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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Bradford J. Wood**. *This Remote Part of the World: Regional Formation in the Lower Cape Fear, North Carolina, 1725-1775.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004. xx + 344 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-540-1.

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**Published on** H-South (February, 2006)

**Tar Heel State, or Tar Heel Region?**

In this detailed and exhaustively researched social historical study, Bradford J. Wood argues that understanding the Lower Cape Fear region of North Carolina requires a new paradigm in Early American Studies. Put briefly, a "tar heel region" preceded the "tar heel state," and that difference makes a difference in how we understand early America.

Wood uses a distinctive methodology for data collection and processing. He built two computer databases that linked together 29,000 entries collected from a variety of sources, including county court minutes, wills, conveyances, land patents, port entrances, tax lists, civil suits, church records, militia lists, and several more types of records. Citations of individuals in that extensive collection were then organized by name. Wood identified five thousand personal names in the data to form the empirical heart of the study and what Wood cites in the notes and text as the "Lower Cape Fear computer biographical files" (p. xvii).

Given this intensive approach to the archives, it is not hard to see why Wood's manuscript won the Hines Prize, awarded by the College of Charleston's Carolina Lowcountry and Atlantic World Program. The published text should help satisfy that program's desire to promote the study of the Carolinas within the wider Atlantic paradigm that is currently at the apex of its influence, for years now having been a theme-setting phrase for plenary sessions and conferences.

As the title hints, the Lower Cape Fear formed at the edge of the Atlantic World. Remoteness was defined by cultural distance from colonial centers. The local elite was conscious of this remoteness. James Murray, a colonist, expressed gratitude to a relative for his continued correspondence, fearing as he did that he "would be forgotten 'in this remote part of the world"' (p. 107).

But if the title hints at an Atlantic World, the subtitle suggests a profoundly local or "regional" study. In fact, *This Remote Part of the World* is an example of what David Armitage has termed "Cis-Atlantic" history, or the placing of a detailed study of a specific region in the broad context of the Atlantic World.[1] Wood argues that "the Lower Cape Fear and other eighteenth-century regions like it … provide the logical geographic framework for studying the period between the earliest colonial settlements and the construction of the American nation-state" (p. 9). Wood is especially concerned with recovering what he regards as the particular significance of the Lower Cape Fear. Scholars of North Carolina history have long noted the distinctiveness of the region within the colony. However, Wood argues that social historians of early America more generally have never before "fully considered" the region as part of "the broader process that characterized eighteenth-century settlement" (p. 11). That process, Wood suggests, needs a paradigmatic label different from the "cultural hearth," "staple crop," or the "labor regime" models of Early American historiography. He suggests "the regionalization of early America" (p. 12).

According to Wood, the regionalization paradigm has four dominant patterns: "differentiation," "common experience," "network formation," and "centralization." Explicating these patterns through copious detail constitutes the central task and outline of the seven chapters in the body of the book.

Wood is at his best in the presentation of his impressive data. The biographical files support capacious and detailed descriptions of the Lower Cape Fear that also frequently have the virtue of personal biography based in rich and well-chosen anecdotes.

Although discussion of the conditions in the Lower Cape Fear is Wood's main focus, he is also conscious of possible comparisons with other regions, such as Georgia and South Carolina, and throughout the text he takes the time to point them out. Wood argues in chapter 6, for example, that many Lower Cape Fear planters attempted

during the 1720s to "replicate the same economic endeavors that had been successful near Charles Town." But rice and indigo were difficult to raise in the Lower Cape Fear and by the 1730s, the region "resembled the South Carolina lowcountry around 1700" (p. 186). In other words, following Converse D. Clowse and other historians of early South Carolina, Wood recognizes that South Carolina also developed, at first, as a region where naval stores were a primary export commodity.[2] But by the 1720s, when the Lower Cape Fear began to be settled by whites, South Carolina's economy had more fully developed. What is important for Wood's larger argument about "regionalization" is that the goal of replicating the rice and indigo economy had to be abandoned in the face of actual local conditions.

