



John B. Boles, ed. *A Companion to the American South*. Malden, Mass. and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2002. xii + 554 pp. \$124.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-631-21319-2.



Reviewed by James Farmer (University of South Carolina Aiken)

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Testimony to a Vibrant Scholarly Field (and a Cutting-Edge “Who’s Who” for South Junkies)

Graduate students in southern history rejoice! Your *vade mecum* is here (although a bit hefty for carrying, and a bit pricey for the typical graduate student). Actually, all serious academic southernists will want to consult at least some of the chapters in this excellent collection of historiographical essays. John B. Boles, managing editor of *The Journal of Southern History*, has once again put our tribe in his debt by editing a worthy updating of his and Evelyn Thomas Nolen’s 1987 volume, *Interpreting Southern History*, which was an updating of Arthur S. Link and Rembert W. Patrick’s 1965 *Writing Southern History*.^[1]

In their preface to *Interpreting Southern History*, Boles and Nolen noted the dramatic changes in the scope, methodologies, and interpretive schemes in the field since the appearance of Link and Patrick’s volume twenty-two years earlier. The ensuing fifteen years have witnessed a comparable evolution, and it is surely not too soon for a sequel to the 1987 collection. In the present volume twenty-nine essays sum up the state of the field today, compared to thirteen in the Boles and Nolen offering, and although this is partly a matter of how the pie is sliced, it is also a measure of the growing depth

and breadth of the field. Perhaps most dramatic is the contrast in the earliest period, for here we have five essays addressing the years before 1800, including chapters devoted to Indians, and the Spanish and French, where there was one in the earlier volume. Other areas receiving more attention are predictable: women, marginalized groups, the environment, and the most recent decades.

The advent of on-line search engines and data bases have made it possible for scholars to quickly compile bibliographies and abstracts, easing the otherwise formidable task of keeping up with even a small corner of an academic field as large as the American South. However, these digital tools have not rendered a volume such as this one obsolete, for we still need carefully wrought historiographical essays by scholars who have read widely and deeply and can synthesize a long list of sources gracefully and provocatively. This is what the present volume provides, and so we share our debt to Boles with the twenty nine-scholars who have, quibbles aside, performed their tasks admirably.

There will, of course, be arguments about the treatment of individual books, and the priorities of the writ-

ers as to the volumes they consider most influential, but I applaud the essayists who chose, first, to begin with the classics in their fields, no matter how old, and second, to devote more space to a smaller number of books, placing them in context and allowing them the room needed for careful evaluation. Often a page or even two, and occasionally more, are devoted to a single work. Some chapters offer a narrative structure into which the most significant interpretations are woven. In every chapter, many other works are evaluated briefly, and even more are cited in the bibliographies, which in some cases list over one hundred titles. But the approach taken in these chapters avoids the tendency of one paragraph per book, which falsely implies an equality of value. Lacking the will to summarize all twenty-nine chapters, I offer my eccentric selection of and comments on some of the book's essays.

Amy Turner Bushnell's essay on Indians in the early south offers a trenchant survey of what for most southernists is an obscure area. She describes the "new Indian history" which "is more conscious of relationships among Indian nations and of intercultural spaces." It combines a sense of Indian agency, institutional and policy history, and social science models to put "Native Americans center stage in a drama reaching back to when the south was theirs" (p. 4). Cynthia Kierner discusses the trend away from individual colonial histories and toward subregional and community studies that focus on social and cultural history. She devotes eight pages to the Chesapeake and four to the Carolinas and Georgia, reflecting her sense of the relative wealth of the studies she examines. In both cases, older works, by Edmund Morgan and Peter Wood, still define the terms of scholarly debate.

Betty Wood's treatment of slavery to 1808 is a particularly excellent example of the historiographer's art. Like Kierner, she builds her essay on seminal studies reaching back some thirty years, those of David Brion Davis, Winthrop Jordan, Edmund Morgan, and Peter Wood. Into that framework she places the works of Sylvia Frey, herself, Ira Berlin, Philip Morgan and Kathleen Brown. In the last essay in Part 1, Ira D. Gruber treats the Revolutionary era in the form of a dialogue on the importance of ideology versus rational self-interest. He shows how the current generation has either built upon the work of Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood, as in the case of Jack N. Rakove and Timothy Breen, or has departed from them, as with Joyce Appleby, Rhys Isaac, and Rachel Klein. His conclusion: the rational self-interest crowd has had the better of it lately.

