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Jaime Amanda Martinez, *Confederate Slave Impressment in the Upper South*. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2013. Pp. 233. ISBN 978-1-4696-1074-0.

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In this fresh look at a highly unpopular piece of legislation, Jaime Amanda Martinez (Univ. of North Carolina–Pembroke) examines how Confederate authorities enacted policies to impress slave laborers from their Virginia and North Carolina owners. She also describes the slaveholders' response to the policy and subsequent legislation, and how the debate over impressment led to increasingly powerful and centralized Confederate authority at the national and state levels despite opposition from slaveholders and states' rights proponents.

In order to maintain its war for independence, the Confederacy passed some much hated laws that sapped public support for the war among key constituencies. The government in Richmond conscripted men into the army, confiscated and burned cotton to deny it to the enemy, and seized food crops to provision its armies. Beyond their violation of civil liberties, these policies deprived agricultural communities of farm labor, depleted the civilian food supply, and caused demoralization, defeatism, and criticism of Confederate President Jefferson Davis's handling of the war. The burden of the legislation fell, more or less evenly, on the various regions and social classes of the Confederacy. One practice, however, affected a particular social class almost exclusively and had the potential to undermine the Confederate war effort.

Starting with local, then state, and finally national requests for laborers, the Confederate government impressed slaves from their owners to work on military projects and fortifications. Slaveholders objected, especially as the government's demands grew ever greater and more frequent. Their complaints were both vociferous and varied. Advocates of states' rights challenged the power of the national government to seize property without compensation and protested that the practice was not applied fairly—citizens who owned no slaves did not have to provide labor in some other form. The requisition of slave labor also denied slaveholders the means of generating wealth. The confiscation of food or cotton was one thing, since more could be grown, but taking the slaves themselves denied the owners the means of production. By extension, the loss of slaves as an economic asset also threatened the social status of slaveholders. After turning their slaves over to first the state and then the national government, they found new reasons to object to labor impressment. They claimed that slaves close to Union lines might take the opportunity to escape and that the government was harming their property by overworking the slaves and not providing them with proper food and clothing. Fearing for the security of their slave investment, owners appealed to their state governments for redress of grievance and used what legal channels existed to escape the execution of the law. In the end, however, the great majority complied.

Beyond describing how the Confederate state and national governments impressed slaves, Martinez, at the core of her discussion, explains how the Confederate leadership overcame opposition to the law in Virginia and North Carolina. In the early months of the war, when nationalistic fervor was at its highest, slaveholders willingly offered their slaves for local or state projects on the presumption that the war would be short and their slaves not far out of reach. At this point, appeals to patriotism and shared sacrifice usually sufficed to induce compliance. As the war continued, however, fewer owners voluntarily gave up their slaves, forcing the Virginia and North Carolina legislatures to enact laws regulating slave labor within their borders.

State impressment laws also clarified the states' position relative to the Confederate Army's Engineer Bureau, the primary recipient of slave labor; the Bureau's appetite for able bodies seemed insatiable. Eventually, the Confederate government became involved when Virginia and North Carolina lost the ability or the will to impress slaves from their owners, who held considerable influence in local politics. Backed by

the power of the national government, the governors of Virginia and North Carolina (most notably Zebulon Vance of North Carolina, who enjoyed a reputation as a states' rights advocate) actively executed local and national laws governing the impressment of slaves, while at the same time easing the economic blow with financial compensation and guarantees of good treatment of impressed slaves. The authorities also made impressment more equitable by granting exclusions or reducing quotas for slave laborers when and where warranted. The author demonstrates, for instance, that slaveholders in counties near Union lines were exempted from the law more frequently than those in relatively secure counties. Where incentives and appeals to patriotism did not work, threats of jail time and fines often did. Martinez argues that the considerable number of slaves accumulated under the authority of the state indicated the growing centralization of Confederate power as the war continued. This hints at other possible economic and/or social vicissitudes had Confederate power been so concentrated earlier in the war.

Martinez has a couple of particularly good discussions in the book. In chapter 3, on the impact of impressment on agricultural production, she describes how the loss of slave labor hurt the Confederate war effort and proved the centrality of slavery in Southern life. Slaveholders are often characterized as upper-class planters invested in cotton, but Martinez shows that slaves were vital to the production of all commodities and that their diversion to non-agricultural projects inflicted hardships on all social classes. Such universal privation underscores the concern to preserve slavery as a prime motive for Southern independence: one did not need to be a slaveholder to benefit from slave labor.

In her epilogue, Martinez considers the presence of impressed slaves in the recent "black Confederates" narrative. While the loss of slave labor badly damaged Confederate agriculture during the war, the postwar Lost Cause mythology downplayed slavery as a reason for secession. Among more recent efforts in this direction is the ludicrous claim that thousands of slaves served willingly in the Confederate Army. While many competent historians have thoroughly debunked this fantasy, Martinez ends her book with a pointed analysis of the misrepresentation of impressed slaves as "soldiers" by those seeking to alter the historical narrative of the Civil War.

Certain elements of the book are unclear or debatable. Defining the "upper South" as only Virginia and North Carolina (omitting Tennessee and Arkansas) is a bit geographically selective. Also, Martinez breaks no new ground with her thesis of growing centralization of Confederate political power. Most troubling, however, is that, while she shows impressment was generally achieved in Virginia and North Carolina, she neglects the wider context of other states in the Confederacy, where it was often an abject failure. Virginia and North Carolina were the exceptions, not the rule. Martinez's contention that impressment succeeded due to the centralization of Confederate authority is not entirely convincing. The efficacy of the government in its own back yard is not proof of the wisdom of centralization, since impressment failed elsewhere *despite* centralization. Martinez also asserts that compliant slaveholders made the impressment campaign effective—"Even though most failed to meet their full quotas, ... they recognized the importance of slave impressment, however unpleasant, to the continued defense of the Confederacy" (112). But obedience to the law need not equal support for the law (Prohibition comes to mind); as the author's own statistics show, government calls for slave laborers often did not meet stipulated quotas.

These criticisms aside, as a regional history, *Confederate Slave Impressment in the Upper South* provides a detailed and suggestive analysis of the relevance of slave labor to the failure and success of the Southern war effort and to the economic and social history of the Confederacy.