"Tar heels" is a label for the state's residents now, but it once was a better descriptor of the Lower Cape Fear than the state as a whole. Thus it encapsulates both Wood's empirical research accomplishment and his paradigmatic ambitions. The region preceded the state in early America in meaningful ways, Wood suggests.

The question of labels and naming alludes to my reservations about the conceptualization and method of this study. Minor criticisms stem from the empirical method itself. The procedure for collecting and correlating the data in the "Biographical Files" did not allow Wood to differentiate between like names appearing in the original records. As a result, "it is impossible to know how many settlers had the same name" (p. xviii). In addition, Wood's discussion downplays the presence and agency of Indians and the enslaved. Wood tells us briefly that slaves were never less than 55 percent of the local population, and we learn a little about standard subjects in the historiography, such as runaways, paternalism, and plantation networks, applied in the Lower Cape Fear (p. 34). But I found myself wishing for more from such a thoroughly researched book. This is especially true with Wood's discussions of Indians, who only are mentioned in passing as residing in the region when white settlement began. If Wood had used anecdotes to fill out the story of Indian removal as skillfully as he does other subjects in this regional society, his book would only have gained.

However, no one can read this book and not come away persuaded that the development of the Lower Cape Fear had unique qualities and that the regionalization process is a reasonable way to describe the developments.

What will probably remain obscure for many readers is the significance of the regionalization approach as a new paradigm for interpreting the transition from newly established colony to nation-state. Skepticism of paradigmatic ambitions is commonplace in academic history. Whenever an author proposes a new explanatory paradigm, almost inevitably someone will ask whether it is not merely "old wine in new bottles." But to play with the phrase for a moment: the label matters as much as the bottle. It is important that the label (paradigm) on the bottle explain what is in the bottle (the archive) better than other labels. A new paradigm has to offer a more complete explanation of existing problems in the historiography. The best ones will soon be boiled down to a quite simple point and fit for extremely broad application, such as "republicanism" or the "Atlantic world." In order for Wood's new label to "stick" (convince) he must show that the data from the Lower Cape Fear defies current frameworks and that regionalization can explain that same data and offer a better understanding of the region in early America and perhaps the Atlantic world. Wood recognizes this and opens with a discussion of frameworks in his introduction, but because the book does not have a real conclusion he does not return to the discussion to explain and sum up the data and its paradigmatic significance. As a result, I am not sure it explains as much about the relationship between the larger context and the archive of the Lower Cape Fear as Wood believes.

*This Remote Part of the World* makes a substantive empirical contribution that qualifies it to be placed alongside other significant recent studies of North Carolina. It also offers researchers useful comparisons to the Chesapeake and Lower South.[4] It belongs in any college or university library committed to faculty, graduate, or undergraduate research in Early America, and it should be required reading for anyone conducting research on early North Carolina. Though *This Remote Part of the World* is probably too argumentative and detail-oriented (as a whole) for the undergraduate classroom, chapters 6 and 7 could each be assigned to graduate or advanced undergraduate students as comparative investigations of plantations and port towns in the Early South.

Notes

[1]. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[2]. Converse D. Clowse, *Economic Beginnings in Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971).

[3]. Marvin L. Michael Kay and Lorin Lee Cary, *Slavery in North Carolina, 1748-1775* (Chapel Hill: Univer-

sity of North Carolina Press, 1995); David S. Cecelski, *The Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Kirsten Fischer, *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 2002). On the Chesapeake, I think, for example, Wood's arguments about family and social networks compare well with those of James Horn in *Adapting to a New World: English Society in the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

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**Citation**: James Spady. Review of Wood, Bradford J., *This Remote Part of the World: Regional Formation in the Lower Cape Fear, North Carolina, 1725-1775*. H-South, H-Net Reviews. February, 2006.
**URL**: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=11398

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