



To Live and Die in Dixie: Native Northerners Who Fought for the Confederacy

by David Ross Zimring.

Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2014. Pp. x, 469. ISBN 978-1-62190-106-8.

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In *To Live and Die in Dixie*,¹ David Zimring (Univ. of Maryland, Baltimore County) presents the results of a rudimentary statistical analysis of several hundred mostly well known cases (including that of Gen. William T. Sherman) to demonstrate that certain native born Northerners tended to adopt the identity and the cause of the Civil War South. He focuses on a little studied demographic—people born in the North who moved at some point to the South, became integrated into local communities, and assimilated into Southern culture.

Most of the book is narrative based on supporting data, with no cross-tabs or direct statistical analysis shown. The stories told here represent a small sample of the many native Northerners living in the South. The point is to show that the strength of a pre-Confederacy regional identity allowed them to be treated as true Southerners *before* but *not after* the war. The book seems directed not to a general readership, but to students of history, especially social history, with a strong interest in the formation of the Confederate national identity.

The author clearly states his aims. For example, of the supposed desire of many Northern migrants to remake the South in the image of the North, he writes:

Analyzing the lives of Northern emigrants in the South, therefore, improves our understanding of the nature of sectional identity, as well as the strength of Confederate nationalism. Rather than view sectional identity as permanent, we can instead see the options Americans possessed in the antebellum era when it came to identity formation. The idea of Northern emigrants moving to the South to remake the region in their own image is shattered by observing the individuals adapting to their surroundings and absorbing the culture and identity of the south. These individuals also provide more evidence that Confederates created a viable nationalism that bred loyalty and devotion among its [*sic*] citizens, since even Northerners with no previous ties to the South could still feel connected to the Confederacy. (5)

It is passing strange that Zimring can write about Confederate nationalism while downplaying the foundational importance of slavery and racism in its formation to begin with.

On the assimilation of native Northerners (at least within a convenient sample) as full Southerners in the antebellum period, Zimring declares that

At no time did they ever comprise more than a small percentage of the Confederate armies or the home front, yet they commanded the defenses of some of the most important cities in the Confederacy, including Charleston and Vicksburg. This did not happen by chance. Thanks to their years of assimilation into their adopted homes, these men had already established themselves as important figures in their Southern communities and as firm supporters of the Confederate cause. As a result, despite their backgrounds, Northern Confederates had little trouble serving in the ranks of their new country. (153)

1. Originally a Univ. of Virginia PhD dissertation (2011).

The author exaggerates the value of anecdotal evidence drawn from a small statistical sample (of a much larger subset of the Southern population) in arguing for a high level of loyalty to the South among emigrant Northerners. Toward the end of the book, Zimring states that the great majority of his sample of relocated Northerners continued to live at least part-time in the postwar South, even though they were, of course, free to move North. Unfortunately, the data tables in the book's appendix reveal that Zimring includes General Sherman, he of the devastating March to the Sea, among those who lived in both the North and the South after the Civil War (342). To construe the general's residency as evidence of his sympathy with a supposed Confederate identity vitiates both the evidence Zimring adduces and his analysis of it. The book's thesis requires a more precise definition of "residence" in the postwar South as well as a more robust evaluation of its real significance.

There are few, in any, studies of the phenomenon of Northern-born Southerners. For all its weaknesses, *To Live and Die in Dixie* does provide at least an initial examination of a sample of this large population and points a way forward for more careful researchers with better skills in statistical analysis. The passion and the novelty of Zimring's approach are most admirable, but his data and conclusions are badly flawed. For one, he does not establish that his sample is actually representative of the target population as a whole; he does not prove that most Northern-born Southerners were loyal to the South. General Sherman's mere postwar residency proves nothing about their loyalties or their acceptability to native Southerners in the period. This is a serious shortcoming in a book presented as a statistics-based analysis (13). Furthermore, Zimring has, he admits, deliberately chosen a sample set skewed toward Northerners who moved to the Deep South, not, as was far more typical, the Border South—according to data from the census of 1860 (13).

To Live and Die in Dixie is then an uneven achievement. In particular, it fails either to establish convincingly the potent appeal of Southern identity to native-born Northerners or to provide a rigorous, non-anecdotal analysis of its sample data. Nevertheless, David Ross Zimring does make a good case that the defeat of the Confederacy in 1865 made it impossible for Northern-born people to be as fully accepted as they had been prior to the war. Moreover, his introductory and closing chapters usefully clarify the fluid nature of antebellum sectional identity and the brittle strength of the Southern identity even today.