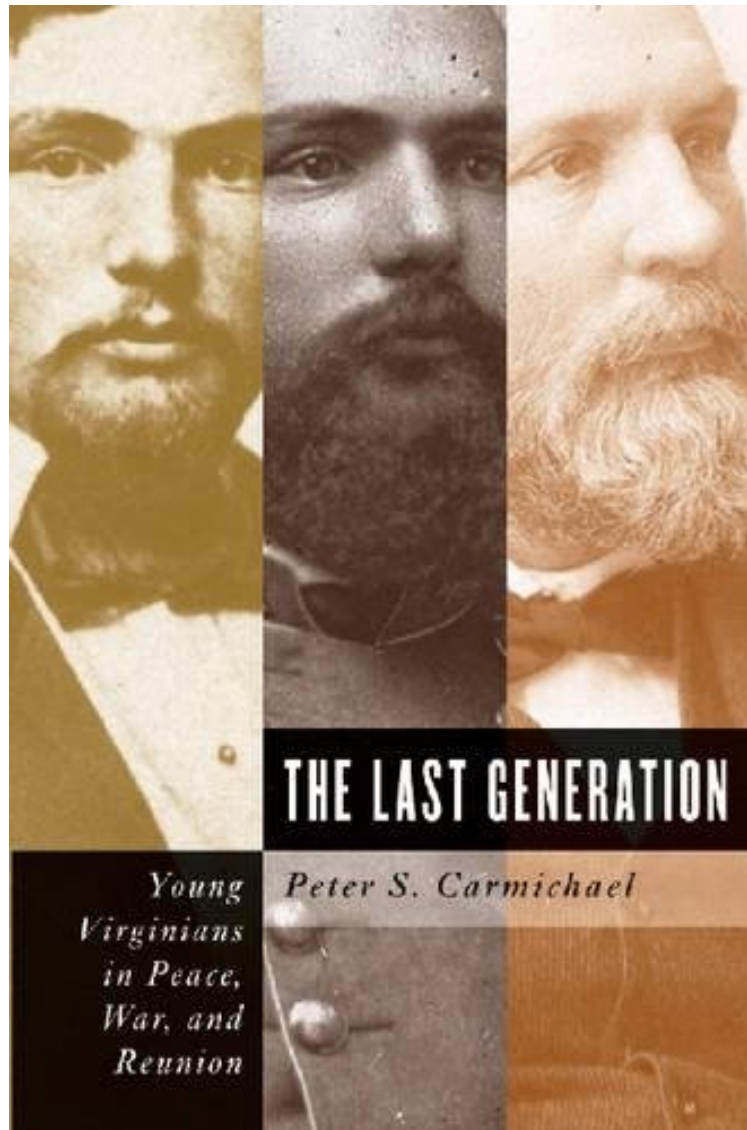


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The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace, War, and Reunion (Civil War America)

Peter S. Carmichael

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Peter S. Carmichael : The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace, War, and Reunion (Civil War America) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace, War, and Reunion (Civil War America):

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. It's OKBy Thomas P. MyersDecent collateral reading but not an essential book. I often found myself thinking, "get on with it!"I would have liked to know more about this sample,

