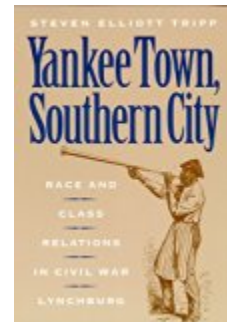


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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Steven Elliott Tripp. *Yankee Town, Southern City: Race and Class Relations in Civil War Lynchburg*. New York and London: New York University Press, 1997. xviii + 344 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-8205-7.

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Change and continuity, conflict and consensus—these have been the twin pillars of historical writing about the South for a half century, at least since Wilbur J. Cash’s monumental *The Mind of the South* (1941). This book is built upon the same foundation: “For the most part, I find myself in agreement with those who have argued discontinuity over continuity, conflict over consensus—but not by much” (p. 2). Critics might argue that Tripp’s work proves the maxim, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.” And the author would probably agree with this statement, too, because this is not a book that delights in historiographical polemics, perhaps a mark of change itself in a new generation of graduate students. Although Tripp does not hesitate to engage previous historians or even to speculate, more often he tells his story with an impressive array of evidence. He has also benefited from the critique of skilled and proven craftsmen in the profession. Peter Stearns, John Modell, and Joe William Trotter directed his dissertation at Carnegie Mellon University and his subsequent revisions leading up to this book. Tripp has written an insightful, highly readable book about Lynchburg, Virginia, just before, during, and after the Civil War.

Local studies of the Civil War South, such as those of Daniel Sutherland, Wayne Durrill, Stephen Ash, Vernon Burton, and Robert Kenzer, continue to deepen our understanding of this terrible war and show how much can be learned about war and society by integrating battlefield and homefront study. The war’s impact on the population and society; the role of noncombatants; why men fought and what they thought they were fighting for; the ingredients of morale, its ebb and flow, and how it shaped behavior, battlefield performance, and the war’s outcome; the relationships between southern cul-

ture, republicanism, and militarism; and the complexities of race, class, and gender all have been subjects of inquiry that just a couple of decades ago received scant attention from Civil War historians. Microhistory is a particularly powerful and effective approach to use in addressing such issues; it allows the historian, in Charles Joyner’s terms, to examine big questions in small places.

Tobacco was king in prewar Lynchburg. By 1860, there were forty-five factories in the city limits, representing an investment over a million dollars, a product value of nearly two million dollars, and a workforce of 1,054. Lynchburg tobacco contributed 17 percent to the state’s revenue of manufactured tobacco sales. Thirty-two of the town’s sixty-eight “tobaccoists,” as they preferred to call themselves, ranked among the town’s wealthiest decile. As for labor, nearly forty percent of the town’s population were slaves, and virtually all of the factory hands were slaves. As Tripp writes, “The world of tobacco factories was a world of black slavery” (p. 12).

Factory slavery differed from field labor. It allowed slaves to live free of their masters’ supervision, in shanties along the city’s narrow alleys and ravines. Here slaves attempted to establish their own independent lives, and in fact some used overtime earnings to procure many necessities. Fearful of too much freedom, masters looked for ways to tighten the bonds of the patriarchal household that living apart loosened. Since many slave women worked in homes as domestic servants, masters had the opportunity to use the paternalistic model on these servants who relied upon them for food, clothing, and shelter. A variety of city institutions, including churches, charities, and police agencies, helped masters to establish their power over their slaves. Mostly,

however, masters tried to use the binding force of benevolence. They supported black Sunday school programs, constructed black churches, controlled charitable agencies, and, when benevolence failed, were not hesitant to use police power to discipline and control the errant.

It is in the area of class relations where this book makes its most profound contribution. The social control of elites over nonslaveholding whites rested upon perpetuation of what was becoming transitory in the 1850s: the argument that slavery guaranteed prosperity, social mobility, and independence for all hardworking southern whites. The declining proportion of slaveholders, growing concentration of wealth, and soil depletion made such an argument problematic. Slaveholders believed they could overcome class tensions by maintaining close and personal relationships with white artisans and semi-skilled workers. Although living together in mixed residential neighborhoods of rich and poor did not guarantee social harmony, other forces were also at work. Wealthier citizens used credit networks, visited the poor during times of distress, mounted poor relief drives, patronized local craftsmen to build their homes, and in many other ways practiced the art of paternalism and personalism to retain the support of lower-class whites. For their part, laborers who did not own slaves still understood their status in relationship to slavery. Tripp finds that these whites accepted the basic tenet of southern republicanism identified by J. Mills Thornton, III; namely, they connected white liberty and independence to black slavery. The contradictory ideals of deference and egalitarian republicanism troubled the elites, but economic dependency and political powerlessness kept white laboring men from challenging elite dominance. Consequently, artisans and laborers looked for other ways to express their independence and autonomy by building new relationships with elites and especially in forging a distinct leisure culture.

