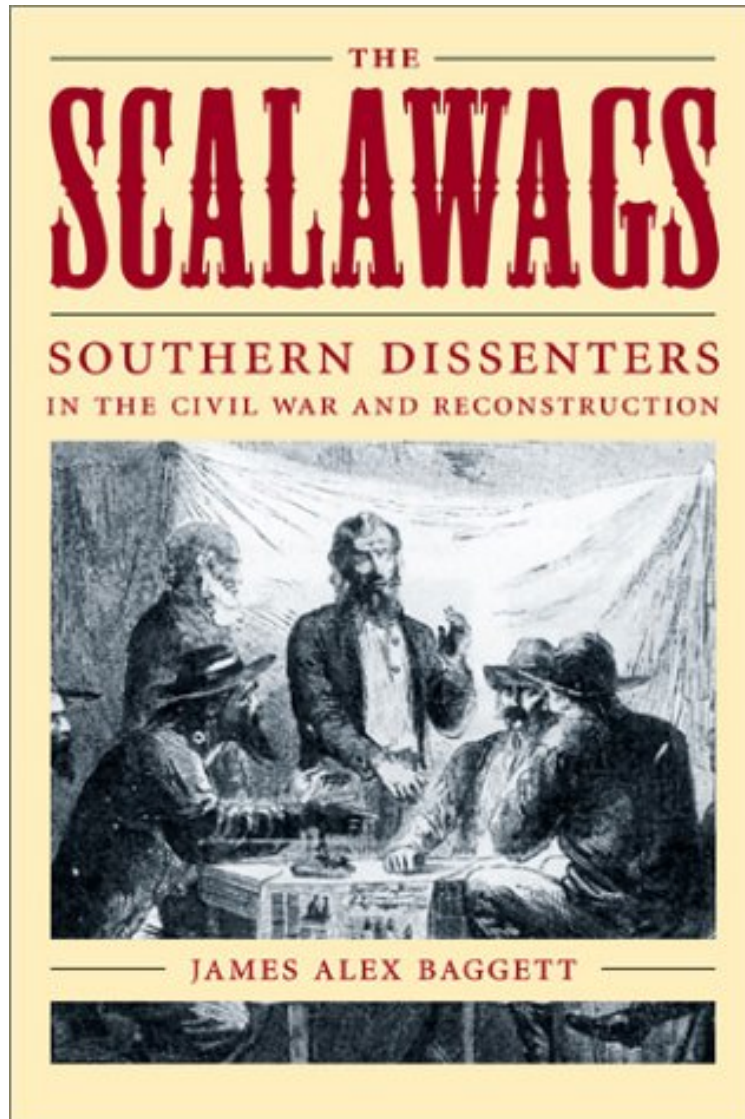


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The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction

James Alex Baggett

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James Alex Baggett : The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Good Information, but a Chore to Get Through By Jason Galbraith In 2000, I wrote a master's thesis on the career of a "carpetbag" Republican politician in the South, Horatio Bisbee (who

after the failure of Reconstruction relocated to his native state of Maine). I picked up "The Scalawags" because 1) Southern-born white Republicans in Reconstruction were a faction I wanted more knowledge about, and 2) I was hoping for more information about the wartime role of Southern Unionists. I was disappointed in 2) but 1) was a goal this book managed to meet. The Republican Party in the South during Reconstruction had three basic components. The largest was the recently freed African-Americans. The second largest was the carpetbaggers, white Northerners who came to the South as part of or on the heels of the advancing Union armies. The smallest, in some states fewer than 2,000, was the white men who had lived in the South prior to secession (not all of whom were born there) and became Republicans after the war for various reasons. This group was known to their enemies (and because those enemies won, to historians) as the "scalawags." (This word is derived from the Scots "scollowag, originally used. . .to denote inferior livestock." p.1-2) Reconstruction in political terms was not uniform throughout the South. In some places, carpetbaggers had the upper hand; in others it was the scalawags. A higher proportion of Republicans in the Upper South were scalawags, which may have something to do with the Republican Party remaining viable longer there than in the Lower South. Scalawags came around gradually to supporting African-American suffrage and typically (in some cases because they had fought for the Confederacy) opposed the disfranchisement of former Confederates. I would not call this a well-written book. It moves from state to state presenting anecdotes about the behavior, conventions, and elections of scalawags in various places. You don't really have time to identify with any of the characters and a biography of a prominent scalawag might therefore be a superior way for people unfamiliar with the period to be introduced to the scalawags. The means whereby the Democratic "redeemers" took over and destroyed the Republican Party and the short-term potential for a multiracial society also receive scant attention, but then, this is not a book about them. The book was probably most disappointing in offering so little information about the Southerners especially from the Upper South who served in the Union Army. A few individuals who did so are covered in passing, but not the exploits of the regiments they formed. My personal favorite scalawags were the Mackey family (Unitarians like myself) of South Carolina. Edmund Mackey served in Congress and married a mixed-race woman, while his uncle, Confederate veteran Thomas Mackey, accurately summed up life in the Deep South during Reconstruction (and Jim Crow) with the following quote: "A great injustice has been done to the people of Edgefield. It is charged that they kill negroes on account of their political opinions. That is altogether a mistake; they do it for Sport." If I get back into history in a more serious way, biographies of these two might be projects I would undertake. If you are a serious student of Reconstruction, this is an indispensable book, but if you are looking for an introduction, Foner's "Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution" is probably where you should start.

In Thomas Dixon's novel that became the film THE BIRTH OF A NATION, the scalawag--a white southerner who supported Congressional Reconstruction and the Republican Party--is summarized as a "Judas Iscariot who sold his people for thirty pieces of silver, which he got for licking the feet of his conqueror and fawning on his Negro allies." Departures from this stereotypical view have appeared slowly since the 1940s as important revisionist historians dispelled the negative connotations surrounding scalawags--but only on a state-by-state basis. James Alex Baggett's THE SCALAWAGS ambitiously uncovers the genesis of scalawag leaders in the entire former Confederacy. Taking the period of the 1850s to 1870s, Baggett uses a collective-biography approach to compile profiles of 742 scalawag-Republicans. Significantly, he analyzes this rich data by region--the Upper South, the Southeast, and the Southwest--as well as for the South as a whole. Baggett follows the life of each scalawag before, during, and after the war, revealing real personalities and not mere statistics. Examining such features as birthplace, vocation, estate, slaveholding status, stand on secession, Republican Party involvement, war record, and postwar political activities, he finds striking uniformity among scalawags. This first Southwide study of the scalawags rescues from the shadows once-vilified men who are vital to understanding Reconstruction and illustrates the events surrounding their political decisions. Its scope and astounding wealth in quantity and quality of sources make it the definitive work on the subject.

"This is a well-written and engaging book, containing in brief the lives of many people of whom we ought to know more." About the Author James Alex Baggett is the author of two previous books, A HISTORY OF JACKSON CLINIC and SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES: UNION UNIVERSITY, 1823-2000.