Part 2, covering the antebellum South, is the longest section, with eight essays. Mark Smith's essay on the plantation economy focuses on the perennial question of profitability. Beginning with U. B. Phillips and Lewis Gray, he focuses mainly on Eugene Genovese, Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, Gavin Wright, Roger Ransom, Peter Coclanis, Richard Kilbourne and Wilma Dunaway. His conclusion: "slavery was profitable as a business but probably damaging for the southern economy as a whole" (p. 115). Stephanie Shaw's essay on slave culture effectively creates a dialogue among the authors she examines. She describes the works of Phillips, Herbert Aptheker, Kenneth Stampp and Stanley Elkins as the "cornerstones for the historiography of antebellum slavery," and then treats subsequent writers in terms of their positions relative to these four on a range of questions. She masterfully shows how more light on one question triggers further inquiry on others, creating a self-sustaining industry of slavery studies that has attracted some of the most gifted scholars in the field.

Samuel Hyde, Jr. notes the somewhat confused state of yeomen studies and expresses regret that, despite some interesting works, this large class has yet to "enjoy the intensive analysis that characterizes the recent historiography of slavery and the planter elite" (p. 152). Randy Sparks's look at religion in the pre-civil war era begins in the colonial period with the works of Jon Butler, Rhys Isaac, Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood, and Philip Morgan. (Here we have an example of the many redundancies in the book; Isaac especially was treated extensively in earlier essays, but the comparisons are interesting and so the redundancy is not resented.) Moving forward chronologically, he praises the works of Christine Heyrman and Stephanie McCurry, noting their addition of women to the story as well as their disagreement on the revolutionary nature of early evangelicalism, which he considers the central issue of the last two decades. His treatment of religion in the study of Civil War causation is limited to a brief discussion of Mitchell Snay's work.

Daniel Crofts offers a lecture-like overview of four aspects of antebellum politics: tensions between oligarchy and democracy, the political parties, state and local politics, and the South's relationship to the nation. J. Mills Thornton and William Freehling get more space than most, and the nexus of politics and culture is acknowledged in extensive comments on the works of Eugene Genovese and Bertram Wyatt-Brown. Antebellum women are examined by Sally McMillen in an even-handed survey. Noting the complexities of gender, class and race, she begins with Anne Firor Scott's

1970 book, and shows how more recent works have elaborated upon, taken issue with, or offered tangential studies from it. Prominent players here are Catherine Clinton, Jane Turner Censer, Joan Cashin, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Suzanne Lebsack, Deborah Gray White, Victoria Bynum, Jean Friedman, Stephanie McCurry and Drew Faust. McMillen's bibliography of some eighty sources shows the fertility of this relatively young field.

David Moltke-Hansen develops his essay on the intellectual and cultural world of the Old South with a novel device. Noting that this field was generally ignored until about a quarter-century ago, he explains its flowering as a result of changes in modern American culture, and then proposes that "the distance traveled in the study of the intellectual and cultural life of the Old South over the last quarter of the twentieth century can be measured by the degree to which the 1989 *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* remains useful or has become increasingly dated" (p. 214).

His conclusion points to the use of the singular, culture, and suggests that we now see it as plural. He looks at scholars who emphasize the European or African origin of southern cultures, and at those who stress the rise of new, often syncretic, cultures here. Included in the first camp are Grady McWhinney, Raimondo Luraghi, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, John Michael Vlach, while the second is represented by Charles Joyner and Rhys Isaac. Marxism has informed the work of other historians, most notably, Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, whose explication of the conservative mind of the southern elite has created much anticipation of their projected multi-volume work, *The Mind of the Master Class*. Moltke-Hansen also treats Louis Rubin and his critic Michael Kreyling, and Michael O'Brien, who "has already done more than anyone to call attention to the range of antebellum southerners' secular, humanistic, intellectual engagements and productions..." (p. 223). Others, including biographers of several antebellum thinkers, have enriched our understanding of the mind(s) of the Old South, but there is still much to learn, especially about the institutions in which southern thought matured and functioned.

