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Richard Pillsbury, ed. *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture; Volume 2: Geography.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006. xviii + 202 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3013-0; $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-5681-9.

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Baby Steps

In 1997, William R. Ferris Jr. was appointed head of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) by President Clinton. As founding director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, one of Ferris's prominent achievements had been the publication of *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (*ESC*) in 1989. Now at the NEH helm, Ferris proposed a national series of regional encyclopedias as part of his initial program, "Rediscovering America: The Humanities and the Millennium." Part of the New Regionalism sweeping U.S. academic and philanthropic institutions, the program established regional centers at various universities and colleges for the purpose of developing oral-history collections, promoting cultural tourism with a regional basis, hosting scholarly conferences, and preparing encyclopedias on a particular region's culture. Implicit in the program was the understanding that mutually exclusive regional cultures exist, and that fostering regional sensibilities more than national ones was the primary responsibility of an NEH reformatted to fit the devolutionary mood in Washington, D.C.

The 1989 *ESC* was massive: approximately twelve hundred entries in sixteen hundred pages; eight hundred contributors; and an estimated $400,000 publication budget. Although it was a best-seller nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, scholarly reviews of the *ESC* were less glowing. Four criticisms were most important: contributors were overwhelmingly white males employed in universities and colleges (of the twenty-four consultants to the project, one was black and two were women); brief and sometimes dated entries attempted to cover the entire history of a topic in textbook-like fashion with little analysis, argument, or suggestions for further research; an exaggerated sense of changelessness permeated the volume; and Southern uniqueness was assumed but not examined, particularly with respect to the often intense dialectical relationship between Southerners and non-Southerners. The result, critics wrote, was an intriguing, informative volume with glaring biases and omissions, many of which masked difficult or painful realities. In his review for the *New York Times*, Howell Raines said it was a "step forward for Southern scholarship, not a great leap."[1]

The *New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* is being published to address these criticisms with emphasis on the many widespread changes that have occurred in the region since the 1980s. Ferris's co-editor for the 1989 *ESC*, Charles Reagan Wilson, is the sole general editor of this revised encyclopedia. A professor of Southern Studies specializing in the religious and cultural history of the South, Wilson follows closely in Ferris's footsteps, the more so since he assumed the directorship of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture in 1998 following Ferris's departure for the NEH. In his introduction, Wilson proclaims this greatly expanded, multivolume set uses many new and updated entries to portray a South greatly changed since the 1980s and one more in keeping with on-the-ground realities.

We may fairly ask then, how new is this new ency-

clopedia? Certainly, it has grown in size. Twenty-four volumes are proposed, a large expansion of subject matter compared to the previous effort. Volumes 1, 2, 3, and 4 appeared in 2006: *Religion*, *Geography*, *History*, and *Myth, Manners, and Memory*, respectively. In 2007, volumes 5 (*Language*) and 6 (*Ethnicity*) were published, and 7 (*Foodways*) and 8 (*Environment*) are scheduled for release later in the same year. Yet, improvements along the lines the critics suggested are not clearly indicated. Twenty-two of these titles are identical to categories used in the old *ESC*. *Women's Life* will be converted to a volume on *Gender*, and *Black Life* will be replaced by *Race* (yes, race was neither an entry nor a separate subject in the *ESC*). But it is not apparent yet whether these are more than cosmetic changes. Moreover, section editors and numerous entries remain largely the same.

If *Geography* is any indication, less than half of each volume's entries will be new. Whereas the geography of the South is now four times as long as its counterpart in the *ESC*, by my calculation only 44 percent of it is new material. Of a total of fifty-seven entries, twenty-three are taken verbatim from the old *ESC* section on geography, one is taken verbatim from the section on black life, and another seven are also identical except for a single new concluding paragraph added in the attempt to bring them up to date. None of this may be surprising since the original editor, Richard Pillsbury, was retained as editor of the new version.

