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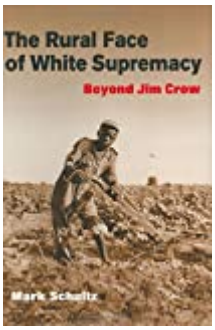

Mark Schultz. *The Rural Face of White Supremacy: Beyond Jim Crow.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005. xvi + 305 pp. $42.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-02960-8.

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Personalism and Racism in the Rural South

Mark Schultz's book, *The Rural Face of White Supremacy: Beyond Jim Crow*, offers a detailed look at how white supremacy worked in the rural rather than the urban South. Focusing on the cotton belt county of Hancock, Georgia, Schulz conducted extensive oral history work, which he interpreted in the context of more conventional archival studies. He concludes that, although white supremacy was as prevalent in the rural South as it was in the cities, it was constructed and functioned completely differently. Rather than being based on spatial segregation, rural white supremacy was grounded in personalism–the white control of blacks through an intricate mesh of economic, political, and social dominance woven from personal interactions.

The Rural Face of White Supremacy falls into three sections. The first, and longest, addresses social interactions between whites and blacks in rural Hancock County. Schultz explains that, unlike in urban areas, the rural South remained unsegregated in many ways. Blacks and whites were neighbors, co-workers, sexual partners, and even, in some instances, friends. They used the same doctors and attended each other's churches. Even the economic division was ragged: some blacks owned land and some whites were sharecroppers.

This picture of a non-segregated rural South, echoing as it does the antebellum situation, is probably commonsensical to most rural historians, but still bears repeating. For those whose racial picture of the South is formed from the dramatic "whites" and "colored" photographs of the civil rights era, a portrait of supremacy not based on geographical distinctions provides important balance. As Schultz says, "segregation simply did not fit well with the economy, geography, and cultural traditions of the rural South" (p. 66).

Despite the lack of physical segregation, rural Hancock County was as white-dominated as any area of the South. Without the presence of slavery, white Georgians maintained control through an intricate combination of social mores, economic dominance, and political disenfranchisement, all undergirded by the ever-present threat of violence. The second section of Schultz's book deals with the nature of racial violence in the county. This part challenges assumed wisdom that "the cotton belt led Georgia in the percentage of lynchings" (p. 133). Schultz

demonstrates that, although a cotton belt county, Hancock actually experienced only two lynchings. Rather, violence tended to be both highly personal and highly private. Schultz argues convincingly that the nature of the violence reflected the intensely personal system of white dominance, based as it was on networks of labor, kin, and patronage.

The third section of the book also represents a considerable deviation from accepted knowledge. Here, Schultz argues, that the black population of Hancock County was never completely denied the vote, even at the height of Jim Crow. Rather, he presents a picture whereby personal networks delineated black voting. Some blacks paid Georgia's poll tax (or had it paid for them) making them eligible to vote. Most of these men, however, followed the lead of their white patrons in determining their vote. Thus, as Schultz concludes, these voters were "less the precursors of the civil rights movement than they were the embodiment of patronage ties between the white elite and the 'respectable' black men whom they trusted" (p. 191). Despite this essentially patronage-based system of politics, Schultz points out that the black vote was not completely meaningless. Although often voting for avowed racists, some black communities in the county successfully lobbied their bloc vote to improve their physical situation somewhat–for example, receiving more money for black schools. This was especially true as the black vote started to increase after World War II.

Throughout this detailed portrait of the mechanisms of white control in rural Georgia, Schultz offers his reader many excellent stories. Working so much from primary sources and oral interviews, he is able to offer interesting, heartrending, and often funny stories to demonstrate the nuanced nature of black/white relations. For example, we learn about Zach Hubert, a black landowner, who hired a white crew to help thresh his wheat. The crew left outraged after Hubert's sons sat down next to them at dinner. Hubert followed them and apologized, noting that he later found out the crew boss was a Klan member and that Hubert's subservience probably saved him from further retributions (p. 53). This and many other anecdotes offer depth and personality to Schultz's argument that race relationships were founded on personalism.

Another major advantage of the book is that it continues the current trend in southern historiography of demonstrating ways in which blacks had power and ways that they used and expanded this power. Schultz is careful to note, throughout the book, black exceptions: blacks who owned land, blacks who voted, blacks who perpetrated violence against whites. In each case, he explains how such exceptions worked within the greater framework of white supremacy. Again, individual stories are key. Annie Dixon was the well-respected wife of a prosperous black landowner. When her white neighbor complained to the sheriff that she had fired a shotgun over his head, the sheriff replied, "if she did that, you must have been messing with her" (p. 171) and the end result was that the white man proffered Dixon an apology for accusing her of stealing his cow.

Overall, Schultz has done an excellent job of painting a detailed picture of how white supremacy operated in one rural county. By his careful use of oral histories (he also has an appendix detailing his oral history techniques and approaches that is well worth reading), he is able to offer considerable supporting evidence for his thesis that personalism rather than geographic division provided the basis for black/white interactions in the pre-civil rights era.

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