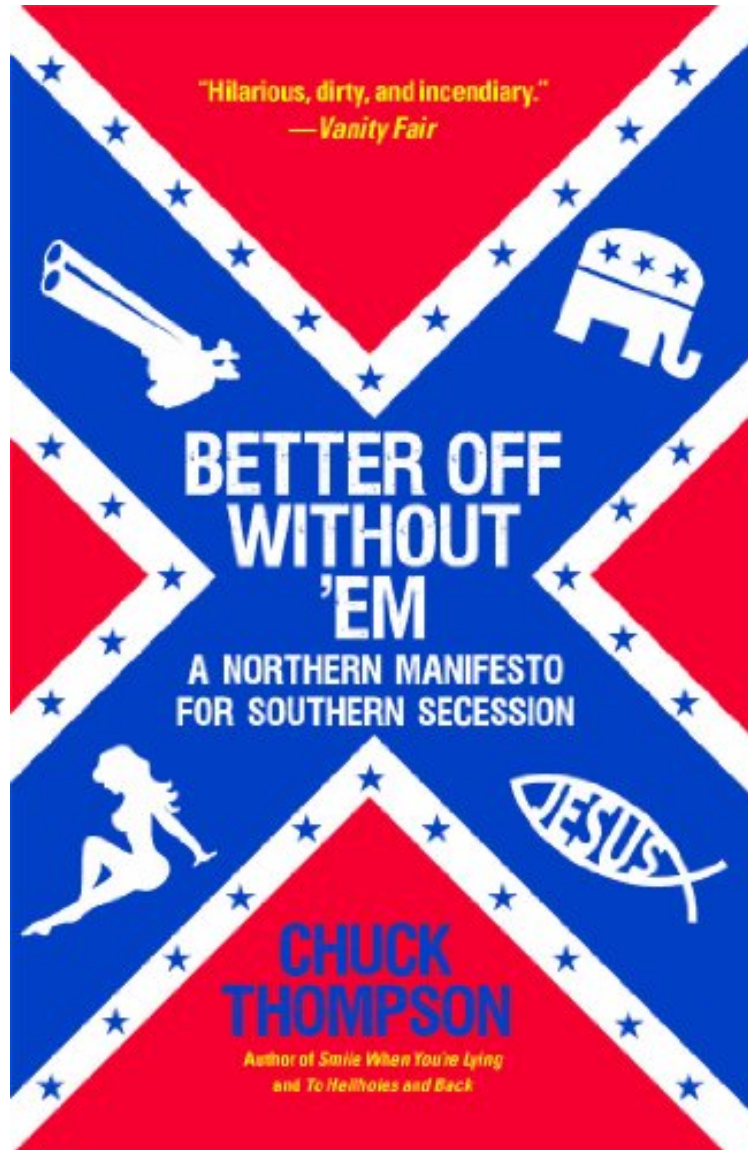


(Read and download) Better Off Without 'Em: A Northern Manifesto for Southern Secession

Better Off Without 'Em: A Northern Manifesto for Southern Secession

Chuck Thompson

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Chuck Thompson : Better Off Without 'Em: A Northern Manifesto for Southern Secession before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Better Off Without 'Em: A Northern Manifesto for Southern Secession:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Both insightful as well as written with a sense of ...By justmeBoth

insightful as well as written with a sense of humor. The author brings some interesting and frightening parts of the south and southern history to the table, and leaves you scratching your head a bit because sometimes the truth is stranger than fiction. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Funny and fact-filled By Grizzled Funny and fact-filled, but drags after a couple of chapters. It's a great tool to discuss modern southern culture, but it just doesn't carry the book 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. This is me, waving goodbye to the South. May your secession succeed in the 21st century. By Always looking for a good read Hilarious and well-reasoned. Makes me wonder why our ancestors didn't encourage secession.