George C. Rable takes the measure of Civil War scholarship by looking at issues of leadership—political and military, strategy, the common soldier, class tensions in the Confederacy, religion and its impact on the war's outcome, slavery during the war, and the homefront, including women. Pointing to a fruitful new area of study, Rable praises Daniel Sutherland's work on the Confeder-

ate community of Culpeper County, Virginia. The contentious field of emancipation studies is well treated by Laura F. Edwards, who notes that scholarship here is particularly indicative of our present political concerns. Michael W. Fitzgerald reviews the bitter field of Reconstruction scholarship, and shows that it is finally reaching a level of maturity necessary for, and marked by, more subtle and nuanced studies.

Sam Webb's essay on populism and progressivism begins with the myths popularized by W. J. Cash, and then shows how various scholars, from Vann Woodward to Lawrence Goodwyn, Steven Hahn, Jack Temple Kirby, George B. Tindall and Dewey Grantham have challenged them. Woodward again takes center stage in James Beeby and Donald Nieman's chapter on Jim Crow. Despite valuable studies by Glenda Gilmore, Howard Rabinowitz, Tera Hunter and Leon Litwack, the authors conclude that much more needs doing, especially with the connections between gender and race. In this connection, Elizabeth Hayes Turner's piece on women in the New South demonstrates the vitality and growing sophistication of this field generally, and its list of some seventy-five works testifies to the impact of women historians on our awareness and understanding of gender in the southern past.

John Inscoe's essay on Appalachia reminds us of the ever-widening range of investigation into the South's history, and the resulting appreciation of its diversity. Unlike most of the other writers, he provides a narrative history of the sub-region and weaves the works under review into it. His theme is the growing respect with which scholars have treated the people of the mountains. Mart A. Stewart's essay on southern environmental history, more than the others, is a call to arms. He notes that "in the 1980s, one-third of the hazardous waste landfills in the United States were located in five southern states ... and all of them were sited in places where neighboring residents were largely black and always poor" (p. 413). Thus, while he praises the works of several scholars in this old but new field, he urges that more are needed. He has, it should be added, done his share in this regard.

Finally, Pamela Tyler's treatment of works on the impacts of the New Deal and World War II dramatizes the growing realization of the pivotal nature of this fifteen year period. She pays special attention to the works of Pete Daniel, Jack Temple Kirby, Jacquelyn Hall and her co-authors, Bruce Schulman, Morton Sosna, and Jim Cobb, but adds that the fictional works of William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor still stand alone in their

insights into this traumatic era.

A few quibbles: As valuable as this book is, one may not be too greedy to wish that its editor, who surely is capable of the task, had included an essay addressing the general trends in the field during the last two decades. Also, most if not all of the topics and periods covered here have been the subject of historiographical essays that have appeared in the periodical journals in recent years. Reference to these would have provided readers with alternative overviews and interpretations. Finally, with rare exceptions, the essays do not include dissertations, and thus we are not alerted to works that will soon enrich the field further.

Reference works such as this are either enhanced or diminished by their indexes, and here the editor has chosen an approach that some users will question. Authors and titles are listed in the chapter bibliographies, but not in the index. The Boles and Nolen volume, by comparison, has footnotes, and a seventy-page index, which is nothing but authors and titles. Here, on the other hand, historical periods, states, topics and concepts are listed in the index, so that one can instantly find that

the yeomanry are discussed on pages 139-53, or that the book contains comments on twenty-three topics related to South Carolina. This reader would have preferred an index that includes authors *and* topics and concepts, but the chapter bibliographies and the otherwise sterling quality of the production make this one hindrance bearable.

Every academic library should add this volume to its holdings, and every serious student of southern history should consult it. One can only wonder what another fifteen or twenty years will yield, as the insights discussed in this volume are digested and the lacunae noted here are addressed.

Notes

[1]. John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen, eds., *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); Arthur S. Link and Rembert W. Patrick, eds., *Writing Southern History: Essays in Honor of Fletcher M. Green* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965).

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