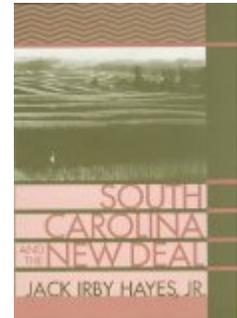




Jack Irby Hayes, Jr. *South Carolina and the New Deal*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001. xvi + 290 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-57003-399-5.



Reviewed by John Barnhill

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Modernizing South Carolina

South Carolina in 1932 epitomized the cotton south in all its anguish. It had the lowest per capita income and highest illiteracy rate in the United States. South Carolinians believed in one party, Democrat, one race, white, and one family, paternal. Governments preserved the status quo. They did not reach down and touch the average citizen. The New Deal changed part of that and began the process that would undo the rest. What the New Deal did not do was bring South Carolina into mainstream America. Still, as in the rest of the South, it planted the seeds that after World War II brought the depression to an end and imported modern mores.

Thirty years ago Hayes began working on this project as his dissertation. He put it aside while he wrote a history of his college, and his most recent previous work, *Dan Daniel and the Persistence of Conservatism in Virginia*, published in 1997. It is fortunate that Hayes went back to his graduate work, for he has produced a good, solid, readable state study that increases the available knowledge of the New Deal South.

Structurally, the book is solid. A general background chapter profiles the political situation and introduces "Cotton Ed" Smith and the other members of the delegation. Then follows a chapter on the early New Deal, the crisis and the solutions. Five chapters describe the permanent alterations due to the PWA, NRA, Social Security and the other long-term Roosevelt programs. Hayes then assesses politics and shifts in public opinion, the impact on African Americans, and the overall impact of the New Deal on South Carolina. In all, the book contains eleven chapters, just over two hundred pages of text.

The state delegation was not unanimously and thoroughly supportive of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Support was better in the first New Deal than in the second (the one that came after the court-packing effort) because it was easier to rationalize relief in a crisis, to sacrifice principle or redefine states rights as necessary. Cotton Ed Smith was no fan of big government, but he took care of his people. And the House members were largely supportive due to the abysmal condition of South Carolina. They turned away when the na-

tional Democrats seemed to be pandering to blacks and labor. South Carolina states righters wanted their unique condition left alone, and they did not want the increased labor costs associated with a minimum wage.

There cannot be a New Deal study without numbers. And Hayes has a bundle of them. For instance, 23 percent of South Carolinians were on relief in October 1933, 40.9 percent of them under age 16, and 55 percent of them black (an over-representation: African Americans were 46 percent of South Carolina's population). Farm counties had a higher relief population because cotton and tenants were both struggling more than textiles. South Carolina was so poor that it paid only 2 percent of its Economic Recovery Agency expenditures; Delaware, at the other extreme, paid 60 percent of its costs. The state received \$533 million in New Deal money.

More numbers: the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in its eight years built or improved 1,138 bridges and viaducts, over 11,000 culverts, and 10,000 miles of street and highway. The WPA also fought illiteracy, which was up to 55 percent among adult blacks in some counties.

And more numbers. Schools were atrocious with 500 firehazards and only 5 percent of white (none of black) schools reaching national average school property value per child. The median value was \$59 for white and \$5 for black children. The WPA built 228 new and improved 632 other schools in its first 3 years. Over all, the WPA built or improved 2,179 schools and over 5,000 school toilets. It provided literacy training for 53,357 adults. By March 1938, adult education reached about 10 percent of the people. Librarians and teachers and artists and writers and historians/archivists got jobs and made permanent contributions to the state thanks to the WPA and National Youth Administration.

Above all, South Carolina got infrastructure--buildings, water and sewage plants and lines, privies, and swamp drainage. As always, there

were the complaints of inefficiency and the personality clashes, and the accidental making of public improvements on private property. And the relief programs of the WPA did have an adverse impact on agricultural labor--farm wages were not competitive, so the WPA had to force people to take farm jobs. But benefits far outweighed costs.