"As if Kevin Phillips's American Theocracy were being narrated by Rolling Stone's Matt Taibbi," Chuck Thompson's "viciously funny and thoroughly tasteless" examination of Southern secession was one of the most controversial books of the year (Washington Monthly). Chuck Thompson dubbed savagely funny by the New York Times and wickedly entertaining by the San Francisco Chronicle spent two years traveling the American South to determine whether, as he'd long suspected but not yet proven, the whole country might be better off letting Dixieland make good on its two-hundred-years-old threat to secede. The result is a long overdue and serious inquiry into national divides that is deliberately provocative and uproariously funny while making a compelling case for a kind of no-fault divorce for nation-states: no hard feelings, just two adults who can't quite make the relationship work, shaking hands and walking away (The Oxford American).

Hilarious, dirty, and incendiary, [Better Off Without Em] is a book that will prompt guffaws in some, an urge to shoot it through the spine in others, and everyone to agree that it will only stoke the election-year bonfire. (Vanity Fair) (Thompson) is serious about his argument and has more than enough ammunition. (New York Times) For critics who lament the homogenization of the United States, Thompson offers several memorable scenes with distinct regional flavor. . . . Underneath all the macho bombast, there are some serious ideas at play. In a chapter on the condition of education in the South, Thompson writes passionately and persuasively about the disastrous long-term effects that de facto segregation and systematic underfunding of public schools will have on the US economy. (Boston Globe) [Thompson] is awesomely talented and wickedly funny. (Philadelphia Inquirer) Funny in the mode of P.J. O'Rourke and Joe Queenan. (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette) [Thompson's] solution is a kind of no-fault divorce for nation-states: no hard feelings, just two adults who can't quite make the relationship work, shaking hands and walking away. (Oxford American) Reading and hearing about the hue and cry from thousands for secession since the election, with Texas leading the pack, I highly recommend the book Better Off Without 'Em: A Northern Manifesto For Southern Secession by Chuck Thompson. He presents an intriguing and plausible plan, with a touch of humor, that just may be the only way out of the political poison that has spread across this country and endangers the future for all of us. Plus it's a darn good history lesson. (Boulder Daily Camera) As if Kevin Phillips's American Theocracy were being narrated by Rolling Stone's Matt Taibbi . . . Viciously funny and thoroughly tasteless, it's an easy and cathartic read for anyone fed up with the Confederate influence on the national discourse. But like Taibbi or Bill Maher, Thompson isn't aiming just to entertain; he wants readers to take his underlying argument seriously. (Washington Monthly) Portland nonfiction author Chuck Thompson's Better Off Without Em: A Northern Manifesto for Southern Secession gets the election season's regional angst off to a tartly observed start. (Portland Monthly) Hilariously over-the-top . . . Thompson's mix of vitriol, bewilderment, humor, and research holds the seemingly disparate elements together and makes for an entertaining, if absurdly hyperbolic, read. . . . Thought-provoking. (Publishers Weekly) Often thoughtful, always irreverent . . . a raucous road trip through the South with a funny, informed, sardonic and opinionated Yankee. (Kirkus) A convincing case that the American South is essentially a separate country that negatively affects the rest of the United States. . . . Everyone jokes about secession, and some politicians like Texas Gov. Rick Perry have even threatened it. But what if it actually happened, Mr. Thompson wondered? . . . Better Off Without Em combines scathing humor, caustic opinion, colorful travel writing, jaw-dropping interviews and solid academic research in an entertaining and thought-provoking book that sticks to the ribs like cheese grits and pecan pie. (Fort Myers Weekly) An entertaining and worthwhile read . . . [Thompson] amasses data, and somewhere in between the fire and the brimstone, plans of serious argument are laid down. (Daily Kos.com) A fun, engaging read let's call it speculative nonfiction and would make for a fine night of beer-fueled argument. (Wonkette.com) Thank you for the copy of Better Off Without Em, but I'm afraid it's New York and San Francisco that I think should secede. (P.J. O'Rourke) Fry yourself some grits, unfurl that Confederate flag, and read this gem of a book. Chuck Thompson doesn't have a politically correct bone in his Yankee body. He skewers the South mercilessly, and hilariously. And backs up his barbs with facts. Lots of facts. Better Off Without Em is sure to set hearts racing, on both sides of the Mason Dixon line. (Eric Weiner New York Times bestselling author of The Geography of Bliss) A surprisingly worthwhile read . . . A confrontational, extreme and occasionally convincing argument for cutting the South loose, peppered with hilarious anecdotes. (Shelf Awareness.com) "A fun yet pointed case for splitting the American South away from the rest of the US, offering fiery charges combined with meticulously researched detail into a proposition secretly entertained by many. . . . No matter what side of the line you're on, Better Off Without 'Em makes for a thought-provoking, winning analysis."