probably in appendix. Who was in it? What was their family background? The 1850 and 1860 census would provide useful data about family wealth and position of child in family. How is the sample among colleges balanced? 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A Fresh Perspective on Virginians Before, During, and After Civil War By gburgalum01I owned this book for three years, and after only recently picking it up to read it, I realized what I was missing out on during that time. This is a fresh and descriptive analysis of the young Virginia generation before, during, and after the war. As one who has read dozens of books on the Civil War, it was this one more than any other that best explains how and why Virginians formed their fundamental opinions of their native state, the Southern region, and Northern industrialism during the antebellum period. Through their viewpoint that Virginia's reputation and standing in the Union was diminished during the period prior to the war, it becomes clear that the war gave these young Virginians an opportunity to improve the status of their commonwealth while cementing their place among men in their state. Though one often gets the perception through Carmichael's writing that these were overzealous, egotistical young men, their conduct in the war brings to fruition their importance in the New South. Carmichael's writing is interesting and well-detailed with a wide variety of excellent material from both primary and secondary sources. His inclusion of statistics on the members of the last generation provides ample insight into the professions, religious affiliation, and other important data on the members of the last generation. Even more than "For Cause and Comrades" by James McPherson, this book will expose why a reluctant Virginia joined the Confederacy and explains clearly how the young Virginia generation almost pushed the South to ultimate victory. 7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. A New Look at the Civil War By Nathan Marshburn In his book, "The Last Generation," Peter Carmichael explores the psyche, values, goals and visions of the young caucasian men of Virginia who came into adulthood just as our nation descended into the Civil War. Born to privilege in the 1830s and early 1840s, these men were in colleges and schools across Virginia and the nation when the crisis of secession reached its apex in 1860 and 1861. Once the war started, they served as junior officers in the Army of Northern Virginia, leading their peers into combat and fighting alongside them. The book is a generational study and an examination of Confederate nationalism in the young Virginians. Carmichael first takes us through the 1850s, a time when young Virginians worried about the future of their state and their place in it. They watched as the North increasingly distanced itself from Virginia through industrialization and internal improvements. They feared that Virginia, the home state of four of the first five U.S. presidents, was becoming moribund under the leadership of its elders, "old fogies" who lived on past glories of events such as the American Revolution and who encouraged unthinking opposition to change even at the expense of educational and economic reform. At the same time, the young Virginians had to find a way to reconcile slavery, the system upon which they depended for their wealth and social standing, with the free labor system of the North. Some of the strongest points in Carmichael's book delineate how these men did just this. Their belief that slavery was sanctioned by the Bible as necessary because God had created races to be inherently unequal, coupled with their belief that Southerners were God's chosen people, sustained many young soldiers throughout the war. Even as it became clear in 1864 and 1865 that the war would be lost, Carmichael cites examples that show these men could not distinguish between their religious beliefs and political nationalism. To the end, many young Virginians believed that God would not allow the North to be victorious. Young Virginians sincerely believed that theirs was a unique Christian society trying to survive in a godless world. The book is careful to point out that young Virginians gave considerable thought to secession and do not fit the traditional stereotype of secondary scholars who say young Southerners were drawn to the flame of secession like boys playing with fire. The book looks at the leadership style of young Virginians once the war started. Examples are cited of how they maintained order and discipline in the ranks, what they thought of battle and death, and how they maintained their morale through defeats. Some colorful anecdotes are also included in "The Last Generation": Jeb Stuart's thoughts on women while he was a cadet in West Point, NY; the president of Washington College and his comical attempt to control the secession frenzy sweeping his campus; the notion of body building by young Virginians in college as a way to "muscularize" and "masculinize" their Christianity. In the final chapter of the book, Carmichael examines the fate of various members of the Last Generation who managed to survive the war. He explains how they adjusted to Reconstruction. The romanticized, "Moonlight and Magnolias" view of some ex-Confederates is contrasted with those who wished Virginia to take a new role of leadership and have the economy of the state resemble more closely that of the North. This book contributes greatly to the discussion of why some Southerners fought the war- a question which will probably always be debated. Through diligent research and thorough explanation, Carmichael presents a new picture of a generation of Southerners of the Civil War era. His book takes into account many factors that made "The Last Generation" distinct from their Northern counterparts and from the older Virginians who preceded them. It is an important book on dispelling stereotypes of the young Confederates and in understanding the complexity of the South as a whole.

Challenging the popular conception of Southern youth on the eve of the Civil War as intellectually lazy, violent, and dissipated, Peter S. Carmichael looks closely at the lives of more than one hundred young white men from Virginia's last generation to grow up with the institution of slavery. He finds them deeply engaged in the political, economic, and cultural forces of their time. Age, he concludes, created special concerns for young men who spent their formative

years in the 1850s. Before the Civil War, these young men thought long and hard about Virginia's place as a progressive slave society. They vigorously lobbied for disunion despite opposition from their elders, then served as officers in the Army of Northern Virginia as frontline negotiators with the nonslaveholding rank and file. After the war, however, they quickly shed their Confederate radicalism to pursue the political goals of home rule and New South economic development and reconciliation. Not until the turn of the century, when these men were nearing the ends of their lives, did the mythmaking and storytelling begin, and members of the last generation recast themselves once more as unreconstructed Rebels. By examining the lives of members of this generation on personal as well as generational and cultural levels, Carmichael sheds new light on the formation and reformation of Southern identity during the turbulent last half of the nineteenth century.

