

an agricultural stabilization program in the form of the Farm Board was, of course, a new development.

Snyder's stress on the importance of labor unrest as a factor in the crisis suggests similar problems. He argues that cotton farmers were heavily and chronically dependent on casual labor to harvest the crop and that the possibility of collective action by pickers to raise wages posed a serious threat of disruption. This may well be true with regard to the 1931 situation. However, as Warren Whately has recently suggested (in "Labor for the Picking: The New Deal in the South," *Journal of Economic History*, December 1983), transient labor had traditionally been used chiefly on farms with relatively large acreage and at least partial mechanization, and was marginal to tenant and sharecrop farms. The impact of the depression, and later the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, drastically altered the proportion of large to small units, while creating a large floating labor force available for picking. By 1931, then, the role of transient labor in the cotton harvest may have been unprecedentedly large, which would have increased the impact of labor unrest on the cotton market.

Snyder's book also suffers to some degree from a journalistic perspective that all day-to-day events are of roughly equivalent value. An entire chapter on southern complaints about the bad tidings which the U.S. Crop Reporting Service brought, for instance, seems a bit excessive; the service was, after all, only the messenger. More seriously, Snyder seems to be overly sympathetic to Long's "drop-a-crop" crusade. He disposes effectively of some objections to the scheme (e.g. fear of foreign competition), but too easily dismisses the problem of finding alternative crops and the difficulties of transforming a rigid economic structure for the sake of a short-term goal. He also neglects problems of enforcement which, he notes, contributed significantly to scuttling the alternative program of acreage reduction. These are minor objections, however, and generally do not affect the value of the work. All told, Snyder has succeeded admirably in illuminating a pivotal moment of the southern agricultural past.

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Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980, by Gilbert C. Fite. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984. xiii, 273 pp. Notes, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$28.00 cloth, \$10.00 paper.

In the course of forty years experience in historical research and writing, Gilbert C. Fite has amassed a huge amount of material. Some of it is new, some of it is old, but all of it is melded into his history of south-

ern agriculture since the Civil War. *Cotton Fields No More* is the work of a mature scholar with a sure touch. Fite uses much new material but also draws on a vast reservoir of secondary and primary sources. He rigorously restricts his story to the history of farming in the former Confederate states, but embraces the years 1865 to 1980. Of course, from time to time, he compares the South to the rest of the United States or to other regions, such as the Upper Midwest. Statistics are rather abundant for the years after 1865, and Fite uses them judiciously, not only as illustrations but as sources of information. His account covers all commodities, all subregions, all classes of people, all varieties of climate and soil, and indeed, all of everything imaginable. The balance in coverage is deft, and nothing is overdone or underdone. About 38 percent of the book deals with the years 1865 to 1914, and the rest treats the years since 1914. This is a fair distribution of attention, and Fite gives almost every possible historical interpretation a fair presentation.

The basically chronological narrative shows the unintended consequences of human activity. It also reveals how little reformers and leaders were able to influence the course of events. When changes took place in the South, they flowed from the national course of events; chiefly, changes in agriculture resulted from urbanization and industrialization. In this regard, southern agriculture had much in common with agriculture everywhere in America. This discovery may be of cold comfort to readers in Iowa and the Midwest. The only strikingly different problems which southerners faced were those related to cotton husbandry and racism. Otherwise, what happened in the South seems to have happened all over. The most significant aspect in the history of any region in America, is that every region was and is a part of the whole. No region or state, even in the details of as complex an industry as agriculture, can be understood in isolation from the rest of the country. Historians do not always recognize this perfectly obvious truth as clearly as it is seen in *Cotton Fields No More*.

Of course the South, like any other region, has some peculiarities. As the story unfolds it becomes depressingly clear that at any given moment after the Civil War, southern farmers were in worse circumstances than farmers anywhere else. At least southerners were disadvantaged in most areas of life, regardless of class or status: rich farmers were not as rich as rich farmers elsewhere and poor farmers were much poorer in the south. Fite explains the causes of this constant comparative deprivation, but usually a bit too gently and too indirectly. Put simply, southern agricultural history is American agricultural history, but with a pronounced racial bias. At bottom only racism, in all of its unpleasant manifestations, explains why everything in the South

was worse. If racism in turn needs explanation, that is a subject for another book.

In the South, historical change seemed painfully slow. Mechanization was slower in coming, urbanization and industrialization were more gradual, and every type of adjustment to changing circumstances took longer. Even the boll weevil took forty years to advance from west to east. Although the author gives all of the relevant details on climate, prices, costs, rural electrification, poor roads, and on and on, none of these conditions or events seems to explain the long-term and lamentable condition of southern agriculture. Fite reveals this, but softly and sometimes obliquely. Nevertheless, he does point to the source of the trouble: only the pervasive and expensive efforts to keep blacks in an inferior status can explain the languishing history of southern farming.

The story ends optimistically, however. The South has largely overcome its heritage. The baleful results of racism should give no comfort to readers in other regions. People in every section and every state have their own particular mean streaks, with or without racism. Readers of this book may ponder on their own region as they learn about the history of southern farming.

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Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877-1984, by James C. Cobb. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984. xii, 185 pp. Bibliographic note, index, \$19.00 cloth.

Industrialization and Southern Society, as its author readily acknowledges, is largely synthetic. It draws together much of the literature on the industrialization of the South and fashions it into an informative but sometimes sketchy narrative. James C. Cobb examines the South's potential for industrial growth, the efforts of southerners to translate that potential into reality, and the social, political, and environmental consequences of industrialization. He concedes that economic growth and diversification have altered the character of southern life but contends that "industrialization has not obliterated the socioeconomic and structural differences that have traditionally represented the fundamental basis of southern distinctiveness" (163). He believes that the region "avoided a rapid social and political metamorphosis" because its attitudes and traditions were generally compatible with the development of the type of primary, minimally skilled, labor-intensive industries characteristic of the South's economic growth during the late nineteenth century and much of the twentieth (1).

Cobb's book is weak in its analysis of southern industrial develop-

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