(California Bookwatch) About the Author Chuck Thompson is the supervising editor for CNN.com Travel. His other books include the comic memoirs *Smile When You're Lying* and *To Hellholes and Back*, and his writing has appeared in *Outside*, *Esquire*, and *The New Republic*, among other publications. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Better Off Without Em INTRODUCTION

Divided We Stand (Sort Of)

Hang out in my living room on any national election night and at some point in the evening, usually around 7 p.m. Pacific time, you're almost certain to hear me scream something like: Why in the hell does the United States and by extension the entire free world, capitalist dominion, and all of Christendom allow its government to be held hostage by a coalition of bought-and-paid-for political swamp scum from the most uneducated, morbidly obese, racist, morally indigent, xenophobic, socially stunted, and generally ass-backwards part of the country? Catch me after some earnest academic with Cambridge and Ivy credentials has to appear on NPR to defend evolution against the latest onslaught on public education from Book of Dipshits creationists, and you'll likely bear witness to a Thompson rage-gasm along the lines of: What in Christ's name happened to that confederation of Mason-Dixon mouth breathers that got them so intimidated by science and facts and book larnin that they can't even walk past a library or look through a microscope without quoting Habakkuk and Deuteronomy to each other until the threat of intellectual enlightenment goes away? Crack a beer in my TV room on any autumn Sunday when the BCS college football rankings come out or, God help you, kick back on my sofa the week the annual bowl game matchups are announced and the Southeastern Conference is once again gifted a national championship opportunity based on some rigged illusion of the down-home gridiron greatness of a conference that wouldn't know its latest recruiting violation from a kicking tee if it ever left home after September to play in the snow, sleet, or any genuine football temperatures, and you'll definitely need to stop me from slashing my wrists before hearing me wail in agonized sports martyrdom: Vanderbilt? Kentucky? Mississippi State? You call that strength of schedule? You're honestly standing there and telling me with a straight face that nonconference wins against Troy State, Charleston Southern, and Florida International, at fucking home, are legitimate? Stop by when a brain-dead zealot is yammering her way through a hypocrisy-laden justification for simultaneously being pro-life and pro-death penalty while some mewling cipher of a FOX News reporter bobs his head in vacant acquiescence and ... well, you already know how the rest of this Stars and Bars tangent goes. And you already know how it goes because (a) You've said or felt pretty much the same things yourself about the slave states at some point or (b) you're from the South, have people there, or otherwise possess a degree of affection for the region such that you're sick and tired of its honor being traduced and its culture blamed for every American malady by hillbilly-bashing, know-it-all knob polishers such as myself (however impressively informed and well intentioned we might be). You already know most of the other backwoods-bumpkin insults that I could layer into this opening salvo because if there's one thought that at one time or another has connected American minds from Seattle to Savannah it is this: It's too bad we didn't just let the South secede when we had the chance. A short time ago, I began scribbling down notes for a book with the working title *The Divided States of America*. I'd gotten the idea from a brilliant website of regional/tribal drumbeating that lays out the case for something called the Republic of Cascadia. The site is the brainchild of a guy named Lyle Zapato, a mystery man who refuses to be interviewed by anyone other than Daljit Dhaliwal, the semi-hot, bob-haired London-born Punjabi Sikh former host of PBS's *Worldfocus*. Zapato's Republic of Cascadia is an imaginary place that combines the former American states of Oregon and Washington and the former Canadian province of British Columbia into a sovereign nation consisting of 330,411 square miles and fifteen million inhabitants generating an annual GDP of \$515 billion. Rather than being tied to the vagaries of a federal government with an agenda that, beyond national defense, rarely lines up with local needs, the more or less like-minded residents of Cascadia live in a paradise of mist-shrouded mountains and mossy forests; a utopia of organic composting and innovative light-rail transportation where all the cows are grass-fed, all the