

Review of: Malcolm C. McMillan. *The Disintegration of a Confederate State: Three Governors and Alabama's Wartime Home Front, 1861-1865*. Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press. 1986. Pp . 152.

Historians continue to debate why The Confederacy lost the Civil War. Malcolm C. McMillan, a former professor at Auburn University and former President of the Alabama State Historical Society, sets out to confirm Charles E. Ramsdell's thesis concluding that the "disintegration and collapse" of the Confederacy "took place behind Confederate lines" (p. vii). In order to prove this, McMillan uses Alabama as a case study. McMillan intends to prove that "when federal armies reached central and southern Alabama in late 1864 and early 1865, they only had to occupy that state—not conquer it". (137)

The Author begins his study with a chapter giving biographical and historical background of each governor; the first being Andrew Berry Moore. Moore has less than half of his second term left—The Alabama Constitution restricts governors to two terms—when the state seceded from the Union on January 11th, 1861. He was a long time Unionist and did not support succession. McMillan then focuses on John Gill Shorter who took office on December 2nd, 1861. Shorter was born to a wealthy planter family in the south western part of the state. Shorter was a long time secessionist who wholeheartedly supported the Confederacy. The final Wartime governor was Thomas Hill Watts. Watts, who took office in December of 1863, was unionist who only supported secession on the final hours before Lincoln's election.

In the final chapter, McMillan evaluates the problems these governors had to face and connects those problems to disintegration of war support throughout Alabama. He concludes that there are three major reasons why public support for the war slowly declined between the years of 1862-1865. First, He contends that deserters coupled with military conscription caused unrest on the home front. The large amount of deserters caused the army to be depleted before they got into battle; thus making winning more difficult for them. He also contends that the policy of treating deserters as criminals and

bushwhackers caused them to return home and often act like criminals. These deserters caused social and economic problems as they were attempting to hide from the Calvary sent to search for them.

Second, the author argues that inability of Shorter and Watts to effectively deal with the state's economic collapse caused the citizens—as well as the soldiers—to lose faith in the government. He recognizes that the collapse “of [the] finances of the Confederacy has long been recognized as a reason for the collapse of the home front” (133) however, he puts the fault on the office of the governor. He faults Shorter for focusing state funds on helping the poor and starving rather than focusing on arming the state militia. McMillan suggests that Shorter focused on the poor in an effort to win reelection.

Third, and finally, McMillan suggests that “the people were witnesses to a complete breakdown of the democratic process” (134). He contends that the unwillingness of the government to reopen the secession question to the people was a complete disregard of the democratic process. He points to the yeomen of northern Alabama and their strong protests against secession and their request for reconsideration. McMillan also points out that the election process had been altered during wartime. In attempt to promote unity, nominating conventions were done away with and local newspapers were given the task of selecting candidates. The candidates were not asked policy questions in fear that their answers might further divide the state. McMillan contends that the suspension of the basic democratic process led to the increase discontent with the state government.

The Author uses a wide variety of sources to prove his thesis. He suggests that the most important sources are letters from governors to other political and military leaders. These letters provide the insight into the thinking of Moore, Shorter, and Watts as they attempt to lead Alabama through the war. He also references a variety of personal letters from citizens to the three governors. These letters are used to explain the hardships faced by the citizens on the home front. In all McMillan has chosen appropriate and reliable sources to construct and defend his argument.

In conclusion, McMillan successfully defends his thesis. He proves that the inability of the three war time governors to deal with the problems of the home front caused the “disintegration of a Confederate State”. However, he spends too much effort in the providing a biography of each of the governors. The majority of his work is focused on providing background and he provides the reader with trivial facts about Moore, Watts, and Shorter. The conclusion is informative and provides the true argument. This book is a significant addition to the field of Civil War history and can be used to better understand the turmoil on the Southern home front. Student and scholars of Civil War, Confederacy, or Alabama history would benefit from reading this short monograph.