

[Kenzer on Decredico, 'Confederate Citadel: Richmond and Its People at War'](#)

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Mary A. Decredico. *Confederate Citadel: Richmond and Its People at War*. New Directions In Southern History Series. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2020. Illustrations. 224 pp. \$50.00

(cloth), [ISBN 978-0-8131-7925-4](https://www.amazon.com/dp/9780813179254). 

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Given that over the last fifty years at least four books have been written about Richmond, Virginia, in the Civil War era, there should be no doubt of the city's critical role during the conflict. Emory M. Thomas wrote the first of these four works (*The Confederate State of Richmond: A Biography of the Capital* [1971]), and his book remained the primary study for another twenty-five years until Ernest B. Furgurson completed his study (*Ashes of Glory: Richmond at War* [1996]). Now, in the last two years, Stephen V. Ash (*Rebel Richmond: Life and Death in the Confederate Capital* [2019]) and Mary A. DeCredico have added their histories of wartime Richmond to the existing scholarship.[1]

Since all four of these works focus on the same events, themes, and personalities and rely on many of the same primary sources, what makes DeCredico's work different? The answer is found in its length and chronological approach. DeCredico's work is by far the shortest of the four books, about half the length of Furgurson's *Ashes of Glory*. Accordingly, it simply cannot go into the depth of any of the other works. While Furgurson and Ash present the community's history from a largely topical approach, DeCredico, like Thomas before her, follows a strict chronological format as each of her five chapters trace one year of the war.

DeCredico's chronological format allows the reader to engage with themes in multiple time frames. For example, DeCredico, like each of her predecessors, emphasizes Richmond's growing food shortages. Her chronological approach highlights the topics multiple times throughout the book, each time within the specific chapter's time frame. This approach encourages readers to be sensitive to the specific events that shaped these themes. This is best seen in chapter 3, covering 1863, and chapter 4, examining 1864. Chapter 3 describes how the spring food riots led directly to the city council instituting poor relief efforts. Likewise, chapter 4 notes how in 1864 poor weather conditions "delayed the spring campaigning season" but also posed "new challenges" as "heavy rains ... menaced crop land" and "did little to alleviate the food shortages in the Confederate capital" (p. 108). Hence, it becomes evident how the same weather conditions that benefited the Confederate military meant starvation for Richmond's civilians.

While DeCredico's book does not contain an overriding new thesis, it successfully complements her predecessors' findings that Richmond served as the center of the Confederate government and

military and played a critical role in industrial production, commerce, and hospitals, and as a location for holding prisoners of war. Though it is unlikely that another book will chronicle wartime Richmond for the foreseeable future, there are still aspects of how the community experienced the war that future scholars should examine. For example, all of the books noted above discuss the tremendous population growth Richmond experienced, from just under forty thousand inhabitants on the eve of the war to more than one hundred thousand near its conclusion. It then declined to a bit more than fifty thousand in 1870. None of the authors have tried to link the 1860 inhabitants through the war years to see who remained and left. Another topic for future exploration is the city's business community. What 1860 firms lasted through the war? Neither of these topics may be worthy of another book, but they do suggest valuable points of further inquiry.

Note

[1]. For a review of Ash's book, see Michael E. Woods's H-Net review at <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=54431>.

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