Pillsbury is an academic geographer recently retired from Georgia State University, who earned his M.A. degree in 1964 under Fred Kniffen at Louisiana State University and his 1968 doctorate under Wilbur Zelinsky at Penn State. These facts will alert most geographers to Pillsbury's empiricist, inductive approach to the discipline. The entries he either co-wrote or solicited on "Courthouse Squares," "Geography of Sports," and "Log Housing" are good indicators of the book's orientation. As he writes in his own brief introduction, "geography is about where things are and why they are there" (p. xviii). Thus, the entries dwell on analyses of spatial distributions, with only periodic reference to iconic symbols or human values and beliefs, and still less on the spatial ideologies and practices that condition human life. It is an empirical-material geography of Southern artifacts, economies, and habits. This approach serves the avowed purpose written on the book's jacket quite well: "this volume sets the scene for the discussions in all the other volumes." In other words, this is geography as a stage on which the important dramas and comedies of life are played.

Pillsbury's own thirty-three-page entry on the cultural landscape, mistakenly written in the essay's actual title as "Landscape, Cultural," is by far the longest in the book. At the outset Pillsbury offers his nationalization thesis. The South is no longer as visibly distinctive as it once was, he announces, due to recent immigration, industrialization, a dramatic rise in urbanization, and development of an ersatz regional identity in which the material landscape has been frozen for the consumption of tourists. This is an important claim and one that could be amply supported, yet although Pillsbury briefly revisits these changes later, he seems to be trusting others to explain them in detail. If that was the strategy, it never pays off. I wondered, for example, what the implications of his thesis are for a twenty-four-volume encyclopedia founded on claims to regional exceptionalism. Is the *New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* just an attempt to mine the past in the service of regional chauvinism? Is a national homogeneity winning out over regional differences? Or, does that binary choice too simply characterize the issue? Pillsbury does not address such questions. Instead, he jumps abruptly to an extended essay on the shaping of historic Southern landscapes that is substantially the same as the one he wrote in 1989. The characteristics of landforms, migration, agricultural practices, urban patterns, house types, religion, foodways, and language are all summarized in evolutionary terms and discussed by sub-region: Atlantic Lowland, Gulf Lowland, Atlantic Coastal Plain, Upland South, and Other (Acadia and southern Florida).

Most of his account is factually accurate, which makes it useful to readers unfamiliar with the spatial distribution of these historic and mostly rural traits of the White South. But it is gravely flawed by the choice of the conceptual framework in which to arrange these facts. Here, readers will encounter a 1950s-era Eurocentric model of land-use evolution, startling in its disregard for the geographical scholarship amassed in at least the past twenty years. For example, effective occupancy and use of the region is portrayed as beginning with European immigration and continuing as a purely Euro-American activity, which could not be further from the truth. Sadly, there is no American Indian or African presence in the historical or contemporary cultural landscape in this account.

The bias is equally evident in the only two entries in this volume explicitly devoted to American Indian residency in the South. One, "Cherokee Settlement," briefly explains Cherokee dwellings and village layouts before moving to a lengthier and, one assumes, more impor-

tant discussion of white influences. Another, "Indians and the Landscape," lists only transportation corridors, place-names, the presence of corn in today's diet, and, still more inexplicably, "the attraction to nature" (p. 78). Conspicuous by its absence is any reference to the era of ethnic cleansing; the massive removals of tens of thousands of Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks, and Seminoles between 1812 and 1836; the extensive agricultural lands and villages they were forced to leave behind; and the legal, political, and mortal combat accompanying this horror that eventually engaged all three branches of the federal government, several state governments, and the planter, African, and Indian societies in the center of the maelstrom. Careful readers will find three sentences on the subject hidden away in the item titled, "Migration Patterns."

The book is almost as weak on the subject of African Americans. Most who study the South recognize that black communities everywhere have Southern roots and that all of the South is part black, but most of this volume ignores these facts. For example, readers will find nothing on geographies of race relations or the civil rights movement. There are only two paragraphs on blacks in "Patterns of Ethnicity," and little or nothing in "Foodways," "Language," "Plantation Morphology," and "Land Use." There are only six city entries. Four mention black experience only briefly (Richmond, New Orleans, Memphis, and Atlanta); the others not at all (Nashville and Birmingham). Two notable exceptions are the entry on the Carolina and Georgia sea islands and the account of rice plantations, which uses Judith Carney's recent work on blacks as agents in shaping the landscape and economy of the South Carolina coast.

