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Louis M. Kyriakoudes. *The Social Origins of the Urban South: Race, Gender, and Migration in Nashville and Middle Tennessee, 1890-1930.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. xviii + 226 pp. ISBN 978-0-8078-2811-3; ISBN 978-0-8078-5484-6.

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Middle Tennesseans in Motion

Louis Kyriakoudes explores the roots of the "modern, urban South" (p. 2) in this impressively constructed volume focusing on the greater Nashville area between 1890 and 1930. By bridging the histories of urban and agricultural history while dabbling in gender, race, labor, and other sub-disciplines, Kyriakoudes has made a valuable contribution to a number of fields. The author has combined thorough research with lucid, largely jargon-free writing. The book therefore lends itself quite well to a number of graduate and undergraduate courses.

Kyriakoudes attempts to tell this story through the eyes of the participants. Wherever possible, he adds the stories of common people to illustrate specific points about changing social, economic, and cultural practices in the greater Nashville area. Thus, readers get to encounter the (often dashed) hopes of the people drawn to Nashville for a variety of reasons. Kyriakoudes reminds us that although they were taking place in processes that were national in scope, the participants saw their choices in deeply personal and individual terms.

Kyriakoudes begins his story with a compelling chapter examining the birth of Nashville's famous Grand Ole Opry. The ties between the Opry and Nashville's environs were tight, the author argues, as many of the early performers hailed from Middle Tennessee. He believes, however, that the traditional understanding of the Opry is as flawed as is the traditional understanding of the urban South. Some previous scholars have argued that the Opry demonstrates the dominance of rural values in Southern cities. Yet the Opry had a much more complicated relationship with rural culture than its admirers might care to admit, and that relationship serves as the bridge onto the interesting struggles between core and periphery that abound throughout this study.[1] Opry listeners, according to Kyriakoudes, "could project their nostalgia for elements of a fading rural culture without actually surrendering their desire for the products and the ways of modernity" (p. 8).

Having demonstrated his comfort with cultural history, Kyriakoudes proceeds to analyze the economic, geographic, and demographic pressures that helped to transform the greater Nashville area between 1890 and 1930. Nashville's location in the Upper South, as well as its good fortune in surviving the Civil War with little damage, helped to account for the city's development as a "merchant's city" by the turn of the century (p. 22). The Cumberland River and a number of railroads helped to link Nashville to a series of various markets, and in turn, helped to draw the rural residents in the hinterland closer to Nashville's economy. The development of this integrated transportation system also proved to restrict the development of Nashville's economy to low value-added industries, such as wheat, lumber, and livestock. Although entrepreneurial Nashvillians attempted larger scale industrial concerns, especially in iron, textiles, and meatpacking, they found that they were unable to compete with other, more established competitors. Nashville's businessmen consequently focused on developing regional markets rather than national ones.

The residents of Nashville's rural surroundings receive the majority of the author's analysis. The same forces that drew Nashville businessmen into larger market networks compelled their rural brethren, too. Farmers felt additional pressures, which Kyriakoudes demonstrates were compounded by race and by gender. High fertility rates, declining child mortality, and a rise in land prices all combined to strain the agricultural traditions that had developed in the greater Nashville area. Fortunately for those rural residents, Nashville and its markets offered numerous opportunities to supplement income. Whether it was selling hogs, produce, or poultry, or logging the abundant old-growth forest in the region, rural residents found themselves in increasingly complicated economic relationships by the turn of the twentieth cen-

tury. As markets matured, competition increased, and many of the rural Tennesseans found themselves competing with better organized–and faceless–distant foes. As a result, increasingly after 1900, more individuals found themselves leaving rural areas for the city.

Kyriakoudes revels in the unintended consequences of progressive reforms meant to stave the crisis of agrarian flight during the second decade of the 1900s. People were leaving the hinterland, these reformers believed, because "the countryside's problems stemmed from a rural culture that was backward and resistant to change" (p. 88). Reforming roads and schools, progressives thought, would therefore check the people leaving Nashville's environs for the city. Yet these very reforms, the author points out, increased the likelihood of outmigration: good roads made it easier to escape to the city, and improved education meant that aspiration and training outweighed opportunity.

The rest of Kyriakoudes's book traces the types of experiences that the former rural residents tended to enjoy in Nashville or in other locales. Drawing upon census materials, World War I selective service records and YWCA documents, the author reconstructs the ways in which race and gender dictated the experience of these new arrivals. He shows that African Americans were more likely to move beyond the Nashville area during and after World War I, because their economic opportunities were largely restricted to unskilled labor in the city. Because of the oppressive conditions in the rural areas from which they came, women of both races were more likely than men to migrate to the cities.

Kyriakoudes's ability to tell this story in a compact 159 pages of text speaks to the skill with which this book is constructed. The author is able to engage in a number of historiographical debates without getting contentious, and even resists the temptation to attack George B. Tindall, Richard Wade, and C. Vann Woodward directly when his evidence differs from their interpretations. Sticking to his argument, in such cases the author merely refers the readers to his endnotes. He also does not let statistical information overshadow the argument by retelling, *ad infinitum*, his statistical findings.

The main shortcoming of this book is a product of its ambitious methodological scope. Although a number of common people appear for brief moments throughout Kyriakoudes's text, the author does not follow their individual stories except to illustrate his arguments. Readers will understand the forces explaining how and why individuals made choices to migrate from the areas of rural Tennessee, but they are unlikely to remember the individuals themselves. If Kyriakoudes had not professed interest in exploring "the process of migration from the perspective of the migrants themselves," this critique could be ignored (p. 2). He excels in describing the process, but is not as successful in making readers appreciate the stories of the people whose lives were a part of that process. A tighter focus on a handful of such individuals throughout the book might have helped Kyriakoudes in this regard, but it also would have made for a different book in size and in scope.

The Social Origins of the Urban South neatly synthesizes an array of scholarship, while keeping a human perspective on the processes that historians typically discuss in inanimate terms. Scholars of the New South, urban history, and Tennessee will particularly appreciate this fine contribution to the literature.

Note

[1]. Kyriakoudes's interpretation of the Opry is based on primary research as well as the work of Curtis Ellison, *Country Music Culture: From Hard Times to Heave* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995); and Richard Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

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