chickens roam free, many of the herbs are smokable, plastic bags are outlawed, citizens mail their post-consumer-waste commitment-ceremony announcements with Cascadian Postal Authority stamps honoring such cultural touchstones as proper kayaking protocol, and nonobese children salute a flag emblazoned with a pinecone resting on a field of tolerant rainbow colors. The philosophical underpinning of Cascadia is simple: shared values, cultural norms, and manageable geography—not the chance tentacles of history and insatiable federal bureaucracy are what unite, or at least what should unite, a given population. Cascadia works in the imagination because to a large degree it already exists in real life. That imaginary beer you were drinking during my BCS football meltdown? An uncompromised, unfiltered golden wheat Widmer Hefeweizen brewed, bottled, and sucked down like teat milk every day by the masses in Portland, Oregon. Better still, the concept is eminently transferable. With Cascadia as inspiration, I began imagining the U.S. map carved into similarly cohesive cultural blocs. Heartlandia, for example, would stretch from the area east of the Rockies in Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado across the breadbasket to the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Mormonia would claim all of Utah and adjacent parts of Idaho and Nevada. Biblestan would cut a massive swath across the lower half of the existing United States, but also include noncontiguous pockets of Heartlandia, claiming dominion over chunks of Missouri, Kansas, and the rural Southwest (which, if you don't know, is a lot more Bible-thumpy than all the adobe and golf courses lead you to imagine). The Northeast would be rechristened Greater Soxany. Like Singapore and the Vatican, New York and Los Angeles would be conferred city-state status. Mexifornia would stay Mexifornia. Tracing new national boundaries out of obsolete

American states got me excited about writing a bestselling travel book from the point of view of a first-time visitor to each of these culturally united lands. As I shifted my attention from the map and started compiling imaginary atlas statistics, however, the broader limitations of my redistricting project quickly became apparent. With its national seal bearing the image of a man in overalls pointing toward an endless horizon of corn syrup and thank-you notes for nice visits with aging relatives, Heartlandia possessed an undeniable appeal. But was life there really all that different from the day-to-day grind in Biblestan or Mormonia? Sure, the people of Greater Soxany and the Federated Boroughs of New York had their differences, but one loudmouth is pretty much like any other, and hipsters get just as uppity about recycling in Burlington as they do in Brooklyn. And when you got into the nitty-gritty details of pinecone politics, Cascadia felt an awful lot like old Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, right down to the organic spunk of damp wool, flax brownies, and \$1,200 Restoration Hardware couches covered in dog hair at the well-attended neighborhood association meetings. Anyone wanting to blow holes in my gerrymandering could see as plain as prairie that half a century of Interstate travel, mass media, and nacho cheese flavoring had done its grim work. Every region of the country has its own natural splendors and personality ticks, but aside from a few wacky religious differences and all that goddamn salad dressing they insist on drowning their iceberg lettuce with in the Midwest, I realized that life in These Homogenized States wasnt all that dissimilar from sea to warming sea. With one exception: The South. The Confederacy. The Rebel states. The land of pickled pig knuckles, prison farms, coon-hunting conservatives, NASCAR tailgaters, prayer warriors, and guys who build million-dollar careers out of bass fishing. The more I looked at my map and considered each new republic, the more the South stood out as the only truly exotic region left in America, the only nation within a nation, the only place separated from the rest by its own impenetrable morality, worldview, politics, religion, personality, and even language. Grits, Gravy, and Gumbo: An Unauthorized Definition After abandoning the idea of redrawing the social and political boundaries of the entire United States in favor of a more thoroughgoing examination of the South, the first issue I had to address was defining my subject. This turned out to be unexpectedly tricky. When forming a mental picture of the South, the first impulse is to recall the original Confederate States of America, that farsighted group that voted to secede from the Union in 1861, thereby touching off the Civil