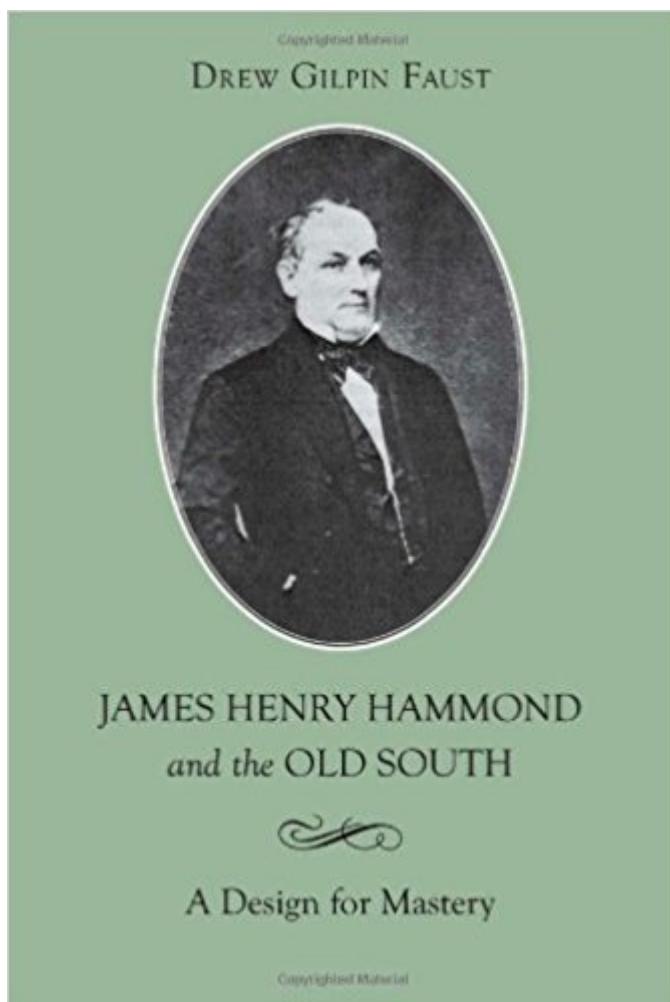


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James Henry Hammond And The Old South: A Design For Mastery (Southern Biography Series)



Synopsis

From his birth in 1807 to his death in 1864 as Sherman's troops marched in triumph toward South Carolina, James Henry Hammond witnessed the rise and fall of the cotton kingdom of the Old South. Planter, politician, and partisan of slavery, Hammond built a career for himself that in its breadth and ambition provides a composite portrait of the civilization in which he flourished. A long-awaited biography, Drew Gilpin Faust's *James Henry Hammond and the Old South* reveals the South Carolina planter who was at once characteristic of his age and unique among men of his time. Of humble origins, Hammond set out to conquer his society, to make himself a leader and a spokesman for the Old South. Through marriage he acquired a large plantation and many slaves, and then through shrewd management and progressive farming techniques he soon became one of the wealthiest men in South Carolina. He was elected to the United States House of Representatives and served as governor of his state. A scandal over his personal life forced him to retreat for many years to his plantation, but eventually he returned to public view, winning a seat in the United States Senate that he resigned when South Carolina seceded from the Union. James Henry Hammond's ambition was unquenchable. It consumed his life, directed almost his every move, and ultimately, in its titanic calculation and rigidity, destroyed the man confined within it. Like Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen, Faust suggests, Hammond had a "design," a compulsion to direct every moment of his life toward self-aggrandizement and legitimization. Hammond envisioned himself as the benevolent, paternal, but absolute master of his family and his slaves. But in reality, neither his family, his slaves, nor even his own behavior was completely under his command. Hammond ardently wished to perfect and preserve the southern way of life. But these goals were also beyond his control. At the time of his death it had become clear to him that his world, the world of the Old South, had ended.

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Customer Reviews

Drew Gilpin Faust is associate professor and chairman of the Department of American Civilization, University of Pennsylvania. She is the author of *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840--1860* and the editor of *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South 1830--1860*.

In her biography of James Henry Hammond, Drew Gilpin Faust (now president of Harvard) offers an insightful look on one of the leading planters, political leaders and intellectuals of antebellum South Carolina. Faust offers a solid description of Hammond's tenure in the US House, as governor of South Carolina and in the US Senate. Like a host of South Carolina politicians of the time, Hammond was in the shadow of Calhoun. Faust also shows how Hammond's ambitions were often undermined by a horrid personal life, showing how the man married for money, had sexual encounters with four of his nieces (which would seriously impact his political career for a decade), and had children with a number of his slaves. Hammond even took a 12 year old slave as his mistress. At the same time, Hammond was also very cultured and well read and counted the novelist William Gillmore Sims as one of his closest friends. Faust does not offer the depth on Hammond's intellectual pursuits in this book as she did in "A Sacred Circle" though she is much better on his life in politics, as a planter, and as a man. She also uses primary sources and indicts Hammond through his own diaries. There is one serious problem with the book. As Faust clearly shows, Hammond was a man of great ambitions and industry. He was not exactly a content southern planter but was instead a capitalist in a traditional agrarian society who rose up from the lower middle class. Hammond was not typical of the Old South by any means in terms of his intellect, his faith, his politics (while an ardent defender of slavery, Hammond was not a secessionist in 1860, rare to say the least in SC), as a planter, and yes in his personal life. Faust tries too hard to make Hammond the personification of his time and place. It can't be done. Hammond was a monster. Monsters are never the norm, even in the Old South. Despite this, Faust offers a good and haunting look at an important man in the Old South who never quite lived up to his ambitions and dreams-and became a beast in spite of his high visions.

Fascinating look at a flawed but interesting man who had a large impact on South Carolina politics before the Civil War. Also a look at the slave system through the eyes of an eloquent defender, which reveals that some of his own conduct was inconsistent with the ideals of the duties of the slave owner that he espoused. Author Drew Gilpin Faust is now President of Harvard. She is a skilled historian of the first rank and this book helped to make her reputation.

I was assigned this book for class, which required me to only read a few sections of it. It was surprisingly engaging and rather interesting. I don't know if I'd suggest it to the casual reader but if you are assigned it for class, legitimately take some time to read the book instead of just skimming.

The book is in wonderful condition with only a couple of page bends throughout. There were no pen/pencil/highlighter markings to be found and the cover is perfect.

This is a good book. I needed it for my college history class which I am writing a paper on one chapter. Definitely will recommend this book to anyone who loves history.

Wife loves southern history and this was a gift. I can't speak to the accuracy, writing quality or the writing style.

This product came on time, in good condition. It helped with school and I didn't expect anything more. I do not recommend reading for entertainment purposes. =]

Hammond is not a nice guy. He married for money, was not a great father, and campaigned for elected office at time when no one else did and against the 'party' candidate to boot. Most interesting of all was his commitment to the Confederate cause but resistance to the call for material and manpower to help the cause. In the end, he could not believe it when his slaves were jubilant about the prospect of freedom. Through Hammond's eyes we see the south changed forever by the Civil War, not only due to the loss of their slaves but also by the unsouthern actions the Confederate government had to take and how they affected the southern way of life. Hammond is not a nice guy but this very readable book provides an excellent insight to the antebellum southern mind.

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