The book is a study of all levels of Lynchburg society, but we learn the most about lower class whites and the world of the profane. The author makes exemplary use of local newspapers, the manuscript censuses, church and court records, and federal archives to present the best portrait yet of the elusive and seldom understood world of laboring class culture before, during, and just after the Civil War.

Despite economic dependence and political powerlessness, Lynchburg's white laborers found independence from elite dominance in their own distinct leisure culture, not unlike the coal miners I studied in company

mining towns of southern Appalachia. Living in shanties along narrow alleys and deep ravines, the lower classes of artisans and common white laborers gambled, whored, and drank in a section of the river basin on the southern edge of town colorfully called "Buzzard's Roost." There on the streets, in the grog shops and doggeries along the river or, to a lesser extent, in the nearby churches, they defended their republican ideals, resisted the imposition of middle class standards of propriety, and practiced a vernacular version of the code of honor, a compound of aggressiveness and rage they believed necessary to survival. Lynchburg's elite tolerated the Buzzard's poor white culture, so long as it remained confined to its own neighborhood and did not involve blacks. Also, the behavior of underclass residents confirmed their own race, ethnic, and class superiority.

In the street culture, we witness the unfolding dynamics of race and class in Lynchburg society. Not unexpectedly, civic leaders responded aggressively to black impropriety. They used harsher standards of justice, meted out punishments in the form of lashes or jail time, pronounced stiffer sentences, and generally prosecuted slaves' and free blacks' rowdiness, drunkenness, and breaking of curfew much more vigorously in comparison to the tolerance shown whites. Town officials were especially anxious about the intersection of lower-class white and black street culture in the Buzzard and attempted to thwart the black liquor trade and any social mixing of free blacks and slaves. Blacks and laboring whites shared a class-common world view that produced like patterns of behavior but within the limitations of racial conventions. Blacks too saw their world as hostile, violent, and competitive, and they possessed a similar understanding of honor as something to be defended by force if necessary. Generally, they attempted to avoid confrontations with whites and to keep whites from having to come in and settle disputes. Groceries and grogshops were places where blacks could not avoid interaction with whites. Blacks did insulate themselves, however, in the tobacco factories where they worked and where few lower-class whites dared enter. The factories became their meeting places and served as churches, funeral parlors, and gambling dens. The factory stood at the intersection of lower class cultures where whites and blacks met to buy and sell liquor, congregate, gamble, and fence stolen property. Regardless of the meeting place, interactions paid homage to social and racial conventions. Most whites, for example, found in "black" doggeries were either owners or their employees, i.e., pimps or prostitutes.

The Civil War loosened the ligatures of the prewar social order. Laboring whites became alienated from the political designs of elites, collective activism and separatism developed in the black community, and interracial violence increased. Class tensions increased markedly. Even in the early days of the war, complaints multiplied about supplies, rations, and living conditions in camps. Begging and foraging became part of routine life. Health problems grew among the soldiers, mostly lower-class whites, who soon realized that they were going to bear a large burden for this war. Soldiers saw that decisions of officers, mostly elites, had a much greater impact on their lives. Soldiers from evangelical churches questioned the morality of officers known for their whoring and drinking and demanded that civic leaders take action. Soldiers quickly learned they had power over elected officers and could compel them to meet their demands for blankets, rations, and the needs of sick and wounded. The malleability of the social hierarchy was short-lived, however, and was brought to an abrupt halt by conscription laws.