War. Using history as a guide, todays South would logically seem to follow the imprimatur of the proudly seditious and eternally defeated states of the C.S.A. Alas, history is almost never as neat as wed like it to be. It turns out that a total of eleven states officially made up the Confederacy. Seven states were original signatories to the C.S.A.; four joined shortly afterward. Amazingly, for Civil War novices anyway, Kentucky and West Virginia, two states that even the least worldly Yankee sixth grader of today would identify as part of the Skynyrd universe, were not members of that regionally hallowed organization. Even more startling, given its reputation for naked racism and attachment to cranky public figures such as ex-Klansman senator Robert Byrd, West Virginia was created specifically as a non-Confederate state, a Unionist part of Virginia. Now consider that Texas was among the original seven states that declared secession even before Abraham Lincoln took office on March 4, 1861, and you can see that defining the South isnt anything near an open-and-shut case. An all-around pain in the ass insofar as categorization goes, and never much of a team player, anyway, Texas had its own motives for dropping its long johns in the direction of Washington, D.C. And even back then its reputation was far more cowboy than cow tipper. Filled with Jews, Cubans, and meth labs, todays Florida is, like Texas, impossible to characterize in prototypically southern terms. Nevertheless, Florida demands Confederate consideration for being yet another of the original seven rebel states, as well as the geographic anchor of the region, and an easy target of ongoing jokes about its penis-like shape. (Which Ill do my best to refrain from as we move along, but no promises.) Even more troublesome to the fledgling ethnographer, during the Civil War parts of at least five other states and territories were claimed by the Confederacy without formal secession or control ever being established. These included areas of Oklahoma and Missouri benighted burghs according to certain contemporary prejudices, perhaps, but not places one immediately associates with Rachel Maddow effigies or guys named Skeeter and Possum. With membership in the Confederacy not guaranteeing a punched ticket into the modern southern fraternity, I turned for help to the famed Mason-Dixon line. From a purely metes-and-bounds point of view, however, this turned out to be an even more complicated and confusing line of inquiry. Presumed by many to exist as a physical line of division between northern and southern states, the original Mason-Dixon line was actually laid out in the 1760s merely to establish the legal boundary between soon-to-be abolitionist Pennsylvania, slave-friendly (in a manner of speaking) Maryland, and the territory that would come to be known as Delaware. Doing the laying out were a pair of British astronomers named Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon. According to American National Biography writer Edwin Danson, the latter was such an ethically weak soul that hed once been kicked out of a Quaker meetinghouse for excessive drinking, thus making him a perfect candidate to be dispatched to America to help settle a ferocious land dispute. That dispute had raged for nearly eighty years between three generations of landowning Penn (as in Pennsylvania) and Calvert (as in Marylands Calvert city, county, and peninsula) family dynasties. At the core of the fight was the jurisdiction of Philadelphia, and whether the future American capital was to be located within the legal boundaries of Pennsylvania or Maryland. The Penns and Calverts were so intractable regarding property lines that their territorial pissing match eventually led to a series of armed skirmishes between colonial militias, events known as Cresaps War, named for Thomas Cresap, aka the Maryland Monster, whose fierce loyalty to the cause of

Maryland expansion provoked numerous outbursts of mob violence on his person. That as an adolescent my Calvert County nephew Erik used to refer to a certain feature of his anatomy as the Maryland Monster is mere unhappy coincidence and immaterial to the larger historical discussion at hand. Almost a century after Mason and Dixon had undertaken their peacemaking survey, which resulted in an accepted border between Pennsylvania and Maryland, more and bigger land disputes were coming to a boil across the United States. By the time abolitionist Abe ascended from his murky Illinois backwater to the national stage, the term Mason-Dixon line had morphed in popular usage from a recognized boundary delineating Pennsylvania free territory from Maryland slave territory, into a symbolic line separating all free and slave states and, eventually, states that seceded from the Union. Yet even that imaginary border was maddeningly fluid. Some of that eras authorities referred to the then undecided states of Missouri, Maryland, and Kentucky as being above the Mason-Dixon line, i.e., free states. Others spoke of those same states as being situated below it, i.e., slave states.