true stakes of the Civil War become clearer than ever before, as slaves battle for their freedom in the face of brutal reprisals; Abraham Lincoln and his party turn what began as a limited war for the Union into a crusade against slavery by issuing the Emancipation Proclamation; poor southern whites grow increasingly disillusioned with fighting what they have come to see as the plantation owners' war; and the slave owners grow ever more desperate as their beloved social order is destroyed, not just by the Union Army, but also from within. When the smoke clears, not only Dixie but all of American society is changed forever. Brilliantly argued and engrossing, *The Fall of the House of Dixie* is a sweeping account of the destruction of the old South during the Civil War, offering a fresh perspective on the most colossal struggle in our history and the new world it brought into being. Praise for *The Fall of the House of Dixie* "This is the Civil War as it is seldom seen. . . . A portrait of a country in transition . . . as vivid as any that has been written." • *The Boston Globe* "An absorbing social history . . . For readers whose Civil War bibliography runs to standard works by Bruce Catton and James McPherson, [Bruce] Levine's book offers fresh insights." • *The Wall Street Journal* "More poignantly than any book before, *The Fall of the House of Dixie* shows how deeply intertwined the Confederacy was with

slavery, and how the destruction of both made possible a second American revolution as far-reaching as the first. •David W. Blight, author of *American Oracle* “Splendidly colorful . . . Levine recounts this tale of Southern institutional rot with the ease and authority born of decades of study.” •Kirkus Reviews (starred review) “A deep, rich, and complex analysis of the period surrounding and including the American Civil War.” •Publishers Weekly (starred review)

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Customer Reviews

This masterful work is essentially an examination of the political and social disintegration of the antebellum South under the strain of slow but relentless military defeat. Levine presents compelling evidence to counter revisionist arguments concerning the role of slavery in the South. He asserts that the entire edifice of Southern society was based upon the “peculiar institution” and the racial assumptions used to justify it. He effectively demolishes the mythology of a passive, even content slave population and illustrates how the maintenance of slavery depended on the threat and often the use of violence. Levine also acknowledges schisms in Southern society between the planter elite and the nonslaveholding majority. Once the military conflict began, the pillars of Southern society slowly eroded as men left the farms and plantations to fight and slaves refused to work and often fled into the arms of approaching Union forces. Levine’s employment of testimonies by slaveholders, slaves, and pro-Union Southerners is effective and

often poignant. This work will be an excellent addition to Civil War collections. --Jay Freeman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“This is the Civil War as it is seldom seen . . . and a portrait of a country in transition . . . as vivid as any that has been written.” •The Boston Globe “An absorbing social history . . . For readers whose Civil War bibliography runs to standard works by Bruce Catton and James McPherson . . . [Bruce] Levine’s book offers fresh insights.” •The Wall Street Journal “More poignantly than any book before, *The Fall of the House of Dixie* shows how deeply intertwined the Confederacy was with slavery, and how the destruction of both made possible a second American revolution as far-reaching as the first.” •David W. Blight, author of *American Oracle* “Splendidly colorful . . . Levine recounts this tale of Southern institutional rot with the ease and authority born of decades of study.” •Kirkus Reviews (starred review) “A deep, rich, and complex analysis of the period surrounding and including the American Civil War.” •Publishers Weekly (starred review) “This book limns the relationship between slavery and the rise and fall of the Confederacy more clearly and starkly than any other study. General readers and seasoned scholars alike will find new information and insights in this eye-opening account.” •James M. McPherson, author of *Battle Cry Freedom* “With his characteristic judiciousness and crystalline prose, Bruce Levine demonstrates the toll that disaffection and dissent took on the Confederate cause and brings into sharp focus what the Union victory, enduringly, achieved. He has, in short, written another modern classic.” •Elizabeth R. Varon, author of *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* “A gripping, lucid grassroots history of the Civil War that declines the strict use of great battles and Big Men as its fulcrum, opting instead for the people. In the tradition of James McPherson, Bruce Levine has produced a book that is a work of both history and literature.” •Ta-Nehisi Coates, author of *The Beautiful Struggle* “Levine illuminates the experiences of southern men and women •white and black, free and enslaved, civilians and soldiers •with a sure grasp of the historical sources and a deft literary touch. He masterfully recaptures an era of unsurpassed drama and importance.” •Gary W. Gallagher, author of *The Confederate War* “A compelling, valuable and eye-opening work [that] will inform and entertain the most discerning student of the second American revolution.” •The San Antonio Express-News “Masterful . . .

Levine's employment of testimonies by slaveholders, slaves, and pro-Union Southerners is effective and often poignant.