The passage of the draft laws breathed new life into officers' designs to recapture control over the soldiers. Conscripts lost the leverage the volunteers had enjoyed to leave the Confederate army. With new power under the authority of the draft, officers began to withdraw from their men, spend more time with other officers, and exercise their right to execute deserters. It was at this juncture that the cry went up of "a rich man's war and a poor man's fight." Resistance, guerrilla warfare, bushwhacking, and social banditry increased, "as poorer whites in many locales helped to destroy much of the Old South" (p. 70). These findings are remarkable, first for showing the problems the draft law may have presented to the Confederacy very early in the war. Secondly, the reactions of southern soldiers to the contradiction between republican ideals of deference and egalitarianism, if widespread, would have been devastating to Confederate hopes of victory. Tripp does not argue that the draft laws alone caused the defeat of the South, of course, but his work certainly shows that the South may have lost more than it gained in compelling men to fight. Have historians underestimated the role of class, as embodied in the tenets of republicanism, in the war's outcome? During the final years of the war in Lynchburg, men refused to reenlist, the Heroes of America made inroads in southwest Virginia, and acts of collective violence and crime increased, as did desertions. Tripp agrees that all of these actions constituted what Paul Escott called "the quiet rebellion of the common people" that eventually led to defeat (p. 110).

Despite so much evidence to the contrary, Tripp emphasizes that countervailing forces encouraged loyalty, however, and most Lynchburg soldiers did not express class animosities. Just as often as war embittered, it also created devotion in those who were committed to the Confederate cause, if not the fight. Stories of atrocities, Yankee depredations against cattle, poultry, and other food stores, insults to women, liberations of slaves, and finally the federal sacking of Lynchburg on June 18, 1864—all of these events no doubt bred hatred toward Yankees and encouraged loyalty to the Confederacy.

Yet there is considerable ambiguity in the evidence. Not all southern soldiers were perfect gentlemen. In fact, Tripp found soldiers stationed around Lynchburg became serious threats to the safety and well-being of the community. War quickly transformed a manufacturing city into a garrison. The red-light district of prostitution spread from Buzzard to the central business district. Barkeeps, prostitutes, gamblers, and dancehall patrons catered to the men. Thievery, especially in the form of crimes against property increased; soldiers looked upon thievery as their "due." Civilians howled over the loss of morality, and the city responded with curfews, night watches, and closings of grogshops. Just as often, it seems, civilians were at the mercy of their own armies. Late in the war, civilian authorities lost control of the city as civilians joined the soldiers and went after clothing, tobacco, and shoes from the canal boats and river warehouses. Consequently, in March 1865, when rumors of a Yankee invasion spread, the military commander was able to muster only a few twelve-year old youths. Civic officials decided that Yankee rule was better than chaos and disorder, an attitude that carried over into the early years of Reconstruction.

Until 1867, local officials looked upon the Union as the best friend of the old order. Federal officials worked with the city's political and business leaders to protect private property, stop vandalism and rowdiness. The Buzzard was virtually shut down, as the doggeries were closed and prostitutes rounded up and garrisoned in the abandoned tobacco warehouses. Federal officials also proved lenient in the treatment of former rebels. In January 1866, federal officials returned police authority to local hands. Tobacco manufacturers resumed production. Officials also agreed with rebels that blacks were as yet too ignorant and unprepared for freedom. Black refugees coming to town to look for work were forced back into the countryside to sign labor contracts with local farmers. Freedmen's Bureau officials also cooperated with tobaccoists to approve work conditions that

required black factory laborers to be content with food and clothes or no more than thirty dollars per year in wages.

In 1867, conditions began to change. In elections of that year, the Republican party gained ascendancy and the Conservative restoration was temporarily halted. Former Confederates were stripped of their power. Blacks gained the vote. The result was that a loose coalition of blacks, relocated northerners, and former southern unionists managed a political campaign that beat the Conservatives at the polls and allowed them to control local politics until 1870.

Former slaves and free blacks also reacted to changing times. Their first reaction was to flee their owners; this was especially so with house servants, the most trusted of black workers whom white owners held up as models of affection and exemplars of the benevolence of the slave system. Each flight challenged the owners' misguided notions of slavery as a personal relationship. Black resistance continued. Former slaves refused to be whipped and stood up to sexual advances. The factories became places to demonstrate solidarity and plan collective action. In these prewar centers of labor, they organized churches, schools, funeral halls, fraternal associations, and political campaigns, and they planned labor strikes for better wages. By 1870, blacks had established an autonomous black community that included a debating club, temperance society, women's social circle, and several fraternal organizations in addition to a cluster of black businesses. Tripp asks whether such behavior is evidence of a larger trend where blacks chose to separate themselves from whites. He finds that blacks clustered on the town's perimeter for more practical reasons: they paid cheap rent on the outskirts (where poor whites clustered too); they could find employment on the periphery; and they had more freedom from whites there. Besides, the separation was never complete, since they worked for whites in the inner city, lived with poor whites on the periphery, and mixed with whites in the nightspots of the Buzzard.

