

Break It Up: Secession, Division, and the Secret History of America's Imperfect Union

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From journalist and historian Richard Kreitner, an ambitious, timely and inspired understanding of "these supposedly united states," arguing that the internal divisions that threaten to tear America apart today have three hundred year old roots in the earliest days of our Republic

The novel and fiery thesis of BREAK IT UP is simple: the United States has never lived up to its name-- and never will. The thirteen highly autonomous and distinct colonies could barely agree to fight Great Britain together, so a detailed plan for uniting them into a democratic republic was certainly not in the offing in 1776. Kreitner argues that ever since our country's founding, there have been two inextinguishable warring forces in the American mind: the impulse to preserve the Union, and the desire to dissolve it.

With a scholar's command and a journalist's curiosity, Kreitner takes readers on a revolutionary journey through American history, revealing the power and persistence of disunion movements. Every New England town after Plymouth was a de facto secession from another; George Washington feared independence west of the Alleghenies; Aaron Burr schemed to set up a western empire from an island in the Ohio River; John Quincy Adams brought a Massachusetts town's petition for the dissolution of the United States to the Congress floor; and William Lloyd Garrison called the Constitution a "devil's pact." This disunionist impulse found its greatest expression in the Civil War, but as BREAK IT UP will show, the seduction of secession has never gone away.

BREAK IT UP shows not only how fruitful it is to understand our past in these terms, but also how necessary. BREAK IT UP will help readers make fresh sense of our fractured age. Richard Kreitner is a contributing writer to *The Nation*. He is the author of *Booked: A Traveler's Guide to Literary Locations Around the World*.

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