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Bradley G. Bond. *Political Culture in the Nineteenth-Century South: Mississippi, 1830-1890.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995. 343 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-1976-1.

Reviewed by Robert P. Forbes (Rutgers, The State University for New Jersey)
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The title of this book is a bit misleadingly broad. It is unclear how accurately Mississippi may stand for the ninteenth-century South. If, as it was said after the presidential election of 1932, "as Maine goes, so goes Vermont," perhaps one might claim, "as Mississippi goes, so goes Alabama"; perhaps not even that. This is not a book about the South, but about one quirky, atypical, often confounding corner of it. Although the author asserts that "[n]o state offers historians a better view of the transforming-yet-persisting South than Mississippi" (p. 1), he rarely again makes a case for its typicality. No matter; Mississippi is quite interesting enough in its own right to justify this first full-length study of its political culture in the nineteenth century.

Despite his sweeping title, Bond's stated goals are modest: to offer a synthesis of the "extant literature" on Mississippi "while making slightly revisionistic arguments about existing phenomena" (p. 2). He accomplishes more than this, however. The book offers a broad overview of Mississippi politics over sixty years while carefully sketching the key debates over politics and economics that shaped the state's development. While Bond does intervene, intelligently, in a number of specialized historiographical debates (such as whether or not Mississippi planters achieved or sought agricultural self-sufficiency, or on the effects of the crop-lien system), the important contribution here is a mostly clear, coherent narrative of Mississippi politics from the Jacksonian era to the dawn of Jim Crow.

That is no mean accomplishment, and one might almost wish that Bond had been satisfied with it. But Bond seems determined to make his story part of wider historiographical conversations where it does not necessarily belong. Beware the monograph on Mississippi that has J.G.A. Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment* in its bibliography! Although Bond is assiduous in applying to that state the paradigms of classical republicanism, which such historians as Robert Shalhope and Lacy K. Ford have fruitfully used on nineteenth-century Virginia and South Carolina, Bond's evidence convincingly confirms that the rich, rude lands of the Old Southwest are a world apart. The special brand of Mississippi civic republicanism portrayed here can perhaps best be summed up in a diary entry of an Ole Miss student on the eve of the Civil War: "Employed myself killing rats and reading Hume" (p. 116).

It is in such vivid glimpses of Mississippi life that Bond's book comes alive. Unfortunately, his eye for such detail is frequently clouded by an ideological and historiographical agenda that do not neatly harmonize with his evidence. Bond's chief concern is with the southern "social ethic," which he defines as "a collection of ideas, at times contradictory, about he nature of a good republic and good citizenship" (p. 2). His purpose is to chart the transition of this ethic from Old to New South in a representative southern state, charting continuities and changes over an extended period. He sets a scene of a torrid, torpid, squalid, dangerous land that retained much of its frontier atmosphere through the 1880s. The men who settled this forbidding environment–and Bond consciously limits his attention to men, of the white variety–rejected the intrusion of government and relied on themselves and their neighbors for any assistance they might need, while cultivating both individualism and "communitarian values." But in the chapters that follow, the lure of the market economy and its promise of wealth cast a shadow on this alluvial Arcadia, tempting hardy communitarian individualists (is there something of a contradiction here?) into a fatal entanglement with market production.

Like a parent of errant teenagers, Bond frequently seems disappointed when his subjects fail to live up to the classical republican standards of "liberty and virtue" he sets for them. Instead of pursuing agricultural self-sufficiency and virtuous independence, they cast themselves into "the web of the market economy" by eagerly adopting monoculture agriculture, producing for themselves only "as a way to bolster their bottom line" and

to safeguard "their claims to material success." But this was, after all, "the idea that had propelled them to immigrate to Mississippi in the first place" (p. 79). So much for the "Jeffersonian-Arcadian paradigm" (p. 71), for which Bond astutely gives up the search. The question is, what make him think he might find it there to begin with?

