H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

John B. Boles, Bethany L. Johnson, eds. *Origins of the New South: Fifty Years Later: The Continuing Influence of a Historical Classic.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003. vii + 305 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-2905-0; $26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8071-2920-3.

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Published on H-South (September, 2004)

Inside the Historians' Mind

Origins of the New South: Fifty Years Later contains papers presented for the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of C. Vann Woodward's *Origins of the New South*, along with historiographic materials published earlier that relate to the study. Organized chronologically, the book weaves together two purposes. First, the articles provide an historiographic evolution of the themes Woodward presents, including those who lauded and those who quibbled with his findings. Second, historians present reflections of their personal interactions with C. Vann Woodward and *Origins of the New South.* In so doing, the book offers fascinating glimpses into the people behind the historical debates and the processes in which history is created.

The book begins with a preface by John B. Boles that explains the conference at Rice. The introduction by Bethany L. Johnson assesses the climate for Southern history when *Origins* was published in 1951, and its initial reception by the historical community. As Johnson notes, "Though *Origins*, too, eventually became the target of thoughtful critics, as the essays in this volume illustrate, its longevity is partially attributable to its encapsulation of the new trend of historiography of the American South" (pp. 19-20). Much of the remainder of the book attempts to explain that longevity. A favorable review by Allen W. Moger, first published in the *Journal of Southern History* in 1952, appears next, where Moger wrote that the book has "little that deserves criticism" as it "is one of the ablest and best volumes in an excellent series" (24).

The next six selections pair an assessment of the book during the 1970s and 1980s with the reviewers' reflections on *Origins* for this project. Sheldon Hackney, a Woodward student, assessed the book on its twentieth anniversary in 1971, finding that "there has been no major challenge to *Origins*" (p. 31). He explained this phenomenon because "Woodward's sensibility is both Beardian and Faulknerian, and the combination of the two is the source of the continuing appeal of *Origins of the New South*" (pp. 31, 49). When reevaluating the book, Hackney now "suggest[s] that the tragic story that Woodward told resonated in an era of disillusionment" in the 1950s and 1960s (p. 51).

Carl V. Harris probes a key part of Woodward's thesis in which Southern Democrats herded the New South into a political alignment with Eastern industrialists over a more natural alliance with Western agrarians. Harris uses quantitative analysis of the roll call votes of Southern Democrats in Congress to assess this belief. He sets aside that simple dichotomy, instead finding that Southern Democrats "fashioned a unique alignment on each separate issue" and unified over economic matters (p. 95). In his reflection, Harris finds that the continuing discussions "have not come close to exhausting the mighty agenda set by *Origins*" (p. 108).

Calling for revision of Woodward's revisionist outlook, James Tice Moore rejects his premise that the New South constituted a sharp break in Southern history. Instead, Moore finds continuity between antebellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction leadership and the Redeemers of the New South. In his reflection, Moore "soon concluded that *Origins* was a truly great polemic, a masterful indictment of a region and of an era, but I was dubious whether it was, in fact, very good history." He asked himself, "why should the warmed-over Beardianism of *Origins* continue to hold sway as the overarching interpretive motif for the New South?" (p. 135). Instead, Moore "stressed the continuing prominence of many political chieftains whose careers in public service had begun during the antebellum period" (p. 140). When his critique continually received a poor reception by the Woodwardians, Moore became "weary of the moralistic posturing" and halted his revisionist argument (p. 143).

C. Vann Woodward himself speaks next, in an excerpt

from *Thinking Back*. Woodward reiterates the themes of *Origins*, with his Beardian class struggle and Eastern aligned Redeemers running the South. He dismisses challengers like Harris and Moore as New Continuitarians who wish to harken back to the old "chorus of continuity" against which he originally railed (p. 153). He then analyzes his critics, finding fault with most of their challenges to his ideas.

The next articles, all of which were presented at the symposium, represent the main portion of the book. James C. Cobb provides a detailed background glimpse into the writing of *Origins* and Woodward's career. When he began writing in the 1930s, "Southern historians inclined to objectivity or candor were forced to do battle not just with the romance of the Lost Cause but also with the uncritical boosterism of the New South Creed" (p. 165). Most of the work critical of the New South appeared in literature, not history, and Cobb tours Southern literature, especially William Faulkner, who influenced Woodward's writing style and sensibility. The biography of Tom Watson motivated Woodward to become an historian, and provided the impetus for his writing the New South installment of the History of the South series. Finally, Cobb examines how Woodward agitated the profession from within, such as inviting John Hope Franklin to address the Southern Historical Association. As for *Origins*, Cobb concludes that Woodward "might have been a bit overzealous in his campaign against New South orthodoxy," especially over the role of the Redeemers and evolution of segregation, which "became the most inviting and vulnerable targets for those seeking to revise Woodward's interpretations" (p. 187).

The next five pieces reflect upon how *Origins* influenced topics within the New South. Robert C. McMath addresses Woodward's influence on politics. After outlining his main points about the Redeemers, the Populists, and the Progressives, McMath concludes that the Redeemers are an overly mined area, believes the Progressives to be the least examined field, and focuses on the Populists because "I *like* to talk about the Populists" (p. 192, emphasis in original). For Populism, McMath applies Woodward's theories to Arkansas, looking at race relations, voluntary associations, progressive reformers, and other matters. In his findings, McMath substantiates Woodward's points while calling for their modification and expansion to include other factors, such as southwestern Populism, that *Origins* overlooks. McMath believes "that by opening up new perspectives we will encourage a new generation of scholars and citizens to pursue Woodward's purposes" (p. 217).

