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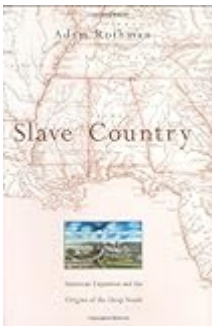

Adam Rothman. *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005. xi + 296 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-01674-3.

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A Model for the Deep South

Adam Rothman's ambitious first book, *Slave Country*, provides an analytical narrative of how the three states associated with the Deep South–Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi–developed into plantation societies. Rothman weaves together political, economic, social, and military history to construct a much-needed study of this often-overlooked region's beginnings. This task is an ambitious one for a first book, and Rothman, by and large, proves himself up to the task of writing this history.

A review of his methodology reveals the time and effort that went into the crafting of this book. The sources for this study are varied and numerous. Rothman mines congressional debates, government records at the federal and local levels, records from the British Public Records Office, diaries, memoirs, travel accounts, personal correspondence, newspapers, census figures, and even information on the number of ships passing through the port of New Orleans for selected years. One of the more fruitful sources employed by Rothman comes from Kenneth Stampp's project involving plantation records.[1] These papers reveal the thoughts, hopes, and fears of the planters who settled the Deep South, and thus add a human dimension to the heart of this study, which relies on showing how economic growth influenced the development of slavery and the plantation society that characterized this region.

Marxian analysis informs Rothman's study of the Deep South. He owes prominent intellectual debts to the work of Barbara Jeanne Fields, his dissertation adviser at Columbia, Ira Berlin, and Eugene Genovese.[2] This Marxian framework is most evident in his interpretation of slavery. "Chattel slavery was at bottom a class relationship enforced by physical coercion in which some people lived off the labor of others" (p. 207). Rothman perceives the master-slave relationship as being patriarchal and coercive. Furthermore, he links the rapid growth of American slavery in the Deep South with the spread of capitalism, particularly with the development of the textile industry in Great Britain and the northeastern United States and the increase in demand for sugar. He notes how planters flocked to the fresh, fertile lands of the Deep South and began to grow staple crops. He also discusses how planters in the early nineteenth century moved away from crops such as indigo

and tobacco, which had been popular in the Deep South, in order to make more money growing cotton and sugar. The increased production of these staple crops led to increased demand for slaves and the rapid growth of the Deep South's economy and population. Rothman's evidence supports his thesis about this development. He cites correspondence from merchants and planters, as well as statistics about ship traffic and crop production, to illustrate this rapid economic growth.

Rothman also pays close attention to the human dimension of this economic development. He includes case studies of individuals who lived and worked in the Deep South, and these people reappear throughout the book. He writes about men such as Edward Livingston, a New York merchant who moved to New Orleans to restore his fortune and good name; Isaac Briggs, a Quaker who was chief surveyor of the land in the Louisiana Purchase south of Tennessee beginning in 1803; and Benjamin Hawkins, the agent to the Creek Indians. He also adds African, African-American, and Indian voices to balance those of the white settlers. Rothman focuses attention on how people reacted to the land, the disease environment, and their encounters with Indians, African and African-American slaves, and whites of various ethnicities. By focusing on the stories of individuals, their successes and failures, Rothman is able to reveal the human costs men and women suffered as they carved out an existence, sometimes quite prosperous, sometimes not, on the new frontier. It was rare for families to escape diseases, such as fevers, without losing at least one family member. Rothman also points out the human cost for slaves, in terms of death and forced separation from loved ones, and reminds readers that slaves were forced migrants to the Deep South. The fate of the Indians is also discussed in depth, and is one of the strong points of this study. Indian voices are interwoven with those of whites throughout several chapters. The study of the Red Sticks and the Creek War is well done and brings to light an important incident that could have changed the course of American history had the Indians prevailed. Instead of victory, the Indians lost the war and much of their land, thus paving the way for greater white American control over it.

