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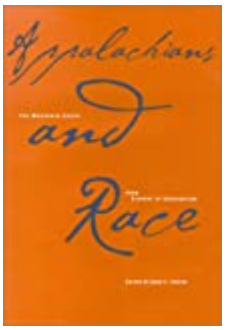

John Inscoe, ed. *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001. 344 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-2173-4.

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Different but Not Distinctive

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Appalachia plays many different roles in the traditional narrative of nineteenth-century history. Historians often depict the mountain southerners of the antebellum period as quaint yeomen not yet entangled by the greedy tendrils of the "market revolution." In the postbellum period, these same seemingly innocent Appalachians found themselves under siege from the modern world of corporations, railroads, and secularism.

In addition to this picture of an isolated and "pure" economic world, past historians also have created a contradictory set of stereotypes about race relations in nineteenth-century Appalachia. During the Civil War, these stubborn folk are portrayed as fiercely independent and closeted abolitionists. They lived in the South, the story goes, but their strong adherence to the Union and revulsion for slavery made them not quite "southern." The region's white population is one of either innocent yeomen yet unspoiled by the South's racial problems or poor white folk whose self-chosen unfamiliarity with African-Americans bred a mean racism. In either view, the role of black residents of the mountain South is often neglected, but, in both views, Appalachian race relations developed in a distinct fashion from the rest of the South.

This idea of Appalachian "distinctiveness" has been criticized by a number of scholars of the region, and for good reason.[1] It is high time that historians acknowledge that Appalachia was not a region of isolated simple folk who either resisted progressive change or preserved traditional ideas of community (depending upon your political perspective), while the rest of the nation marched on through history. We need to incorporate a more complex vision of Appalachia into our historical framework of the nineteenth century; one that takes a more sophisticated approach to the region's experiences with the central questions of southern history.

John Inscoe's recent collection of essays, *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South From Slavery to Secession*, succeeds in complicating the concept of Appalachian "distinctiveness" and the question of race. It draws from a wide variety of scholarship–some new, some familiar–in order to forge new questions for not only the interdisciplinary scholars working the field of Appalachian studies but also those interested in the his-

tory of race relations and the history of the South. But the value of this collection stretches far beyond the sum total of sub-disciplines represented in its essays, and *Appalachians and Race* should be of interest to all scholars of American history.

The authors here, for example, provide new insights into the nature of slavery in the mountain South. Were Appalachian whites resistant to the idea of slavery? Did these whites resent their slaveholding brethren in the plantation regions? Did enslaved African Americans in the region exercise more control over their lives than those in the Piedmont or Tidewater? These questions are not new, and a number of authors here support the editor's position established in *Mountain Masters* (1989) that although the number of slaves might have been smaller in the mountain regions of the South, slavery hardly dwelled on the margins of Appalachian society.[2] Wilma Dunaway, for example, argues that "southern Appalachia was neither isolated from nor culturally antagonistic toward the interstate slave trade" (p. 130). Industrial slavery, moreover, served as an important component of western Virginia's early salt trade, as John E. Stealey III demonstrates in his essay. The slave system actually was expanding in Appalachia on the eve of the war. Kenneth Noe, in his study of railroads in Virginia, maintains that if the Civil War had not eliminated slavery, "it certainly would have continued its march into the southwest Virginia mountains" (p. 107).

The personal dimension of slavery in Appalachia also forms an important theme in this collection of essays. Inscoe explores Frederick Law Olmsted's narrative of a visit to the region as an important source for the attitude of mountain whites to slavery-albeit through the lens of a educated northerner. Cecelia Conway's study of one of the most recognizable artifacts of Appalachian distinctiveness, banjo music, suggests that a blending of Celtic and African styles of banjo playing was likely the fruit of interaction between mountain whites and enslaved blacks during the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Charles Dew uses the personal narrative of Sam Williams, an enslaved Virginia ironworker, to view Appalachian blacks as "men and women who lived out human lives despite the confines and cruelties of their enslavement" (p. 75). One of the most peculiar manifestations of the "peculiar institution" in Appalachia had to be the story of Adam Waterford, an African American who apparently owned slaves in Tazewell County, Virginia. Marie Tedesco's essay dealing with Waterford brings to light the strangest detail of all: Adam Waterford apparently owned his brother Walter at one point in time. All of these stories suggest that the study of the day-to-day negotiations between slaves and masters reveals much about the larger system of slavery in the mountain South.

