

mism and conservatism only served to energize the family's efforts to construct a better future.

The book is almost flawless in its internal consistency, but there are times when the author seems to contradict himself. Had Robert J. Breckinridge "found" (61) Danville Theological School or had he "virtually found it" (62)? Was Sophonisba Breckinridge "the first woman admitted to the Kentucky bar" (189), or was she "apparently the first of her sex so honored in Kentucky" (199)? These quibbles are so glaring simply because one is so engaged in the unfolding story.

This book is probably not the last word on the Breckinridges. Klotter's analysis and interpretation of the political orientations and power of several of the members should elicit reinterpretations and more research. Nevertheless as a collective biography of interconnecting lives of one of this nation's great families it will be hard to surpass.

INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ROBERT M. TAYLOR, JR.

*Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of Revolution*, by T. H. Breen. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985. xvi, 216 pp. Notes, illustrations, index. \$19.95 cloth.

Why review in the *Annals of Iowa* a book about Tidewater Virginia in the colonial era, long before Euro-Americans began to settle in Iowa? Because, quite simply, it suggests a fresh way of looking at important aspects of the history of Iowa.

Most of us are accustomed to thinking of eighteenth-century Virginia as a world inhabited by lawyers, statesmen, and political philosophers. In *Tobacco Culture* T. H. Breen shows us a world inhabited by planters who "spent most of their working hours thinking about crops and livestock" (40-41, 1). Not adequately classified as intellectual, economic, or agricultural history, or as a merely revised rehash of the reductionist Beardian analysis that ascribes revolutionary impulses to motives of economic self-interest, the book reflects Breen's use of anthropological tools to shed light on planters' ideas about the world they inhabited. The distinction between his approach and that of more traditional intellectual history lies in his discussion of those ideas, not by tracing a chain of intellectual debts, but by linking together the planting cycle, the psychology of the planters, and a political ideology.

Breen shows first how patterns of human relationships were influenced by patterns of tobacco production and trade. Then he analyzes the psychological and cultural effects of the transformation of those relationships as planters who prized their autonomy grew increasingly indebted to British merchants who did not honor local codes

of behavior (that is, they actually expected planters to pay their debts). As the planters of Tidewater Virginia became aware that British merchants did not share their assumptions about human relationships, and as planters shifted increasingly from tobacco to wheat production (historians of the Midwest will enjoy the Virginians' comments about the salutary moral effect of this shift), they began to realize that their private struggles were part of a collective experience, and that what they had assumed were universal values were in fact the conditions of a *local* culture. Planters began to have doubts about their ability to maintain their dominance of that culture, but they generally blamed outsiders for the passing of the old ways. Still, increasing numbers became convinced that to restore their autonomy and to revitalize their culture would require cooperation, moral reform, a commitment to virtue and simple living, and a repudiation of the extravagance around which the earlier code revolved.

Breen does not claim that these transformations by themselves *caused* the Revolution, but they did, he argues, make the planters receptive to the "radical Country thought" that was the ideological basis for the Virginians' revolt. Much work remains to be done to test his thesis—his evidence is primarily the private correspondence and, after the mid-1760s, the public rhetoric of the Tidewater planters—but as a brief, suggestive, provocative historical essay, *Tobacco Culture* is a stunning success.

In fact, it might serve as a model for that kind of historical writing. The thesis is strikingly simple yet suitably subtle. It is forcefully argued and fully and cogently developed. The book is well organized and clearly and engagingly written; it is remarkably jargon-free given the anthropological nature of its argument. The publisher has done its part, too: illustrations are aptly chosen and placed; typographical errors are rare; lines of text are short; and footnotes even appear at the foot of the page!

I would even suggest that it might be a useful model for some historian of the Midwest. Agricultural historians of the Midwest have studied changing patterns of agricultural production, and political historians have traced shifting political forces; perhaps some historians might now be stimulated by the kind of work T. H. Breen has done to undertake an investigation of the *mentalité* of Midwestern farmers at various critical points in the history of Iowa and the Midwest. As Hal S. Barron has pointed out elsewhere ("Staying Down on the Farm: Social Processes of Settled Rural Life in the Nineteenth-Century North," in *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation*, ed. Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude [Chapel Hill, N.C., 1985]), the condition of mid-western settled rural communities during a period of agricultural

commercialization does not conform well to models designed to explain either frontier or modern urban industrial societies. Historians must come up with new models to explain the social context and consequences—as well as economic and political aspects—of agricultural developments in societies that exhibit characteristics of both traditional communities and modern societies. T. H. Breen's book is a good place to start, even though the place and time—and thus the distinctive characteristics of the *mentalité*—are quite different from nineteenth-century midwestern rural societies.

I urge agricultural historians and others interested in integrating the study of economic life with larger intellectual currents and social and cultural patterns, especially in a society heavily influenced by an agricultural economy, to make some time in their schedule to allow this book to stimulate fresh thinking.

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

MARVIN BERGMAN

*Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures Since 1880*, by Pete Daniel. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985. xvi, 352 pp. Photographs, maps, notes, index. \$22.50 cloth.

In *Breaking the Land*, Pete Daniel explores the transformation and effective destruction of the "cultures" he believes developed around the production of three important southern crops—cotton, tobacco, and rice. Daniel defines culture both in the narrow, agricultural sense, as an annual pattern of work involved in the production and marketing of a crop, and in the broader, social sense. To Daniel, crops shape not only agricultural practices, but also social relationships and institutions. Over the past century, according to Daniel, culture in both senses has undergone a revolution among southern producers of major staple crops.

The transformation of the cotton culture was most dramatic. Already stressed by the boll weevil and adverse climatological and economic developments, the cotton culture faced a severe crisis when the Great Depression hit. Government intervention transformed it. Initially, federal relief threatened planters' control over sharecroppers, but New Deal farm programs ultimately facilitated and even encouraged the modern enclosure movement which displaced most tenants from the land. State experiment stations and implement and chemical companies assisted by developing devices that allowed producers to do without labor. The result was the transformation of the cotton culture in less than a generation from a semifeudal remnant of the postbellum adjustment to emancipation to a modern commercial enterprise on the

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