[An] engaging and original study. . . . Full of new insights.--Register of Kentucky Historical Society Peter S. Carmichael provides an important contribution to both subfields [social and military history] and in doing so enhances the reader's appreciation of the Civil War as the nation's seminal event.--American Historical Carmichael's book is an important vehicle for understanding the relationship between proslavery thought in higher education and the Civil War.-- s in American History Carmichael reviews the experience of young Virginians, 'the last generation of white Southerners to grow up with . . . slavery.'--Washington Times Deeply researched and well-argued. . . . This well-written and sensitively argued study should be required reading for all scholars of Southern history and the Civil War.-- Journal of Military History [Carmichael] contributes significantly to ongoing debates about southern identity, secession, and social, cultural, and ideological continuity across the tumultuous years of Civil War and Reconstruction. . . . Carmichael's engaging study reminds us that there were many versions of southern manliness and honor and many roads to secession.--Journal of American History This excellent study will confirm what teenagers have known forever; that parents are just not cool.--The NYMAS This fascinating book creatively tackles a number of old chestnuts in the historiography of the Civil War era: the late-blooming Southern nationalism in the Upper South, the role of slavery in Southern ideology, and the postwar reunion between the North and the South. Carmichael provides valuable reinterpretations of Southern religion and honor.--Civil War History Peter Carmichael has written a useful, sometimes penetrating, account of Virginia males who came of age shortly before secession and the Civil War. . . . The Last Generation sheds new light on Virginia politics and society during the era of sectional conflict.--North Carolina Historical Using a generational approach to study the motivations and actions of the South's most diehard defenders, Carmichael both enlightens and entertains.--North and South Carmichael should be congratulated for offering fresh insights and interpretations that will engage southern and Civil War historians for some time to come. . . . An important, insightful book. It does what a good work of Civil War history should do: it shines new light on an oft-studied period so that we see it in a new way, thus opening up new avenues of thought and potential research.--H-South A significant book, a work of intellectual history that explores the beliefs of an important group of Confederates. The narrative moves well and is thought-provoking. Highly recommended.--The Virginian An impressive study that illuminates the lost world of young Virginians. . . . This 'generational study' paints a fascinating social, political, and intellectual portrait of Virginia over the course of several decades. . . . The Last Generation is unquestionably an important study. Carmichael's lucid writing, sharp analysis, and stimulating interpretations make this a welcome contribution to the history of the nineteenth-century South.--Southern Historian A well-researched and intriguing study. . . . An ambitious project.--Georgia Historical Quarterly All readers will appreciate [Carmichael's] creative and often compelling re-reading of letters and diaries to find a common worldview within a generation.--Journal of Southern History Carmichael's look at Virginia's 'last generation'--men born between 1830 and 1842, who grew up with the institution of slavery and reached political maturity during the intra-party convulsions of the 1850s--offers a . . . complex and multifaceted understanding. . . . His work will stand as a compelling description of the motivations and mentalities of the men who clamored loudest for Virginia's entry into the war, and then labored hardest to pull it out of the wreckage.--Civil War Times A careful examination. . . . By stressing the economically based generational component of the Old Dominion's late antebellum political culture, Carmichael has added a new dimension to an old discussion.--Southern Quarterly The hypothesis that there was a strong generational component to the secessionist movement appears frequently in the historiography, and yet no scholar, until Carmichael, has tried to systematically evaluate it. The most important contribution of this provocative book is the way the author uses the 'last generation' to demonstrate that the credo of Southern rights had varied meanings in the South.--Elizabeth R. Varon, Temple University This superb book tells a new story of the coming, fighting, and aftermath of the Civil War, revealing generational dimensions we have never seen before. Carmichael's remarkable research, subtle touch, and clear-eyed interpretation are gifts to everyone interested in understanding the war's larger meanings.--Edward L. Ayers, University of Virginia From the Inside Flap Looking closely at over one hundred young white Virginians who came of age in the 1850s and '60s, Carmichael argues that the experiences and the characteristics of the last generation to grow up with the institution of slavery force us to reexamine the nature of Southern manhood and the approach and aftermath of the Civil War.