Glenda Gilmore searches for women in *Origins of the New South* and finds that "women are scarcer than hen's teeth" (p. 221). Gilmore contends Woodward intentionally excluded women to avoid dealing with race, saving that subject for *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. She argues, "No women, no sex. No sex, presto, no race 'problem"' (p. 225). The book, she claims, still has merit for women and women's history for three reasons. First, it contains many facts women can use as a pathway through the period. Second, it makes the New South, in which women's roles were changing, important for historical study. Finally, "Woodward opens a sense of possibility by bringing to light a hidden southern past. Hidden pasts were just where one goes hunting for gendered stories" (p. 227). Gilmore recalls her own encounters with Woodward, calling him her "perfect reader" as they covered the same historical figures from different viewpoints (p. 235). She believes that, towards the end of his life, "Woodward became enthusiastic about using gender to rewrite southern history. And it liberated him to speak the unspeakable" about interracial sex (p. 235).

Harold D. Woodman analyzes the economic, legal, and agricultural issues in *Origins*. Looking at the class struggle and discontinuity themes that infused Woodward's analysis, Woodman states, "I am certainly not here to bury Woodward's ideas but to praise them. I shall, however, raise a few questions and offers suggestions" about how to improve them (pp. 241-242). First, Woodman rejects persistence studies as being too limited in time frame. Then, he finds the tenant farmers and share croppers shared much with industrial workers, and compares the emerging business plantations to factories. Woodman postulates the failure of a biracial coalition as stemming "from significant class differences between blacks and whites living in what only seem to be similar class situations" (p. 258). Land ownership separated the two groups, as even small white farmers needed cheap black labor. Finally, he concludes that "the weakening and gradual disappearance of *significant* southern economic distinctiveness" is "the monumental and lasting contribution of this half-century-old volume" (p. 260, emphasis in original).

Barbara J. Fields, who denounces the separation of blacks as a separate category from politics, economics or society, writes about African Americans. Fields maintains that "never at any point in *Origins* is Woodward unaware of Afro-Americans' entire implication within the vital questions of the New South" as the book "will neither fear nor respect the color line" (p. 262). First, she rejects the category of race itself, claiming it only exists through discrimination, and then commends the book

because "Woodward understands segregation to be an act of political power" (p. 271). She notes Woodward rejected the "moonlight-and-magnolias nostalgia for slavery and the Old South" as a cover for racism (p. 272). After finding limitations in Woodward's treatment of the black class system, Fields enters into a discussion of so-called black English. She ends by commending Woodward for placing blacks within the context of the big questions about politics, economics and society, rather than marginalizing them in their own field.

The last three pieces provide a capstone for the writings done at the conference. William F. Holmes reviews all of the papers, providing thoughtful commentary on their findings and suggestions to strengthen their conclusions. Anne Firor Scott, rather than writing about the papers explicitly, "propose[s] a variation of a theme" of Gilmore's article (p. 287). In particular, Scott looks into those politically and socially active women whom Woodward should have included in the book, especially Rebecca Latimore Felton, yet who were excluded. She believes that "we think that someone as insightful as he was should have noticed–but in this area he shared the cultural blindness of his time" (p. 290). Her own experience dealing with Woodward differed from Gilmore's, yet she terms Woodward "a great man" nonetheless (p. 293).

Finally, Bertram Wyatt-Brown assesses the continuity theme in his own work, reevaluates the conditions that led Woodward to reject continuity, and touches on political and race issues. Wyatt-Brown contends, "Woodward shattered old icons with well-aimed blows" (p. 304), and highlights the longevity of the work even though other historical writing becomes "wind-scattered and dry to future generations" (p. 305). Finally, he concludes with an observation that most in the volume would second. Woodward, Wyatt-Brown says, "is gone from our midst, but we miss his intellect, challenging ideas, and understated wit as much as ever" (p. 305).

The materials contained within *Origins of the New South: Fifty Years Later* demonstrate the enduring importance of the work. Each article contributes to an understanding of the themes raised by C. Vann Woodward and how those themes have molded a field of history. The main section of the book is the conference papers, which provided the genesis for the project. The historians assessed Woodward's ideas and, by implication, the historiography of the New South, whether Populism and politics, women and gender, economics and farming, or black and white relations. The personal reflections strengthen the historiography, as they indicate how, in a book largely without women or explicit African Americans, *Origins* affected New South ideas.

The book contains a few limitations mostly stemming from the nature of the project. Some of the articles are more valuable than others in understanding Woodward's book, as is to be expected in a selection of essays. More criticism of Woodward's theories would have been appreciated, as these are limited to Moore's article and passing reference to quantitative persistence studies. Finally, because each uses the same sources and often the same quotations, the book is self-referential and often leaves a feeling of déjà vu in the reader. The Redeemers herd the Southern masses up the right fork with great regularity, for example, and Woodward's disdain for European history, consigning whole epochs to obscurity, also appears quite a bit.

Despite these minor points, *Origins of the New South: Fifty Years Later* will prove a valuable tool for understanding C. Vann Woodward's book, in examining the historiography of the New South over the last fifty years, and in understanding historians at work in their craft.

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Citation: James Seymour. Review of Boles, John B.; Johnson, Bethany L., eds., *Origins of the New South: Fifty Years Later: The Continuing Influence of a Historical Classic.* H-South, H-Net Reviews. September, 2004.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=9745

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