The answer seems to be that Bond has a serious case of wholesale acceptance of what Richard Hofstadter called "the agrarian myth." Like Thomas Jefferson, Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur, and Charles Sellers, Bond idealizes the simplicity, honesty, and equality of the yeoman farmer. "The farmer himself," Hofstadter dryly observed, "in most cases, was in fact inspired to make money, and such self-sufficiency as he actually had was usually forced upon him by a lack of transportation or markets, or by the necessity to save cash to expand his operations" (*The Age of Reform* [1955], pp. 23 ff). This appears to be precisely the case with Bond's Mississippians, since he provides almost no direct evidence that they cared a whit for agrarian independence, at least until the 1890s, by which time, as Hofstadter has argued, it was little more than an exercise in nostalgia.

For his overall framework, Bond borrows the tripartite structure of Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (1976), dividing his work into sections on "The Way Things Were," "The Agencies of Change," and "Accepting and Rejecting Change"–this last section a modification from Weber, whose peasants accepted change unambiguously. Among the problems with using Weber's work as a template are the facts that the white males of Mississippi were never peasants, nor did they ever wholeheartedly embrace modernity and a strong identification with the nation-state. Likewise, Bond's search for "the way things were" against which to measure change seems a chimerical quest: It seems impossible to isolate a static "before" in a frontier state settled by restless adventurers in search of the main chance.

One constant does persist throughout the sixty-year period the book surveys: White Mississippians remained determined to maintain blacks in an inferior position. According to Bond, this racist underpinning of their "social ethic" led white Mississippians to espouse a "false republic," and ensured that genuine class tensions between whites–which is to say struggles over the commercial order–would be obscured behind a curtain of race. After 1848, the struggle to protect slavery had squeezed out party competition, and, in the face of the political uniformity demanded by fire-eating secessionists in the 1850s, such Mississippians as Daniel Kelly, who valued freedom as much as slavery, feared that "the time is close at hand, when *Sweet Liberty* will be *bruised & mangled*, if not *murdered & buried*" (p. 113).

Although the Civil War exacted a toll on white Mississippians that "exceeded the most gloomy prewar prediction," it failed to reshape a "social ethic" founded on the imperative of black inferiority. Bond's excellent chapter recounting the violent postwar struggle to expel blacks and their white Republican supporters from Mississippi political life is refreshingly free of ideological analysis; there is little in this sordid story that bears any link whatsoever to concepts of "liberty and virtue."

If the War left racism intact, however, it destroyed the antebellum dream of owning a plantation and slaves. Instead, white Mississippians embraced the values of industry and commerce and gamely performed the ideological gymnastics required to retool their conceptions of "a good republic and good citizenship" (p. 184). Mining such rich sources as the credit files of R.G. Dun and Company, Bond provides a revealing window into the New South *mentalite'*.

In his final section, Bond turns to the efforts of reformers from the middle class–those rewarded by the commercial order–and agrarian reformers–those victimized by or skeptical of it–to create their respective versions of a "homogenous society." At last, women take the stage, as activists of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Not surprisingly, however, this reform movement was quickly enlisted by middle-class white males to reinforce the racial order, with black suffrage painted as the greatest obstacle to legislated prohibition. Although Bond perhaps underplays the potential challenge of white female reform to the southern "social ethic," as the recent work of Glenda Gilmore and other scholars has suggested, his account vividly demonstrates the constriction of political options imposed by the corrosive power of racism. Bond's account of the failure of agrarian reform is less convincing, based as it is on his conviction that reformers undercut their position "by refusing to divorce themselves from commerce" (p. 254)–a goal as self-defeating as it is unattainable, however attractive to modern-day disciples of Charles Sellers. Bond even sneers at the movement by farmers to establish cooperatives in order to compete "as active and autonomous players in the commercial order," regarding this as "an ironic role for agrarians to desire since they professed a loathing for the new order" (p. 265). This seems to be setting a more-than-Amish standard of self-sufficiency. Good heavens, even the Trappists sell preserves!

More convincing is Bond's contention that the white

agrarians fatally compromised their chances for success by shunning cooperation with black farmers and sharecroppers. Still, it seems clear that throughout Bond's account, white supremacism trumps resistance to the commercial order every time. Perhaps his well-written and deeply-researched book would have been better matched to his theme if he had chosen the former as an organizing principle, rather than the latter.

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