

Destructives ^[1]

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by Michael Thomas Smith, 2006

Destructives, the nickname of the original supporters of North Carolina's [secession](#) ^[2] from the Union and involvement in the [Civil War](#) ^[3], received their unflattering designation from their opponents, the members of the [Conservative Party](#) ^[4]. Although the Destructives briefly held the upper hand in North Carolina politics after the firing on Fort Sumter and Abraham Lincoln's call for troops in April 1861, their period of dominance was short-lived. The Federal occupation of much of coastal North Carolina early in the war and unpopular policies by the Confederate government in Richmond increasingly alienated much of the public. The election of Conservative governor [Zebulon B. Vance](#) ^[5] in 1862, an opponent of secession until the last moment, signified the repudiation of the leadership of the Destructives. Although Vance was often at odds with Jefferson Davis's government, his prowar policies increasingly won him the support of the Destructives-particularly in his 1864 reelection campaign against [William W. Holden](#) ^[6], the leader of the state's [peace movement](#) ^[7].

Following the war, the Destructives again supported a successful gubernatorial candidate in opposition to Holden. Their backing of prowar Unionist [Jonathan Worth](#) ^[8] in 1865 contributed significantly to his election and heralded a party realignment made possible by the increasing cooperation between Destructives and Conservatives of Vance's pro-Confederate faction. During [Reconstruction](#) ^[9], these disparate elements merged into the reconstituted [Democratic Party](#) ^[10].

Reference:

Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900*(1985).

Additional Resources:

Porter, Douglas R. Jr. "Defying the 'Destructives': Confederate Disaffection and Disloyalty in North Carolina's Northwestern Foothills, 1861-1865." Master's Thesis, North Carolina State University. <https://repository.lib.ncsu.edu/ir/handle/1840.16/1703> ^[11]

"North Carolina.; A Card From W.W. Holden." *The New York Times*. September 4, 1864. <http://www.nytimes.com/1864/09/04/news/north-carolina-a-card-from-ww-holden.html> ^[12]

Subjects:

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[Political movements and parties](#) ^[14]

Authors:

[Smith, Michael Thomas](#) ^[15]

From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#)^[16]

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