The economic conditions of laboring whites deteriorated in the postwar years. They converted their kitchens, cabins, and smokehouses into homes, lived with their livestock virtually under the same roof, squatted in abandoned houses, and turned to crime, stealing railroad iron and gas caps, for example, to barter for food and drink. Laboring whites blamed these conditions, with some justification, upon black economic advances. In the 1860s, the number of white artisans de-

clined forty-five percent while black artisans increased by seventy percent. Despite what they believed, however, most white labor suffered due to the effects of general deterioration of the local economy, not black competition. In fact, whites displaced blacks in tobacco factory labor. By 1870, nearly forty percent of all white unskilled laborers worked in the tobacco factories, at a time when tobacco factory workers had shrunk to half of prewar levels. Growing numbers of whites accepted jobs once defined as "nigger work." Lynchburg's efforts to rebuild its economy through furniture making, leatherwork, iron foundries, and coach manufacturing had little impact.

One of the most fascinating findings of Tripp's work deals with the dynamics of race and class relations during this period of economic transformation. Civic leaders fretted about class conflict, understandably, in a situation where large numbers of poor whites and blacks constituted a dispossessed and alienated class. Not surprisingly, Conservatives tried to use race to shatter potentially dangerous class liaisons. What is surprising, because so many historians have argued that race usually divided what class stood to unite, is that Conservatives were not completely successful in their race-baiting campaigns. No longer able to offer benevolence and patronage to laboring whites in the forms of charity and work, white laborers were no longer willing to accept class rule. Whiteness alone was not enough. Facing a growing crisis, elites turned to religion to save the community from collapse.

The Great Revival of 1871 soothed class tensions, but it did not resolve them. Once again, the dynamics of class offer more explanatory force than race. White leaders misunderstood that class gives rise to a distinctive value system and behavior. Many laboring whites refused to participate in a revival that was an occasion for white elites to bash the ethics and behavior of lower class whites. Some laboring whites even turned the tables and used the revival to point out the incongruence between upper class white behavior and the ideals they were espousing. Unskilled laborers reacted to the revival with great indifference. Indeed, the largest number of converts came from professional and semi-professional families. Although there were also other reasons for the failure of religion to produce reconciliation and harmony, this study shows that the role of class has been underestimated as a force in the history of the South.

Equally interesting and understudied is postwar collective black violence and vigilance, the subject of the final chapter of this book. The postwar period differed

from the antebellum days when white vigilance disciplined defiant slaves and free blacks. After the war, white individuals usually carried out violence against blacks; black mobs, sometimes as large as a hundred people, on the other hand, usually carried out violence against whites. In a town that was forty-five percent black, collective black vigilance had a troubling impact. When groups of whites did attempt to disrupt political rallies, blacks armed themselves with bowie knives, pistols, and shotguns and walked to polling places in groups. Only occasionally did whites attempt to rally in large groups, but the Ku Klux Klan and other groups were too weak and ineffective to be of much concern to blacks. Three features characterized black violence: mobs played a central role; violence was usually directed against a perceived injustice, not random; and it had specific objectives that, when accomplished, led to dispersal of the mob. Tripp hastens to add that the lack of white mob violence is not evidence of interracial harmony. Instead, it is another example of class divisions.

An epilogue extends the discussion of race and class into the 1880s with Virginia's Readjuster and Farmers' Alliance movements. The author points to the legacies of race and class to show how disfranchisement resolved white anxieties.

Historians would do well to ponder the meanings of this book. It helps us understand the class dimensions of southern ethics and behavior. Race did not always unite

more than class could divide. Race-baiting was not an infallible weapon against class divisions. Laboring whites, of course, were not free of racism, but neither were they so race-conscious that the hint of race could dissolve all class differences. The book also demonstrates the dimensions and significance of black agency during the early years of emancipation. Out of their experience in the old slave factories, blacks summoned a sense of solidarity and community that became the source of strength and collective will in the emancipation years. Black schools, churches, and businesses were spawned from this collective identity. The book offers challenges also to the idea of a unified white South, not just in the late years of the war when suffering and sacrifice had claimed many southern wills to fight, but from the beginning. Class divisions meant that the South's social structure had some serious cracks before it was tested by war. The laboring classes had a different value system, outlook, and set of needs from those of the middle and upper classes. They could not be easily manipulated with empty promises or scare tactics because the differences were not superficial. These fissures were exposed early, became more obvious under military authority, and unbreachable under the differential economic impact of full scale war.

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