



John Archibald Campbell: Southern Moderate, 1811-1889

Robert Saunders Jr

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Saunders presents the first full biography of the southern U.S. Supreme Court justice who championed both the U.S. Constitution and states' rights.

The life of John Archibald Campbell reflects nearly every major development of 19th-century American history. He participated either directly or indirectly in events ranging from the Indian removal process of the 1830s, to sectionalism and the Civil War, to Reconstruction and redemption. Although not a defender of slavery, he feared that abrupt abolition would produce severe economic and social dislocation. He urged southerners to reform their labor system and to prepare for the eventual abolition of slavery. In the early 1850s he proposed a series of reforms to strengthen slave families and to educate the slaves so as to prepare them for assimilation into society as productive citizens. These views distinguished him from many southerners who steadfastly maintained the sanctity of the peculiar institution.

Born and schooled in Georgia, Campbell moved to Montgomery, Alabama, in the early 1830s, where he joined a successful law practice. He served in the Alabama legislature for a brief period and then moved with his family to Mobile to establish a law practice. In 1853 Campbell was appointed an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. His concurring opinion in the Dred Scott case in 1857 derived not from the standpoint of protecting slavery but from an attempt to return political power to the states. As the sectional crisis gathered heat, Campbell counseled moderation. He became widely detested in the North because of his defense of states' rights, and he was distrusted in the South because of his moderate views on slavery and secession. In May 1861 Campbell resigned from the Court and later became the Confederacy's assistant secretary of war. After the war, Campbell moved his law practice to New Orleans. Upon his death in 1889, memorial speakers in Washington, D.C., and New Orleans recognized him as one of the nation's most gifted lawyers and praised his vast learning and mastery of both the common law and the civil law.

In this first full biography of Campbell, Robert Saunders, Jr., reveals the prevalence of anti-secession views prior to the Civil War and covers both the judicial aspects and the political history of this crucial period in southern history.

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