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**George Lewis.** *Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement.* New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2006. x + 254 pp. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-340-90022-2.

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## Resistance Reconsidered: White Southern Opposition to the Civil Rights Movement

Over the years since the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, a rich historical literature has emerged to account for the manner in which African Americans asserted or fulfilled their aspirations for first-class citizenship in the United States. Studies of the social, economic, and political history of the American South have also flourished, but as George Lewis observes in this volume, a mere handful of books have focused directly on the white Southern response to the civil rights movement.

The reader may be glad to discover that Lewis, a lecturer in American history at the University of Leicester, has attempted to chart a territory so fraught with interpretive pitfalls. But this is an assertion that should require some qualification. In a conservative era, Lewis writes from a revisionist perspective, offering systematic criticism especially of Numan V. Bartley's 1969 *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, an expansive study of Southern politics in the years between 1948 and 1960. A few years after Bartley, Francis Wilhoit published *The Politics of Massive Resistance* (1973), a book that broadened the definition of "massive resistance" to encompass virtually the whole of the white Southern opposition to civil rights reform.

Where Bartley focused in particular on politics, locating the origins of massive resistance in the white supremacist regimes of Virginia and the Deep South, and culminating in the upper South from 1957 to 1958, Lewis follows Francis Wilhoit by adhering more closely to the events of the civil rights movement. Yet more often Lewis responds to the arguments of Numan Bartley, whom he describes as imparting the "traditional view." He rejects the view that would see Southern opposition as merely the product of political elites of the historic Black Belt (old plantation district), whom Bartley dubbed the "Neobourbons." Lewis rightly asserts that the South was a far more heterogeneous region, and broadens the focus to look at white resistance at the grassroots level–on the thesis that "the caliber and tenor of massive resistance were greatly affected by the idiosyncrasies of state politics and the peculiarities of local conditions" (p. 60). He also incorporates the views of William Chafe's *Civilities and Civil Rights, Greensboro North Carolina and the Black Freedom Struggle* (1980), a book that receives virtually unqualified endorsement in this study.

*Massive Resistance* opens with a revisionist sketch of Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia, whose statements in February of 1956, almost two years after the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown* decision, in most accounts became the defining moment, the clarion call that awakened the South to opposition in defense of the "Southern way of living." Where Bartley and Wilhoit had seen a decisive pronouncement from which resistance flowed, Lewis sees something different. Previous accounts acknowledge that the Neobourbon opposition effectively turned the tide of public opinion in the South, which had been more moderate than it later became. Although Lewis seems to agree that there was a popular shift toward resistance, he asserts that the Neobourbon "clarion call" as an historical explanation is "deceptive in its simplicity and inaccurate in its veracity." Senator Byrd's

press statements covered over a vacillating indecision, and wavered between "massive resistance" and "passive resistance," a term used initially by Byrd. Later, when the federal courts rejected most of the legislative program that Bartley identified with massive resistance as such, according to Lewis, "the Old Dominion simply returned to its initial (i.e., passive) resistance strategy" (pp. 1-2, 114).

In an attempt to exceed the limits of "traditional studies" Lewis sets out to examine the actions of political elites within the context of local communities, state political traditions and cultures, and the constituencies that helped to define them. Beginning with state anti-*Brown* referendums in Georgia and Louisiana, Lewis then turns to the town of Hoxie, Arkansas, which tended to reflect the ambivalence and moderation that was more characteristic of the grassroots than the political leadership in the region. The most effective opposition in Hoxie, says Lewis, came not from the Neobourbons, but from groups organized by teachers and women, although the real force of resistance seems to have owed more to "outside agitators" (p. 35). Later on, Lewis focuses on grassroots militancy in various towns–where he sees "the visceral power of local grassroots intransigence" assuming the leadership (p. 80).

Lewis' scrutiny of state politics focuses on three main arenas: Virginia as the originating ground of elite-driven resistance politics, Louisiana as a Deep South locus of a militant neopopulist opposition, and North Carolina, where moderation and "progressivism" proved to be more effective as a strategy of opposition than "massive resistance" on the Bartley model. Lewis is at pains to show that Virginia and North Carolina politicians shared a common outlook in spite of the differences in their political behavior. His rendition of the "Southern Manifesto"–an opposition document endorsed by 101 Southern Congressional leaders–is an interesting departure from previous accounts. Authors of the Manifesto by 1956 were gravely concerned if not desperate to produce a unifying strategy, but the document had a galvanizing effect on the Southern populace only in a superficial way, and could not "smooth over the uneven surfaces of Southern politics" (p. 66).

