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Corinne Fox

James L. Abrahamson's *Men of Secession and Civil War* chronicled the events and politics immediately preceding the American Civil War. Each chapter of the text highlighted a few individuals and their contributions to the state of the union from 1859 to the outbreak of war. Abrahamson focused on the growth of the rebellious spirit, the utter collapse of national unity, the men who had a key role in evoking secessionist sentiments, and those who supported the union and opposed its dissolution. In addition to this, Abrahamson's second premise addressed the chain reaction that occurred after the election of 1860, specifically the initial secession of the Deep South, the refusal of Lincoln to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Confederacy, and the subsequent response by the remaining slave states in the Upper South.

In Part One of *Men of Secession*, "Prelude to Disunion," Abrahamson addressed two key events that fueled the animosity between the slave South and the free North: John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry and the Dred Scott Supreme Court case. The slave insurrection led by John Brown was, so the South believed, only the first of many seditious Northern plots. Abrahamson examined Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry with the aided perspective of a Republican Ohio senator, Salmon Chase. Although a humanitarian at heart, Chase identified Brown's acts as criminal and an attempt to rouse disunion sentiments. Unfortunately, Chase's conciliatory attitude never fully penetrated the South, and many Southerners began to view the entire Northern population as abolitionists. On the other hand, Abrahamson described the Dred Scott decision where Chief Justice Taney infamously rebuked Congress for the unconstitutionality of the Missouri compromise and slavery in the territories. This move appeased Southerners, but stoked Northern fear of the South's relentless pursuit to expand the legality of slavery.

Part Two of Abrahamson's book delved into the heart of the secession campaign. Fire-eaters like Barnwell Rhett spread rumors and exaggerations across the South that imbedded devastating fear of northern Republicans into planters and yeomen alike. The unionist efforts of Stephen Douglas and John Bell acquired them some followers but not enough for a substantial showing in the election of

1860. The Democratic Party split with Stephen Douglas and John Breckinridge running in direct opposition along purely regional lines. Bell, a southern unionist, ran as the nominated candidate of the Constitutional Unionist party. With the election of Lincoln, the fire-eaters went to work and successfully convinced the cotton South that their worst fears of emancipation and levied federal power would come to fruition. South Carolina, not waiting for a unified southern response, was the first state to officially secede from the union.

Secessionist threats, conventions, and rallies did not keep Congress from drafting compromise proposals. In Part Three, "The Road to War," Abrahamson introduced John Crittenden, his failed compromise, the attack on Fort Sumter, and the secession debates in the Upper South. By the time of Crittenden's Compromise, few delegates from the seceded states had any interest in reconciliation. The new Confederacy was working to draft a constitution and establish a government. Even the components of the compromise that included keeping slavery as a federally sanctioned institution and upholding the Missouri Compromise standards for the expansion of slavery into the territories could not entice them to strike a bargain with the Union. Their focus instead switched to seizing federal arsenals. Lincoln, Abrahamson notes, opposed unnecessary violence but was determined to protect the federal property at Fort Sumter in South Carolina, Fort Pickens in Florida, and two other forts in the Florida Keys. The Confederate firing on Fort Sumter led to significant internal struggles among the Border States and the secession of four additional Upper South states. This act of aggression by the Confederacy also led Lincoln to request 75,000 90-day militiamen for what he thought would be a three-month war.

Abrahamson did an excellent job presenting the events and protagonists of the years immediately leading up to the Civil War in a clear and concise manner. This book is a great resource for students looking for a foundation on this subject in a single location. This reviewer's sole critique of this text was that as a graduate student, one would find little new information not previously encountered in academic studies on the subject of Antebellum America. However, one would appreciate the material provided in one condensed location for future research, and the background information Abrahamson provided on the men highlighted in his text offered readers a clearer understanding of why they supported either unionism or secession. The work elegantly humanized and personalized the struggles, both internally and politically, experienced by these famed men.