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## Nation Within A Nation: The American South and the Federal Government

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## *Nation Within A Nation: The American South and the Federal Government*

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Edited by Glenn Feldman. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014. Pp. ix, 354. \$74.95. ISBN 0-8130-4987-8.)

Reviewed by Chris Perry

THE IDEA of Southern Exceptionalism remains a contentious subject for many historians of the Southern United States. Though important, the idea can be summarized simply: is the culture of the South truly distinctive from the rest of the country? Glenn Feldman makes his case in *Nation Within A Nation: The American South and the Federal Government* by demonstrating, rather effectively, the South's unique and sometimes peculiar relationship with the federal government. Feldman compiles an impressive array of essays written by scholars in the areas of Southern history, political science, and economics in order to properly analyze the South's "sometimes tortured relationship with the federal government" (2). He divides the book into five sections presented in chronological order beginning with the early American republic and ending with current events, including the Tea party movement. Feldman provides a provocative and illuminating window into Southern Exceptionalism as it relates to the federal government. It bears similarity to Wilbur J. Cash's reference to a pseudo-Southern nationalism ideology in "The Mind of the South" (1929) in which Cash states that the South was "not quite a nation within a nation, but the next thing to it" (9).

The first section consists of Thomas F. Schaller's essay on the history of South Carolina's relationship with the federal government. Schaller portrays South Carolina as an antagonist in this relationship, a position that has been consistent since the days of the early Republic.

South Carolina seceded from the Union before any other Southern state prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, with the first shots fired on its soil at Fort Sumter. Later in the state's history, South Carolinians considered Harry Truman un-American; favored racial segregation; and embraced symbols such as John C. Calhoun, Strom Thurmond and the Confederate battle flag – emphasizing the uniqueness of South Carolina and the entire South as a whole. From Calhoun all the way to Thurmond, South Carolina distinguishes itself when compared to other states in the union. Feldman's inclusion of this essay provides a proving ground to the thesis, using South Carolina as the test case.

The second section, entitled "Race, War, and Culture," contains essays by Zachary C. Smith, Jason Morgan Ward, Rebecca Miller Davis, and Chris Danielson. Smith delineates the extreme rhetoric of populist Georgia Senator Tom Watson as straddling the line between sanity and "full blown psychosis" (69). However, Watson's influence on the Southern tradition of battling for economic and political independence from the federal government cannot be underestimated. Ward connects the opposition to state intervention into personal, social and economic affairs. He cites the rhetoric of Georgia governor Eugene Talmadge in his attempts to stigmatize Roosevelt's New Deal, anti-Lyndon Johnson and Great Society sentiment in the 1960s and 70s, and hostility toward President Obama today. Davis and Danielson both scrutinize the effect that shifting Democratic Party ideologies had on Mississippi's swing to

the Republican Party. However, Davis argues that the shift occurred gradually for twenty years before the signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 by Lyndon Johnson, while Danielson contends that the process of building a Republican majority in Mississippi continued well into the 1980s. The essays contained in section two provide a blueprint for the idea of Southern Exceptionalism and how it relates to an anti-statist philosophy so entrenched in the South that it shepherded in an era in which the South embraced the party of Lincoln as its savior.

In section three, Fred Arthur Bailey pens a fascinating essay on the influence of Texas literary figure and political philosopher Melvin E. Bradford. He claims that Bradford “emerged as an influential scholar whose interpretations of American history would at century’s end help inspire a neo-Confederate resurgence” (181). The Bailey composition complements the additional essay in the section “The Evil Empire Within” by David R. Jansson. Jansson explores the growth of Southern Nationalism and why it directly resulted from the region’s experience of perceived betrayal and oppression in dealing with Washington and the federal government. As Jansson points out, the maltreatment of Southern African-Americans and Native Americans is all too real. The Southern White perception that leads to the idea of Southern nationalism remains another thing entirely. This connects the Bailey and Jansson essays and reinforces Feldman’s thesis. Bradford “longed for a South freed from oppressive forms of northern egalitarianism and bound once again by a glorious Anglo-Saxon order to the exclusion of all other races” (199). Likewise, “from the perspective of Southern nationalists, the white South constitutes a fundamentally different culture from the rest of the country, one that is true to the founding ideals of the United States” (223). Clearly, the specter of race inundates Southern Exceptionalism and the conflict between the South and the federal government.

An antithetical section four focuses on economic development and reform. Chapters by Martin T. Olliff, Matthew L. Downs, and Gregory L. Richard concisely demonstrate that the relationship between the South and the federal government, as it relates to economic issues, has proven beneficial, productive and benign. While seeming at odds with the general contention of the book, Feldman has strategically positioned this information to demonstrate that Southern Exceptionalism is not a myth (something also widely debated), but an empirical fact. The South and the federal government share a unique symbiotic relationship. Feldman writes that the South has a “basically dual personality when it comes to the federal government: one of persistent resistance, even antagonism, as well as one of reliance and even dependency. What follows is endlessly fascinating as well as often disquieting. It suggests that, perhaps, there is a psychological link (rather than a disconnect) between the magnitude of southern dependence on Washington and the region’s famed contempt for and fear of the federal government” (15). One of the most brilliant portions of the book, section four reinforces the thesis by providing an opposing viewpoint.

The final section of the book explores the Tea Party movement and its taxes with essays by Allan B. McBride and Natalie Motise Davis. McBride’s essay demonstrates the similarity of Tea Party support in both the North and South. It appears that data showing approval or disapproval of President Obama is quite similar across the country. This is salient because the most recent incarnation of the Tea Party was a direct result of discontent with the election and subsequent policies of Obama. What is to be made of McBride’s poll numbers that indicate the political beliefs of Southerners on key issues are not at all distinct from national numbers? In the introduction, Feldman responds by saying, “the South repeatedly registers more intense anti-Obama and anti-statist feelings than other parts of the

country. While the data set used here shows these differences to be small among Tea Partiers of various regions, the more important point may be the consistency of such regional differences” (14). Additionally, the data may be affected by race. According to Feldman, “because blacks are not factored out of what are discussed as southern data, southern numbers on matters of Obama, government regulation, and the free market may be unduly ‘liberalized’ compared to what they would be had the data polled only southern whites” (14). Davis’ essay, “Deal or no Deal,” examines the idea that federal dollars returned to states are typically not equal to the amount of tax dollars contributed by their respective taxpayers. An interesting conclusion develops, because according to Davis her data shows, “the states most likely to benefit the most from this redistribution are the original eleven states of the Confederacy” (327). However, most Alabamians do not believe that they are receiving their fair share. This seems to be the result of “right wing authoritarianism” that is present in Alabama and throughout the South (340). The final essay in this section, while interesting, could have been omitted. The information was thought-provoking, but it seemed a bit disjointed when considering the totality of this fine collection.

Glenn Feldman’s *Nation Within A Nation: The American South and the Federal Government* is both provocative and informative. The synthesis of scholarship is extremely well done and Feldman clearly and concisely supports the thesis of Southern Exceptionalism as it relates to the relationship of the South and the federal government. A few critiques have been noted, but overall this work demonstrates outstanding scholarship. Furthermore, it could be criticized that the book contains political bias, however, the material provides a clear conclusion. Feld-

man only went where the evidence led him.<sup>1</sup>

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1 This review has been performed posthumously, as Glenn Feldman passed away in October of 2015. I have encountered many fine people in my time at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, but none finer than he. He was not only a professor, mentor and unmatched scholar, but he was also my friend. He deeply enriched my academic pursuits and my intellectual curiosity. The world will not be as bright without him in it, and he will be greatly missed. Rest in peace, my friend.