² Authorities today are even more abstract on the subject of what constitutes the South. Its an interesting question and I dont have any expectation your answer to it will meet with anyones satisfaction, one of those authorities, Dr. Charles Joyner, told me after Id asked him for a definitive description of southern geography. In addition to being the Burroughs Distinguished Professor of Southern History and Culture at Coastal Carolina University, as well as extraordinarily patient in the face of insistent cold callers from the West Coast, Joyner is the author of several acclaimed books on southern society, including *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture*. If anyone could define the South for me, Joyner seemed like the guy. In the sufficiently intimidating tones of the southern gentleman scholar, however, the first thing Joyner said when I asked him where the South began and where it ended was, Im not authorized to give out that information. Not authorized? That is correct. And nobody else is authorized to do so, either. Joyner went on to explain that a universally accepted definition of the South has never existed. He pointed out that the great southern diaspora had made places like Bakersfield, California, Flint, Michigan, and Harlem in some ways feel more southern than modern-day Atlanta. A lot of what was part of the old Confederacy doesnt seem much like the South anymore, Joyner said. And theres a part of southern Ohio known as Little Dixie. The greatest label-busting southerner of all time, Joyner told me, was Stand Watie, a slave-owning Cherokee Indian from Oklahoma who rose to the rank of brigadier general in the Confederate Army. If a Native American from Oklahoma could be a rabid southerner thirsty for Yankee blood, so went the implication, who couldnt?³ Joyner, who somewhat troublingly defied my condescending grits n gravy stereotype, even flashed a bit of enigmatic southern humor when I asked him to clear up one of the most perplexing issues of my early research. The Confederacy officially comprised eleven states, I said. So how come the Confederate flag has thirteen stars? Apparently they were numerically challenged, Joyner replied. Otherwise they wouldnt have started a war with the United States. Defining the South for purposes of this book was obviously going to require a combination of historic empathy, a contemporary feel for the culturally distinct, and a hide thick enough to deflect the protests of hometown experts resentful of a stubborn prick in a Seattle Mariners cap interpreting their culture for them. With Texas standing as the most debatable omission, the Appalachian anomaly of West Virginia as the most contentious inclusion, and Florida the most difficult case of all, I eventually settled on a South encompassing twelve contiguous states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia. Though if border Missourians in Dunklin, Pemiscot, and Ozark counties feel unhappy about being left out, they have my blessing to crash the party. *Bluff Called: Gentlemen, Ladies, You Are Free to Leave* Anticipating a white-hooded Dixie backlash after signing the Civil Rights Act into law in 1964, President Lyndon Johnson famously told an aide, We have lost the South for a generation.⁴ For the Democratic Party he was right. Unfortunately, the rest of us are still stuck with the South. And, save for some superficial concessions to modern conformity, the South is in many ways still stuck in 1964. Theres a reason the We want our country back Teabaggers held their first national convention in Nashville in 2010. With China and India cranking out thousands of newly minted computer engineers every week, any forward-thinking part of the country would have laughed Sarah Palin and her \$100,000 populist pose off the stage for suggesting that electronic technology is a mere prop for out-of-touch liberals and that instead of using a fancy-pants TelePrompTer she should just keep her notes written on her hands just like every eighth grader who was ever too lazy to study for the test or too stupid to remember the dick-simple material from the remedial textbook. Incidentally, in terms of politics my issue in this book isnt with Republicans, as much as it is with southern obstructionists and fanatics who want to conflate biblical law with U.S. law. When theyre doing their fiscally responsible, missionary-hump-values routine, the Republicans are fine. Ignorant, rude, and fractious though they are, the Teabagging Repubs and their southern power base have raised the notion of cultural separation to lofty heights, inspiring all sides of a politically energized generation to ponder the increasingly attractive question: What would happen if we simply jettisoned the 566,466 square miles and 78,385,623 million people responsible for generating so much of the willful ignorance and Jim Crowstyle hatred that keeps the rest of the country from moving ahead?