Booklist "Levine's engrossing story chronicles the collapse of a doomed republic—the Confederate States of America—built on the unstable sands of delusion, cruelty, and folly."

Adam Goodheart, author of 1861: The Civil War Awakening "Bruce Levine vividly traces the origins of the slaveholders' rebellion and its dramatic wartime collapse. With this book, he confirms his standing among the leading Civil War historians of our time."

James Oakes, author of Freedom National "Eloquent and illuminating . . . Shifting away from traditional accounts that emphasize generals and campaigns, Levine instead offers a brilliant and provocative analysis of the way in which slaves and non-elite whites transformed the conflict into a second American Revolution."

Douglas R. Egerton, author of Year of Meteors "The idea that Southern secession was unconnected to the defense of slavery has a surprising hold on the popular historical imagination, North and South. Levine's demolition of such a misapprehension profoundly succeeds as both argument and drama."

David Roediger, coauthor of The Production of Difference "Thorough, convincing, and, in a word, brilliant. Our understanding of this central event in American history will never be the same."

Marcus Rediker, author of The Slave Ship "The Fall of the House of Dixie will delight and disturb—and provide much needed clarity as Americans take a fresh look at the meaning of the Civil War."

Ronald C. White, Jr., author of A. Lincoln "The story of a war waged off the battlefield, a war of politics and ideology that transformed both Southern and Northern culture unfolds brilliantly in the able hands of this fine historian."

Carol Berkin, author of Revolutionary Mothers "Levine offers a fresh perspective on this oft-told story by relying heavily on personal letters, journals and diaries. . . . Brushing aside the notion that slavery was merely one of many issues over which the war was fought, Levine . . . shows that it was at the center of everything—the economy, culture, social relationships and worldview."

BookPage "Levine's well-documented study . . . provides a concise and well-written overview of the conflict and a cogent discussion of . . . still-polarizing issues."

The Dallas Morning News From the Hardcover edition.

Having read the book after seeing all the negative reviews, I don't find any evidence of the "Yankee bias" that the negative reviewers of this book claim exists. What I see instead is a comprehensive and engaging narrative of how the culture and commerce of the Antebellum South thrived on the

institution of slavery and how deep and widespread the South's dependence on slave labor was, not just in shaping its economic structure but also its moral worldview. By focusing on the devastating cultural and social effects of the Civil War on this colossal edifice, the volume nicely complements others primarily dealing with military campaigns. At the same time the military campaigns provide a recurring background to the author's narrative. The story is illuminated by valuable diary entries and testimonies from a handful of key Southerners and slave-owners, most prominently the Edmondsons of North Carolina and the Stones of Louisiana. In addition Levine draws upon the words of dozens of major and minor players, including generals, privates, politicians, slaves, non slave-owning commoners, religious leaders and merchants. Their words showcase the diversity of opinions about slavery, the Union and the Civil War dispersed across multiple social strata. Levine starts by providing us with an overview of the astounding affluence that slave labor made possible for Southerners and the sheer size of the slave-based economy. The combined value of the slaves in the South was a gargantuan \$3 billion and one in three persons was a bonded laborer. Levine then documents the slave policies perpetuated by masters in the south and the self-serving justifications that they came up with for sustaining this labor. While economic reasons always loomed large in their calculations, it was clear that the longtime dependence of their families on this system had allowed them to come up with all kinds of convenient moral, religious and social reasons for supporting a way of life fundamentally grounded in slavery. In addition they regularly appeased poor, white non-slave owners with gifts of slaves, money and social status to keep them from commiserating with the slaves and turning against them. And while the friction that their policies caused with the North was often couched in terms of states' rights, it was clear - and Levine details this through words explicitly uttered by many prominent slave owners and Southern leaders themselves- that slavery was always the main issue at stake; Southern slave owners simply could not envision a system without bonded labor and the question of states' rights was often at best a secondary issue. The perpetuation of slavery was explicitly codified in the Confederate Constitution. These are all cold facts supported by extensive documented evidence (the bibliography runs to more than 150 pages), and not bias on the part of the author as the negative reviewers would have us believe. Levine provides an excellent run-up to 1860 when matters came to a head with the election of Lincoln. The book does a very good job of describing how Lincoln's thinking changed over time, from wanting to simply preserve the Union by only gradually setting the stage for abolition to becoming a convert aligned with Thaddeus Stevens and other "radical" Republicans. As the Northern states decided on various progressive policies including the abolition of slavery in new states, the Southern states felt the noose tightening. It's interesting to note that the Republicans did