This emphasis on contingency is one of the strong points of Rothman's analysis. He understands that American dominance over the Deep South was not foreordained, despite the Louisiana Purchase. White Americans faced Spanish forces in Texas and Florida, Indian tribes throughout the Deep South, slaves who expressed their discontent through flight and rebellion, most notably the January 1811 slave revolt along the German Coast of Louisiana, and British forces during the War of 1812. As Rothman asserts, had two or three of these events occurred at the same time, American history might well be different.

Readers will note, in particular, the problems Andrew Jackson faced during the war against the Creeks, particularly the unwillingness of men to stay past their terms of service. Had the Red Sticks attacked Jackson's force at this vulnerable moment they may have carried the day on the battlefield. This story reveals the frustrations endured by Jackson as he battled the persistent self-interest exhibited by these citizen-soldiers.

What ultimately ensured American dominance over the region was the victory over the British and the Indians in the War of 1812, and the ensuing burst of nationalism in the "Era of Good Feelings." Having defeated the British at New Orleans and forced their retreat from Louisiana, and having also defeated the Creeks, the United States was able to turn its attention to other Indian tribes and the Spanish. The Spanish agreed to part with Florida in the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819, after American raids led by Andrew Jackson had exposed the fragile hold the Spanish had on Florida. The United States thus secured its southern border by removing a foreign power that had provided a sanctuary to Indians and runaway slaves. It is interesting to contrast this burst of nationalism with the pronounced localism of just a few years earlier during the Creek war.

Rothman rightly credits the important role the United States government played in these events. American soldiers and sailors helped suppress the slave revolt in 1811, defeat the British in 1815, and defeat the Indians in the Southeast. Deep South planters thus gained physical security from internal and external threats to their economic and political strength. Tariff policies that favored Louisiana sugar planters encouraged the growth of that staple crop. Government surveyors and land offices laid out the boundaries of settlement and brought order to the sale of valuable land in the Deep South. The additional slave states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama also offered political strength to the South in Congress, especially during the Missouri Crisis of 1819-1821 when the evenly balanced Senate defeated the Tallmadge Amendment. The six senators from the Deep South clearly made a significant impact in that crisis.

What ultimately makes this study successful is not just keen analysis, but also Rothman's sprightly writing style, his eye for both the telling detail, and his under-

standing that a good anecdote enlivens history. He captures the rhythms of life in the early Deep South, such as the schedule of work involved in the growing of major crops and the process of cultivating them, helping the reader understand what growing sugar or cotton entailed. He also brings to life not only people, but events such as the Battle of New Orleans, the 1811 slave revolt, and the Red Sticks and the Creek War. Finally, Rothman exhibits a sense of humor and is a master of the well-turned phrase. One example of these qualities will suffice. While discussing growing white fears of free blacks, which led to passage of an ordinance banning free blacks from fencing and teaching martial arts to their fellow free blacks, Rothman wryly notes that in "New Orleans, it seems, good fencers did not make good neighbors" (p. 104).

This last remark, though humorous, makes an important point. Rothman addresses issues of race as well as economics throughout this book. There were many tensions that existed in the Deep South prior to 1812. Race helped create this tension, but so too did religion, and economic growth.

Religion, much like migrants to the region, had to adapt to the new territory. Whites rejected the anti-slavery strictures of Baptists and Methodists, and these sects changed their message in order to survive and prosper. Some slaves embraced evangelical Protestantism and thus laid the basis for Afro-American Christianity. Some Indians even embraced evangelical Christianity, though doing so would ultimately not help them hold onto their land.

