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Thomas Summerhill. *Harvest of Dissent: Agrarianism in Nineteenth-Century New York.* Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005. xi + 287 pp. $38.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-02976-9; $25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-252-07547-6.

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Central New York Farmers' Long Duree, Civil War Era Included

Thomas Summerhill offers his readers a sweeping, highly suggestive, and convincing account of political economy and farm strategies among farmers in three central New York counties–Delaware, Otsego, and Schoharie–from the beginning of the Early National era through the rise and spread of the Grange movement in the late nineteenth century.

At first blush, *Harvest of Dissent* has little to do directly with the Civil War era. The Civil War itself, by Summerhill's admission, has only a limited impact on the region's farmers. The larger changes in this story involve matters like the larger projectory of republican ideology, the gradual crumbling of traditional paternalism, farmers' rejection of politics as a tool for economic betterment, and the creeping influence of commercial farming through hops production and other elements in the shift towards a market-oriented economy.

On closer inspection, Summerhill's monograph does incorporate two issues relevant to Civil War historians, especially those interested in the war's impact on the era's rural Northern history and the influence of national politics on political localism. First, the war's limited impact on central New York farming stands in sharp relief to the commonly held conviction that the conflict between the states triggered unprecedented prosperity and allowed the rapid introduction of horse-powered technology. Not so in central New York, where the contour of the land and poor soil did not allow farmers even in these flush time to purchase mowers, reapers, and the like.

Second, the national sectional issues of the 1840s and 1850s play a critical role in undermining the localist focus on politics that farmers viewed as central to their adjustment to shifting and more commercially oriented farm innovations. The Free Soil movement and nativism worked against efforts to expand democracy at the township and county levels, where presumably politicians would be more responsive to farm interests. Instead, the rise of larger financial interest and its associated corruptions, the aforementioned sectional concerns, and the postwar rise of other national issues became complicating factors that encouraged farmers to abandon reliance on republican political economy and seek other non-political solutions to their agrarian challenges.

Summerhill's study begins by placing the political and economic hopes of post-Revolutionary central New York farmers in the swirling context of inherited local farm patterns. A complicated variety of landowning and renting patterns, conflicting land claims, colonial protests against perceived injustices, and a strong dose of paternalism, all carried over from the colonial and Revolutionary eras in this three-county region. New ideas of political economy, similar to those discussed by Drew McCoy in *The Elusive Republic* (1980), in turn, begin gradually to redirect many of these carry-overs. Farmers begin to view themselves as the backbone of the new nation's rising strength, independent producers whose efforts made them disinterested, virtuous citizens. At the same time, the region's well-entrenched gentry and farmers, of all stripes, continued to maintain the paternalism of their traditional past, especially in times of economic need.

Declension from paternalism and an unsuccessful foray into political activism ensued over the Jacksonian and final Antebellum decades. Paternalism began to fray with the inability and declining willingness of local grandees to aid farmers in the economic depression of the late 1830s and early 1840s. Central New York

farmers responded with traditional, mob-oriented agrarian activism, only to have their movement go asunder amidst local political divisions. A seemingly successful turn to democratic politics also led to unintended, disappointing, and ultimately crippling results. Greater political localism was fostered through a new, reform-oriented state constitution, granting the region's agriculturalists the increased grassroots independence they hoped would shift more control over their fate away from large, outside interests. For a variety of reasons, including local divisions and those pertaining to the rise of national and sectionalist concerns, their hopes were quickly dashed. In the process, central New York farmers became permanently estranged from their core Jacksonian belief that the increasing encroachments of a commercialized economy could be controlled through the democratic political process.

The last two chapters of Summerhill's study turn to the gentry-led shift towards hops production in mid to late nineteenth century, a move that engendered improved farm prospects for roughly a generation; then, due to external market forces and the region's limited agricultural prospects, the final shift was to dairy-related farming as the twentieth century approached. Over time, the changes led to a greater market-orientation and the reconfiguration of farmers into more conventional groups of landlords, owners, renters, and laborers. Those eager to reassert greater control over their current and future destinies largely eschewed politics for the more pragmatic aspects of the Grange program, particularly those associated with cooperation and farm method improvements.

All in all, *Harvest of Dissent* deserves considerable praise for its ambitious and largely successful effort to chart the large sweep of central New York farmers' approach to managing their fortunes over successive generations, explaining the overall shift from tinges of agrarian radicalism to the ultimate spread of a far more conservative if progressive view of farm life. At the same time, Summerhill's study may well frustrate readers on two overlapping fronts. The first difficulty, which to a large extent must have bedeviled the author himself, concerns the unusually large variety of central New York landholding practices; the area's local and state political structures and their elated, fractious squabbles, before 1861; and shifts within northeastern farming, at large, over the nineteenth century. This reviewer, while a specialist in northern farming in general, found himself re-reading (and, at times, re-reading again) chapters in order to the keep the region's exceptional landholding arrangements and the array of political sub-groups and local family alliances untangled. Some streamlining of this vast array of trees would have made the forest more easily definable.

Greater attention to broader northern and, at times, national farming and ideological trends in the body of the discussion would also increase the appeal and accessibility of *Harvest of Dissent* to scholars with interests beyond this particular sub-region of the North. To Summerhill's credit, each chapter begins with a clear, thoughtful discourse of the coming discussion's place within broader historiographic interpretations. Within the chapters' bodies, however, many opportunities to broaden the analysis outward are lost, leaving the reader with a text that is far more narrow and geared towards a smaller range of specialists than is necessary. In the end, the book often reads like a lightly revised dissertation with all the seeming cautiousness and limitations that characterize many scholars' first monographs.

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