What seems more original in Lewis's approach are the wider terms of his analysis, which argues for a multifaceted, "amorphous" movement and divides Southern opposition into three distinct periods. First was the period from 1954 to 1956 in which massive resistance politics was hatched in response to *Brown*. The radicalism of Byrd and the Neobourbons was deceptive, though the ambivalence and moderation of the grassroots gave way to a more intense, popular, and ideologically driven opposition. Second was a period in which resistance ran rampant from 1956 to 1960, adapting Cold War anticommunist rhetoric freely as a means of reinforcing the ideology of resistance though White Citizens Councils and other such groups which grew to a region-wide movement. But while the Cold War rhetoric was pervasive, its origin was in international circumstances; grassroots resistance in the South was more powerfully shaped by religion, according to Lewis, where a hard-line segregationist perspective sought a "sexualized theology" asserted through biblical justifications. The influence of religion, for Lewis, is another sign that massive resistance was in truth not an elitist phenomenon, but was born at the grassroots level (p. 84).

By 1960, as the third phase got under way, opposition to the civil rights movement, according to Lewis, had in effect become state-sponsored. But for the next five years as the most active phases unfolded, from New Orleans to Selma, resistance slowly lost cohesiveness and force as a strategically more successful civil rights movement forced resistance on the defensive (p. 122). In this third, crucial phase, resistance lost none of its inventiveness. Even as it developed an ideological appeal that found welcome support from the North, resistance slowly transformed itself through the kind of moderation and tokenism that had all along been closer to the grassroots. White radical resistance then exhausted itself through the violence of Birmingham's Bull Connors and Selma's Jim Clark, which effectively rallied pubic support for civil rights protestors who found that such violence was the crucial ingredient in providing federal intervention along with passage of civil rights legislation. Unlike Wilhoit, Lewis does not see violence as an inherent feature of massive resistance. Instead, it resulted from the willingness of figures such as Connors and Clark to play to particular constituencies while failing to heed to the advice of moderates, largely because they were ruthlessly targeted by civil rights leaders whose nonviolence became part of a strategy employed for effect (pp. 156-160).

Crucial to Lewis's approach over all is that North Carolina's Senator Sam Ervin, Governor Luther Hodges and Albany, Georgia Police Chief Laurie Pritchett are in a sense regarded as more representative of "massive resistance" than the more visible figures of Byrd, Richard Russell, George Wallace, or the purveyors of violence, Connors and Clark. This, however, is a theme more sug-

gested than explicitly defined. In the book's final chapter, "The Confederate Chameleon," Lewis describes how the campaign of opposition returned to national politics, and, failing to forestall passage of civil rights legislation, proceeded to reinvent itself as educational and professional groups resorted to coded assertions. For Lewis, the rearguard battle waged through moderation, legal pettifoggery and euphemistic subterfuge ultimately in the years after 1964-65 proved more successful than "massive resistance" itself. Although Lewis stops short of equating the rearguard resistance with the "real resistance" of Hodges and the moderate grassroots, the implication is nevertheless clear. Resistance had found new currency in a post-reform age and was ultimately successful at forestalling the more radical objectives of reformers.

Flawed in many of its assertions, this book will prove frustrating to readers for its overall absence of lucidity, devotion to scholastic exposition, and lack of narrative appeal. Although the book succeeds somewhat as a synthesis of recent historical writings, its occasional errors may repel many who otherwise might benefit from delving into a critically important field. For example, South Carolina's Strom Thurmond is named as the *vice-presidential* candidate in the Dixiecrat campaign of 1948 (p. 18). Although its final chapter seems to launch into an examination of post-1965 resistance, the book makes short shrift of the later events of public school integration and political transformation. The impact of Southern liberals, Black voting, Black education, the emergence of the new conservatism, and the Black Power transformation of the movement seem in this book to have little impact on the grassroots. Having provided such bromides as that massive resisters have been portrayed as "monolithic, one-dimensional reactionaries possessing little guile and even less intelligence" (p. 4), Lewis goes on to produce a study in which moderates are muddled with radicals, while civil rights reform advocates such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and John F. Kennedy are one-sided if not unimaginative. Reading this book, the novice is as likely to conclude that the toilsome restraint, bloodied sacrifice, and the subtle wisdom of the civil rights reformers would have accomplished nothing had it not been for the arrogance, crass racism, and calculated violence of the radical resisters. Lewis's book develops insights worth considering especially for scholars in this field but will provide few surprises for those already familiar with the recent literature.



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