

## Performing Disunion

This book traces how and why the secession of the South during the American Civil War was accomplished at ground level through the actions of ordinary men. Adopting a microhistorical approach, Lawrence T. McDonnell connects small events in new ways – placing one company of the secessionist Minute Men in historical context, exploring the political and cultural dynamics of their choices. Each chapter presents little-known characters whose lives and decisions were crucial to the history of Southern disunion. McDonnell asks readers to consider the past with fresh eyes, analyzing the structure and dynamics of social networks and social movements. He presents the dissolution of the Union through new events, actors, issues, and ideas, illuminating the social contradictions that cast the South's most conservative city as the radical heart of Dixie.

Lawrence T. McDonnell is an assistant professor in the history department at Iowa State University.

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# Performing Disunion

*The Coming of the Civil War in Charleston,  
South Carolina*

LAWRENCE T. McDONNELL

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*For Kathy,  
All I want in this Creation ...*

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In my memory, Maggie and Lina are outside the window as I write, flashing across the prairie in pursuit of a swallow. They have been zooming and zigzagging from first light, every day since spring came. They're lightning fast, even for border collies, but the birds stay just out of reach. No matter: my dogs love the challenge, and are happiest flat out on the run. To catch their quarry would be anticlimactic, even distressing, I think. The game would be over, and with it the delight and thrill of play.

Magnolia and Carolina are gone to rest now, yet I play on after their example, doggedly, delightedly overwhelmed by joy and wonder. My chase has brought me here for a breather before the next good, wild run. My whole being pants thanks. This book has been a labor of love, and I am so glad to embrace those who make possible the jubilant race that is my life and work, and share its bewildering twists and turns. Ultimately, I have been no more successful than my dogs in catching what I have pursued, but perhaps I see it clearer now than at the start of my run. I'll take understanding over knowledge any day. Tomorrow I will be back out there, tearing after something else I may never quite bring to ground. That is the private happiness I find in history.

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*Acknowledgments*

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Three decades ago, at a big conference in New York, I looked up to see Bertram Wyatt-Brown and Charles Joyner striding like gods through a crowded book exhibit. Suddenly they broke into grins, grabbed me – a poor, mortal grad student – by the elbows, and said, “let's have lunch!” We crashed a real Mafia joint that day, quite appropriately, and over precise food and sharp debate, I found that I'd made true friends. Across decades and continents, drinks and contretemps, Bert and Chaz and I sparked and hummed, late at night when the bars cleared out, or in the fireworks of memorable conference sessions. They taught me about honor and slavery, writing and chutzpah. I cheer and battle them in this book, and miss them both.

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As to Orville Vernon Burton, there is just no point in writing anything here at all. It is entirely beyond telling – the tallest, most inspiring tale anyone could dream up, and then some. Vernon has been to me a brilliant mentor and the dearest of friends. Plus, he can clog, and care, and cook, and write, and laugh, and pray, and make us all *live* a little better, like nobody's business. I am proud to call him my teacher.

I never actually studied with Eugene D. Genovese, but he was by my side from Alpha to Omega – scoffing at my “Trotskyist tricks” and encouraging my “history of the world” when everyone else doubted. We got each other at first glance in 1981, and built a bond that was intense and enduring. Always the truest of friends, Gene shared his hospitality, brilliance, and wicked wit in ways that challenged and delighted me. I miss our quiet martinis and growling talks about purpose and passion. More than anyone, I learned from Gene, not least the truth of Gramsci's *dictum*, “Pessimism of the spirit, optimism of the will!” Thanks, comrade.

*Acknowledgments*

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I am grateful, finally, to those I love best. *Performing Disunion* focuses steadily on double-minded men and the folly of their choices. Yet it would not exist without the hope, love, and courage of four remarkable women. Barbara Johnston Croft was there long before the beginning of this work, asking smart, tough questions, barring us both from the compromises that would have put me on an easier path. Carol Lee Yu-fen has been my neighbor, friend, guide, and teacher. This work owes so much to her wisdom, love, and unfailing support.

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## Abbreviations

<i>AHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
Allston MSS	Robert Francis Withers Allston Papers
Baker, HU	Baker Library, Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
BFM	Board of Fire Masters Minutes, Records of the City of Charleston Fire Department, CCPL
Bonham MSS	Milledge Luke Bonham Papers, SCL
CCL	College of Charleston Library, Charleston, South Carolina
CCPL	Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, South Carolina
<i>CDC</i>	<i>Charleston Daily Courier</i>
<i>CG</i>	<i>Charleston City Gazette</i>
<i>ChM</i>	<i>Chess Monthly</i>
CLS	Charleston Library Society, Charleston, South Carolina
<i>CM</i>	<i>Charleston Mercury</i>
CM	Charleston Museum Library, Charleston, South Carolina
CPL	Cleveland Public Library, Cleveland, Ohio
<i>CTWC</i>	<i>Charleston Tri-Weekly Courier</i>
CU	Special Collections, Strom Thurmond Institute, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina
<i>CWH</i>	<i>Civil War History</i>

Dalton, DU	Harry L. and Mary K. Dalton Collection, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina
DBR	<i>DeBow's Review</i>
DSC	<i>Columbia Daily South Carolinian</i>
DU	William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina
EA	<i>Edgefield Advertiser</i>
EU	R. W. Woodruff Library for Advanced Studies, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia
GHS	Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia
Hammond MSS	James Henry Hammond Papers
<i>House Journal</i>	<i>Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of South Carolina</i>
HTC	Harvard Theatre Collection, Nathan Pusey Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
HU	Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
JSH	<i>Journal of Southern History</i>
LC	Library of Congress, Washington, DC
Miles MSS	William Porcher Miles Papers, SHC
NA	National Archives, Washington, DC
NCSA	North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina
NYH	<i>New York Herald</i>
NYT	<i>New York Times</i>
NYTR	<i>New York Tribune</i>
OR	U.S. War Department, <i>The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies</i> . 128 parts in 70 vols. Washington, DC, 1880–1901
PAJ	<i>Photographic Art Journal</i>
Perry MSS	Benjamin Franklin Perry Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama
RG 109	War Department Collection of Confederate Records
Rhett MSS	Robert Barnwell Rhett Papers, SCL
RM	<i>Russell's Magazine</i>
SCDAH	South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina

*Abbreviations*

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SCHM	<i>South Carolina Historical Magazine</i>
SCHS	South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina
SCL	South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina
SHC	Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina
SHSW	State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin
<i>SotT</i>	<i>Spirit of the Times</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Greenville Southern Patriot</i>
<i>SPC</i>	<i>Charleston Southern Patriot</i>
<i>SQR</i>	<i>Southern Quarterly Review</i>
TU	Howard Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana
UGA	Hargrett Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia
Wildman MSS	Zalmon Wildman Papers, SCL

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