The Public Works Administration (PWA) cleared slums, built highways and buildings (including saving a shipyard in Charleston, which became a primary builder of destroyers in World War II) and two hydroelectric projects. Columbia and Charleston became major beneficiaries of housing-upgrade money (indoor toilets, electricity, running water, and repairs). Low-cost housing had to be segregated because that was what white South Carolinians demanded. The Buzzard Roost hydroelectric project took place only after a favorable United States Supreme Court decision in *Alabama Power Company v. Ickes*. The other project, over opposition, was Santee-Cooper, which electrified rural South Carolina and basically eradicated mosquito-borne malaria.

Some programs fared better than others. The state ERA was plagued with cronyism and localism and racism, the standard problems. The WPA, with greater federal control, had fewer problems. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) managed to escape most of the controversies, and it was the most popular New Deal program in South Carolina. It gave young men jobs, meals and clothing, education, social skills, and money to send home. It also made a lasting contribution that included, among others, the miles of roads and the beginning of the state park system.

Relief gave way to recovery, and the agency alphabet changed. Thus, the WPA, HOLC, FHA, and Social Security. The latter took some effort, including overcoming the reluctance to tax, changing the state law against pensions for any but Confederate veterans, and establishing a realistic payment level. Miscalculations kept the program

from going smoothly for its first two years, but after 1939 it took hold. The two chapters on the NRA and labor focus on the textile mills. Problems were hard times, unrest, the difficulty of organizing, especially by outsiders, and the weakness of the federal government. The agricultural section deals with cotton and tobacco, and it notes that the New Deal did not bring on the recovery--World War II did.

Chapter 9, the chapter on patronage and New Deal politics shows a good grasp of the adage that all politics is local, and a good understanding of the intricacies of politics in the small towns with their traditional and status-conscious individuals. In addition, he reiterates that the second New Deal was too radical, too northern, too minority-oriented (even though the legislature and probably the average person supported Roosevelt's court-packing proposal).

The irony is that South Carolina, benefiting so much, almost turned away from the New Deal. Also ironic is that South Carolinians feared that Roosevelt, famously tolerant of Southern racial mores, was going to elevate the foreign communist unionist and worse, the African American. South Carolinians, however satisfied with much that the New Deal had brought them, refused to accept anti-lynch legislation, sit-down strikes, and attempts to advance African Americans. And they regarded the attempt of a Yankee (FDR) to meddle in Southern affairs by defeating Cotton Ed as an insult to Southern pride. Hayes works this chapter well, using the South Carolina perspective on what more customarily has been written from the national perspective. He provides interesting discussion of the ins and outs of South Carolina politics and the patronage machines of James F. Byrnes and Smith, which proved more permanent and more powerful than the newer and less rooted national patronage system. Always, politics is local, candidates have track records and friendships and rivalries and animosities within their home communities (town, region, state) and a na-

tional perspective is deceiving. Still, South Carolina voted over 95 percent for Roosevelt in 1940.

The chapter on African Americans points out that they didn't get a great shake, but what the New Deal gave them was a lot more than what they had had before, maybe even the beginnings of the civil-rights revolution that would burst forth from the war. Here Hayes notes that South Carolina was not quite as badly benighted as the rest of the South. But he has to stretch to put the beginnings of the civil-rights revolution this far back. He does acknowledge that 1939 is the closest to a beginning year for tangible change in civil rights. The most Hayes can cite for civil rights in the New Deal is an attitude shift, and that is hard to document. His interpretation certainly is not wrong, but his evidence is weaker here than in the chapters on electrification, agricultural improvement, upgraded education and health and housing, and all the other things where hard numbers back him.

All that can be said for the sources is that they are comprehensive. Given the origins in a dissertation and the long gestation period, this is no surprise. Still it is a plus.

This study is really good, if short. In just over two hundred pages of narrative, Hayes manages to cover all the relevant bases. He defines a critically damaged state, works his way through the multiple programs, and assesses the costs and benefits. As did the rest of the nation, South Carolina needed immediate help and got long-term benefits but required World War II to come out of the depression. As did the rest of the South and West, South Carolina did not fall head over heels for the loss of pride and dignity and autonomy. The New Deal was a mixed blessing, and Hayes captures much more than the mere alphabet of programs, although he does that competently as well.

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