



Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia (Civil War America)

Aaron Sheehan-Dean

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In the first comprehensive study of the experience of Virginia soldiers and their families in the Civil War, Aaron Sheehan-Dean captures the inner world of the rank-and-file. Utilizing new statistical evidence and first-person narratives, Sheehan-Dean explores how Virginia soldiers--even those who were nonslaveholders--adapted their vision of the war's purpose to remain committed Confederates.

Sheehan-Dean challenges earlier arguments that middle- and lower-class southerners gradually withdrew their support for the Confederacy because their class interests were not being met. Instead he argues that Virginia soldiers continued to be motivated by the profound emotional connection between military service and the protection of home and family, even as the war dragged on. The experience of fighting, explains Sheehan-Dean, redefined southern manhood and family relations, established the basis for postwar race and class relations, and transformed the shape of Virginia itself. He concludes that Virginians' experience of the Civil War offers important lessons about the reasons we fight wars and the ways that those reasons can change over time.

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