⁵ Everyone has joked about a modern-day secession. Politicians, like Texas governor and presidential hopeful Rick Perry, have even threatened it. But what would the measurable impact be if it actually happened? Would one or the other or both sides come out economically, politically, or culturally improved? Other than having to redesign the flag, what would happen to the United States if we just went ahead and let the South secede?⁶ In the short term, the United States would lose a few

assets Bourbon Street, South Beach, Augusta National, a lot of great musicians, a few good writers. With the Kennedy Space Center, Pensacola Naval Air Station, and other important military installations, Florida would require delicate handling. The Gulf Coast is by far the U.S. leader in petroleum refinery capacity, so a rock-solid energy treaty or two would have to be inked. Economic pacts guaranteeing unfettered access to genetically modified hogs and NFL-caliber wide receivers would need to be negotiated. Losing the Everglades would be a bummer, but after that its just a lot of third-tier national parks down there, half of which are more or less just stone monuments dedicated to Rebel soldiers.⁷ For romantic souls already growing melancholy at the thought of losing all that quality bourbon and Spanish moss, its worth noting that splitting up the Union doesnt have to mean losing access to most of the good stuff from the South. In fact, for both sides, an exciting by-product of separation would be an explosion of southern tourism. Think about it. Freed from its standing as a hind tit, guilt-by-association international embarrassment to the rest of the country, the politically repressive religious monarchy of the born-again Confederacy would be transformed overnight into a travel destination swarming with trendsetting elites. Just like they do with Myanmar, Venezuela, and more conservative parts of the Middle East, instead of loathing redneck Amerikkka and all it stands for, Lonely Planet types from around the world would immediately embrace the South as a bastion of traditional culture nobly holding out against the so-called progressive agenda of modernity; an indigenous society teeming with underappreciated folk wisdom, ancient values, and fascinating dialects deserving of fierce protection and a slew of new expat-financed eco-lodges. With time, Americans would start thinking of the South as another Mexico, only with an even more corrupt government. The Civil War didnt come out of nowhere. Long before Confederate secessionists fired on Americans at Fort Sumter in 1861 to launch the bloodiest war in the nations history, plenty of southerners were dissatisfied with the very idea of a United States of America. Many had fought bitterly against joining it. Along with brother Edward, John Rutledge attempted to derail the Declaration of Independence at the Continental Congress of 1776, with Edward writing that there was no wisdom in a Declaration of Independence, nor any other purpose to be answered by it. The Rutledges position was largely informed by the fact that John was at the time a near-monarchical head of what residents then considered the independent republic of South Carolina. It wouldnt be until 1778 that Rutledge would abdicate his position as South Carolinas president. (The southern gentry has always felt more comfortable with British elitism, rule of law, and all-around wankiness, which is why to this day the League of the South secessionist organization insists on using British spelling in all of its documents and correspondence, defending Oxford standard usage against what it calls the bastardisation of Websters so-called American English.)⁸ Throwing a massive hissy fit over a newly enacted tariff in 1828, vice president and South Carolinian John C. Calhoun articulated his doctrine of nullification, an argument that essentially said that if a state didnt like a particular federal law it could simply ignore it no matter that it had already pledged its allegiance to upholding the federal compact. In effect, and in true self-absorbed southern manner, Calhoun wanted the South to continue enjoying all of the benefits that come with being part of the country without having to make any of the necessary sacrifices or compromises.