not try to outlaw slavery outright, but it was the South's constant opposition to their policies (especially pertaining to newly admitted states and the fugitive slave law) and the concurrent secession that made compromise impossible. Levine also sheds valuable light on pro-Union Southerners, especially in the upper Southern states, whose conflicting views about the war were shaped by political, economic and even moral concerns. After laying this groundwork, the book then deals with the systematic demolition by the Civil War of this decades-old way of life. Levine charts the changing, initially upbeat, attitudes of slaveless whites and even blacks about the war as chances of victory started looking slim. Confederate armies started finding little support among pro-Union Southerners in states like Kentucky and Missouri and poor whites grew disillusioned about what they increasingly saw as a rich man's war. Concomitantly, the recruitment of black soldiers in large numbers was a breath of fresh air to slaves in the South who were accustomed to thinking of themselves as perpetually indentured. Levine also details the rising aspirations among free black people in the North even as they dreamt of a future of literacy, money and freedom for their children. Another interesting statistic cited by Levine is the enthusiastic support in favor of the Union among immigrant Irish and German military recruits who made up almost a quarter of the Union army. Military engagements are succinctly described, but they provide a backdrop to the far more consequential uprooting of traditions and customs that the conflict brought about, engendering deep feelings of fear and hatred but also hope and understanding. Families which had owned and exploited slavery for three generations suddenly found themselves literally out on the streets. This demolition caused a seismic shift in the whole nature of the South and irreversibly affected the social structure and politics of the entire country. While one does sometimes sympathize with the plight of folks whose entire world came crashing down around them, it's clear that we were dealing with two fundamentally opposed systems which simply could not co-exist. Perhaps the greatest irony in the end is that it was the Confederacy which hastened the end of slavery. The book thus is basically a descriptive account of the depth to which slavery was woven into the South's existence and how massively the Civil War overturned this basic social foundation. It's a historical account dealing with the facts, not a moral one in which the author doles out his personal judgement. And unless you actually think that slavery was a good thing, there's no way in which you can accuse the author of having ulterior motives. I think the simplest explanation of the negative reviews (which are almost all one line pronouncements) is that they have been written by folks who haven't actually read the book. Based on my reading, I strongly urge readers to take a look at the book themselves and decide if the vitriol makes sense.

This is a wonderful book that anyone interested in the history of the South or the Civil War should read. The neo-confederates dislike this history because it focuses on the social history rather than the supposedly heroic military characters. This author decimates any argument that the Civil War was not caused by slavery or fought over slavery as well as a number of other neo-confederate themes, which were always revisionist history and closer to myth or fantasy.

Fascinating "behind the scenes" account of the social structure and beliefs of various demographic groups in the antebellum and Civil War South. As there is today, there was a top 1% of society that fought for its slavery-based economic and social privileges. But there were also lower social classes that had their own reasons for secession and maintaining the slavery status quo. Every action has multiple causes. The author skillfully presents the conflicting political, social, and cultural interests of the South's population in choosing war.

As a person of southern upbringing, the Civil War subject influences my life. The war was fought on southern soil and my family's history was profoundly influenced by the war. I've read many books on the topic but this account was exceptional because Mr. Levine's ability to hold my attention was remarkable. Telling the story from a humanistic, pragmatic point of view was as compelling as any fiction or suspense book I've ever read. I admire the author's appraisal of slavery as the true cause of the war and it is as a truth that it resonates deeply. How sad that it's taken 150 years to read such an account. Thank you Mr. Levine, for the courage to cut through the fog of myths surrounding this revolutionary event in American history.

As a person who reads American history for the sheer pleasure of learning about my country and what has shaped the world in which I live, this book is a wealth of knowledge. I know some readers quickly lashed out accusing the author of all sorts of devious and dreadful things, but as a person whose family didn't even arrive in American until the first half of the 20th century, understanding the depth of the Civil War is always an education. Here's some of what I learned; the South was not completely full of people who owned human beings, those who owned hundreds if not thousands of people embraced the firm beliefs that the slaves were not quite human, that they loved, revered and counted on their owners to save them from themselves. The planters rewrote Scripture to show the validity of their position and were adamant in their complete control of others even if it eventually led to the downfall of their world. I am troubled to realize that the same 'states rights' rationalization is very much in place today, a willingness to break the social contract to concentrate only on self. It

cannot lead to a balanced and working nation when there are those who feel entitled to power without responsibility or obligation to protect and develop a world for more than themselves. Listen, I'm not a scholar. I do not hold any fierce political views, but I know that if I do not share what I have and what I know with those around me it does me and my world no good. This book is one I'll keep and reread because it's full of warnings and messages that to care for only yourself serves no one well.

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