

Wade Hampton: Confederate Warrior to Southern Redeemer

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Review

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Andrew, Rod, Jr. *Wade Hampton: Confederate Warrior to Southern Redeemer.*
University of North Carolina Press, \$40.00 hardcover ISBN 978080783193

The Life of Wade Hampton

This is a first-rate biography of a valiant Confederate soldier, a great plantation and slave owner, and a consummate politician—Wade Hampton of South Carolina. Grandson of a Revolutionary War general and son of one of the wealthiest planters in the South, Hampton owned extensive property in Mississippi as well as in his own state. He was endowed with a magnificent physique and a sound mind; he was alleged to be so strong that he could make a horse groan simply by squeezing it between the thighs. He once killed a bear with only his knife. He was a superb horseman and a dead shot with firearms. He was the incarnation of the southern ideal of manhood.

Hampton was not a southern fire-eater on the issue of secession, though he, like the vast majority of the southern population, believed in the right of a state to secede. He opposed separation when the sectional crisis came but accepted it when South Carolina resorted to it. He was not a West Pointer and he entered the Confederate army as a private soldier. But through merit he rose to the rank of lieutenant general and became the commander of Gen. Robert E. Lee's cavalry following the death of Gen. Jeb Stuart at Yellow Tavern in the spring of 1864. Hampton was one of the most formidable of southern generals and the preeminent Civil War hero of his state.

After the war he emerged, by popular demand, as the state's dominant political figure. Just as he had not been an ardent secessionist, he was not an ardent supporter of violence or fraud in opposing the Reconstruction political administrations of South Carolina. Indeed, he advocated racial harmony, appealed to the blacks for their votes, and promised them protection of their civil rights. He kept these promises, at least in token.

Yet as governor he averted his eyes as many blacks were subjected to the violence of the armed "red shirts" and the ballot boxes were stuffed with fraudulent votes to place and keep the Democrats in office. Later, in the United States Senate he preached sectional reconciliation and the virtues of the Lost Cause. Ironically, he eventually lost his political dominance to the radical racist Benjamin R. Tillman. But in the hearts of his fellow South Carolinians he retained his status as an incomparable military paladin and as the "Redeemer" of the state from the clutches of the Carpetbagger, Scalawags, and blacks.

The work is drawn from impressive research in both primary and secondary sources and deep reflection of the findings. It is well organized and written in an engaging style. The author asserts in his preface that Hampton's lifelong motivation grew out of the southern planter ethos with its emphasis on paternalism, honor, and chivalry. These threads are skillfully woven throughout the text to explain the subject's behavior in every phase of his life.

No book, of course, is perfect, and this one is not an exception to that rule. It might have provided a broader perspective for explaining Hampton's behavior after the Civil War by offering more discussion of the nationwide racism and flagrant political corruption of the Grant era. Though the book appears to be virtually free of factual errors, it is not altogether free of them. The one that most strikingly catches the reviewer's eye occurs on page 102 where it confuses the name of Gen. Fitz John Porter of the Union army with that of Admiral David Porter of the Union navy.

This is, withal, a volume that ought to be in the library of any serious student of the Civil War.

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