⁹ His screed is widely acknowledged as having galvanized South against North and laying the foaming and frothing groundwork for the Civil War. Today, Calhouns plantation home is a lovingly restored attraction on the campus of Clemson University in South Carolina. In light of the Souths long-standing cantankerousness about being part of the United States, it could be and often has been argued that North and South essentially proceeded out of the gate as separate countries, political and social entities at fundamental odds with one another. By the 1790s, American writers were already identifying the South as a threat to national development and ideals, with the North emerging as the essence of the nation and the South as its antithesis, a negative reference point to the rest of the country, according to University of Georgia historian James C. Cobb in *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity*.¹⁰ The same conditions led famed literary critic Edmund Wilson to write in his masterful *Patriotic Gore* that in the 1800s North and South had become so distinct from one another that they were virtually two different nations; they were as much two contending units each of which was trying to expand at the others expense as any two European countries.¹¹ Look at the way current southern politicians repeatedly sabotage national debate or, for just one economic example, examine the way the South has operated like a competing nation in cannibalizing and degrading Michigan and the American auto industry points to be taken up in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 6 and it becomes clear that little has changed. Add on wildly opposing approaches to such civic building blocks as religion, politics, race relations, education, and catfish consumption, and you start to see something beyond a mere alliance of uneasy and often combative economic frenemies what this union has primarily always been. You see two distinct societies fated to an eternal struggle that prevents both sides from fulfilling their destinies. Or at least moving in a direction most of their respective citizens and leaders see fit. One way or another, the social, political, and economic gridlock thats paralyzing this country has got to be broken. There are a lot of people running for office who claim they know how to do it, but none is bold enough to acknowledge the Rebel elephant in the room. None is willing to consider the possibility that breaking up the country through peaceful secession might be the most sane and effective way of saving it. I am. Growing up in Juneau, Alaska, barely a decade after statehood and with the rhetoric of the Alaska Independence Party in full flower, I understood even then the attraction of flipping a middle finger at the rest of the country. Physically distant though it may have been, Alaska had much in common with the South. Less than two decades removed from statehood (1959) and the massive land and resource grab that commenced with the discovery of

oil in Prudhoe Bay in 1968, there was at the time plenty of casual talk in certain beery quarters about the travesty of compromise that came with statehood and economic surrender to a government thousands of miles and cultural light-years away. The Alaska Independence Party was a fringe but nevertheless tolerated part of the political landscape. At eighteen, I briefly toyed with an impulse to check AIP on my voter registration form before ticking the box next to Independent. There's nobility in sticking to your guns, in not selling out, in remaining a rebel forever. By eighteen, however, I was already coming to the realization that there's also a great measure of stupidity and, more dangerous, a toxic mixture of self-pity and self-destruction in clinging to willful obstinacy for obstinacy's sake. Even so, few of us ever sell out completely, and I'm no more immune than any one to anguished cries for Freeeeeeedom! Ridiculous and predictable as they are, I can't help empathizing a little bit with guys like Georgia Republican U.S. representative Paul Broun, who, in the midst of a crucial national debate, seriously advanced the idea that, If Obamacare passes, that free insurance card that's in people's pockets is gonna be as worthless as a Confederate dollar after ... the Great War of Yankee Aggression! Hysterical jackasses like Broun, and plenty like him I met on my travels through the South, really just want the same thing that I do: a country liberated from the tyranny of morons and secessionists, and the freedom to say about the other side, in all honesty and with complete accuracy, that we just might be better off without em.