The complex nature of race relations in the Appalachian South did not become any more straightforward during Reconstruction. Gordon McKinney demonstrates that African-American voters fought hard to win a place within the Republican Party structure in Appalachia during Reconstruction, only to find themselves systematically marginalized by both political parties during the 1880s. In their study of race and poverty in Clay County, Kentucky, Kathleen Blee and Dwight Billings argue that although impoverished whites who failed to accumulate property in the late nineteenth century could move out of the region, neither the steady accumulation of wealth nor out-migration was a possibility for Clay County's African Americans.

In her essay on African-American education in Lumpkin County, Georgia, Jennifer Lund Smith explores ways in which blacks "used the paternalistic ethos of the white elite to their advantage" (p. 220). But in the end, the African-American community won only a partial victory when it came to education. Economic and educational hardship seemed as pervasive among Appalachian blacks as it did among their counterparts in the rest of the South. Even in the context of Appalachian history, in which the dual curse of poverty and low levels of education seem endemic, racial identity often served as a dividing line between the haves and have-nots.

The question of Appalachian distinctiveness within the American South continues well into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Literary figures and social scientists of the North constructed a vision of an "unspoiled" Appalachia during this time, which Nina Silber argues included a "distance and separation from southern blacks and from poor whites' racial hysteria" (p. 254). Silber's essay on the northern celebration of mountain "whiteness" as a projection of their own racial anxiety is important here. Despite the portrait drawn by northern elites of a racially "pure" Appalachia, blacks continued to contribute to the region's history. But the presence of black Appalachians did not necessarily translate into racial equality. Joe William Trotter's essay on the African-American experience in West Virginia coalfields demonstrates that the formation of black communities in Appalachia often occurred as the result of segregation and competition with white labor. Racial harmony was as unlikely as racial purity in the mountain

South, and as these essays suggest, there was a marked divergence between the imagined and real Appalachia in regard to race.

A closer examination of race relations in the region suggests that mountain whites were hardly strangers to Jim Crow. Ronald Lewis's portrait of convict labor in the coal mining regions of Alabama provides the volume with one of its most disturbing, if revealing, commentaries on the New South's method of developing resources with a form of labor that was, in some ways, worse than slavery. In the words of one southerner, convicts were better laborers than slaves because "we don't own 'em. One dies, get another" (p. 263). W. Fitzhugh Brundage provides the final essay in the volume and yet more evidence contradicting claims of Appalachian distinctiveness in the Jim Crow Era. Brundage finds that the frequency and severity of lynching in Appalachia resembled that of the rest of the South, and concludes that the region was "neither blessed by exceptionally benign race relations nor cursed by implacable race hatred" (p. 302)

In the end, these essays suggest a new role for Appalachia within the larger history of the South, and of the United States. Certainly the authors suggest that the mountain South was different, and in some ways unique– perhaps in the same way that South Carolina was different from Virginia, or that the cases of New Orleans or Louisville are unique within southern history. But "distinctive" is a tough sell here, as the authors in *Appalachians and Race* by no means suggest that the mountain South falls in line with the old stereotypes that painted the region with broad strokes of "innocent," "backward," or "pure." These essays suggest that the historical experiences of mountain whites and blacks belong in the larger cultural pastiche of the South. In future studies of the region, we can only hope that the old stereotypes finally are laid to rest and Appalachia's place within the scope of southern history will be appreciated."

[1]. For a good summary of this argument and a call for new directions in the study of Appalachian development, see Ronald Lewis and Dwight Billings, "Appalachian Culture and Economic Development: A Retrospective View on the Theory and Literature," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 3 (Spring 1997): 3-42.

[2]. John Inscoe, *Mountain Masters: Slavery and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989).

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