Slave importation presented a major problem because the national government sought to limit, and then end, this trade after January 1, 1808. Government officials faced local planters who wanted and needed slaves as the cultivation of sugar in Louisiana exploded following the slave rebellion on St. Domingue. This rapid growth in sugar production led to greater demand for slave labor, and New Orleans soon became a major market for the importation of slaves. Rothman uses data from Gwendolyn Midlo Hall and SPSS software to correlate the rise and fall of slave prices in New Orleans with the price of sugar.[3] Slaveholders preferred Africans to Caribbean slaves, fearing they had been tainted with the virus of rebellion. Despite the 1808 ban, Louisiana slaveholders attempted to import slaves through Cuba, Texas, and Florida and then ship them to New Orleans. A brisk interstate slave trade also developed, shipping slaves from the Upper South to New Orleans. The growth of this flourishing interstate slave trade put the lie to the patriarchal relationship as masters bought, sold, and transported slaves southward against their will.

This growing slave population in turn led to growing white uneasiness and resulted in calls for closer slave management. The New Orleans city government passed legislation that created slave patrols to keep slaves on their plantations at night, and also forbade slaves from buying and selling goods on their own with river traders. Slaves did not simply accept their fate. Many of them attempted to run away, often by stowing away on board a ship departing New Orleans. Again, the city government played a role in regulating black life. The New Orleans government forbade ship captains from hiring slaves without their owners' permission. This government also closely regulated free black life, believing free blacks often helped slaves to run away. This step was part of a pattern of limiting free black freedoms by both the Spanish and American authorities. There were restrictions on marriage with whites, sumptuary laws, and restrictions on carrying firearms that the Spanish had instituted. Under American rule, free blacks lost the right of self-purchase and could not participate in the creation of the new state government in 1811. Declension in the condition of free blacks was clearly evident in New Orleans and mirrored the tightening of regulations that governed slave life

Overall, this study does a fine job of discussing the economic and population growth of an important region of the South, the important roles played by capitalism and the national government in "civilizing" this frontier, all without losing sight of the human dimension in this struggle. *Slave Country* represents the thoughtful effort of an historian to address the growth of slave society in the Deep South. As stated earlier, Adam Rothman has a first-rate writing style, a sure command of the sources, especially primary source materials, and this book fills a real need in the historical literature for a modern analysis of the growth of slavery in the Deep South.

Having praised this book, this reviewer does have two minor points where he demurs with Rothman's analysis. One of them is the absence of any discussion of the Burr Conspiracy of 1806. Aaron Burr's flight down the Mississippi River caused much concern in the nation's capital and elsewhere because people were not sure of Burr's goals. Did he want to separate the Louisiana Purchase from the United States? Was he in league with a foreign power, such as Spain? Given Rothman's argument, which stresses the concern attached by the na-

tional government and local planters to the actions of foreign powers in and around the Louisiana Purchase, this omission seems surprising. Did planters in the Deep South discuss Burr's Conspiracy? Or if they were silent about this matter, does that mean that the Burr Conspiracy was more important to people living in the East?

This reviewer also has a quibble about Rothman's discussion of the Missouri Crisis. Rothman correctly notes that there was little debate over the admission of Alabama to the Union in 1819. He cites James Tallmadge's acceptance of Alabama's admission as a slave state because of geography and not wishing to mix slaves and free blacks. There was little discussion about Alabama primarily because it was located south of the Ohio River, and thus fell under the control of the Southwest Ordinance of 1790, which was almost identical to the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, except that the national government could not ban slavery in these territories. The states of Alabama and Mississippi had been carved out of land ceded by the state of Georgia to the national government. Since Georgia was a slaveholding state, both Alabama and Mississippi were allowed to have slavery without any interference from the national government. This is a minor point, but it does bear mentioning.

These criticisms are minor and do not impair the quality of the work as a whole. This book is first-rate and should be read by historians and laypeople that have an interest in the development of a slaveholding society in the Deep South.

Notes

[1]. Kenneth M. Stampp, ed. *Records of Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations from the Revolution through the Civil War* (Frederick: University Publications of America, 1985).

[2]. Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* 181 (1990): pp. 95-118; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Random House, 1972).

[3]. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, ed. *Louisiana Slave Database, 1719-1820* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000). SPSS is the acronym for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Rothman uses the version SPSS 11.0.1.

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