Other parts of the book are more mixed. In "Agricultural Regions," the sections on region-wide rural depopulation and Florida's agro-industry are good, but the claim that producers in the Upland South were isolated from markets "from the beginning" is no longer credible (p. 39). Research reported in Wilma Dunaway's *Slavery and the American Mountain South* (2003) refutes this in great detail. Moreover, Dunaway shows how much black slaves contributed to the industrial and mercantile sectors as well as agriculture, additional topics about which this volume is silent.

Similarly, the discussion of Southern "Crime and Violence" is good insofar as this is the only part of the book where the exceptionalist thesis is submitted to a comparative analysis with other U.S. regions. Too bad there are just two sentences on race-related violence and another surprising yet unsubstantiated assertion: rural white Southerners were and are prone to violence primarily because of their attachment to the land and their dispersed location (p. 51).

So far, I have neglected an important and vexing question most geographers will want answered. What geographical boundaries are used to define the South in this book? Here again I have a mixed response. On the one hand, in his introductory essay, Pillsbury takes pains to carefully account for regional differences within states, arguable as those differences may be. I applaud this effort. His map, "Historic Southern Culture Areas," (p. 14) shows an extended version of the region spanning 1,200 miles from the Atlantic to central Texas and central Oklahoma, and from northern Florida and the Gulf of Mexico north to the middle of Missouri, the north side of the Ohio Valley, and the southern reaches of West Virginia and Maryland. This is fair enough. But, this map seems to have been ignored by many contributors for most of the places named above are omitted or given very short shrift in the text. Most surprising is the omission of Missouri and Texas from serious consideration in this volume. The entry, "Little Dixie," is the only one explicitly dealing with Missouri, and "Southwest" is the only one on Texas. Oklahoma appears only in broad-brush regional entries on the Ouachita and Ozark mountain regions that too briefly characterize life there. Southern Florida, by contrast, gets more attention. The entry on Cuban settlement is devoted entirely to Miami, a city Southern in latitude only.

To be fair, there are at least half a dozen very good entries that help save the book. Three retained from the *ESC* are "Religious Regions," "Land Division," and "Black Migration." Among the best new entries are the one about Orlando in "Disneyfication of Central Florida" and two with awkward titles, "Hispanic/Latino Origins Populations" and "Jewish Origins Populations." The majority of the latter is about Jews outside of Florida, notably the important founding populations of Charleston and Savannah. The writer also provides interesting explanations for the decline of small Jewish communities throughout the South.

Does this book make amends for past errors and assist us in re-thinking Southern distinctiveness? My answer is, not much, for it falls short of fixing most of the major problems of the original *ESC*. Although some new contributors were enlisted, the vast majority of the forty-five authors represented here are still middle-aged or retired white male academics. Four women were added,

but the total of six female contributors is paltry compared to the number available. The lone black contributor also wrote for the *ESC* and his contribution was imported verbatim from the "Black Life" section of that book. This should be a concern since past experience has demonstrated that the worlds of women and racialized minorities have frequently been ignored by the old white guard in geography. Secondly, many of the entries are written in a textbook-style that lacks insight into important intellectual issues or suggestions for further research. Third, Southern uniqueness remains assumed instead of examined. Comparative efforts are also rare. The fourth criticism involved the old stereotype of the changeless South. Here, some progress is evident. All of the contributors made some effort at identifying significant post-1980s transformations relevant to their assigned topic. And several of the new entries are quite good in delineating wholly new developments. But if this volume is similar to the other twenty-three, I am afraid that once again it is no great leap forward. Just another step, a baby step.

Note

[1]. Howell Raines, "Getting to the Heart of Dixie," *New York Times*, September 17, 1989, BR3.