

Book Reviews

decisions of federal courts in cases involving Indians for their major sources of information. Although their descriptions of legal cases are frequently confusing, the fault lies not with the authors but instead with the ambiguous nature of court decisions in general and with the federal courts' ambivalent attitudes toward Indian rights in particular. While Deloria and Lytle are unable to present decisive proof that Marshall's "domestic dependent nation" dictum is the standard guide for American jurists, they present a provocative case for their contention that Marshall's concept can be traced through many subsequent legislative and judicial acts.

American Indians, American Justice is an interesting analysis of the constitutional basis for Native American rights and United States-Indian relations. It should be required reading not only for scholars of American Indian studies, but also for students of United States constitutional history as well.

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THOMAS F. SCHILZ

Black Southerners, 1619-1869, by John B. Boles. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983. xi, 244 pp. Bibliographic essay, index. \$24.00 cloth.

Few aspects of American history have received more attention than the institution of slavery. Some of our best and some of our worst historical writing has dealt with the peculiar institution, but several areas of sharp disagreement still remain. Anyone who wishes to be knowledgeable about the current status of scholarship in this field can read either the voluminous literature or this exceptionally fine summary by John B. Boles, professor of history at Rice University and editor of the *Journal of Southern History*. Anyone who approaches the literature will do well to be guided by his twenty-six page bibliographical essay.

In lucid, readable prose, the author has packed a surprising amount of information in a relatively brief volume as he tells the story of black southerners from the pre-American background to 1869. Neither blacks nor whites can be understood in the South, he asserts, without taking the other into account, for "southerner is a biracial term" (x). There is room here to mention only a few of his observations. The colonial slave trade reached its peak between about 1740 and 1760, with the middle passage death rate being almost the same as that for white immigrants in the seventeenth century. An unusual aspect of American slavery was its rapid growth from natural increase, thus making extensive importation unnecessary.

Boles dismisses the lurid paperback-book theme of slave breeding by saying there is no reliable evidence that it existed. As to the perennial question of profitability, soil fertility was the critical factor. Cotton and corn production made the most efficient use of slave labor, and in 1860 the South had more acres in corn than in cotton and the value of livestock was double that of the cotton crop: "The most significant economic advantage of slavery was that it allowed farm size to increase significantly" (74).

Especially interesting is Boles's account of how the slaves developed their own subculture. Boles emphasizes the importance of religion in shaping the slave character, and he suggests that religion helped explain the small number of slave revolts. Prewar churches were surprisingly biracial. They became segregated after the war as the blacks withdrew, often over the protests of whites. By developing an Afro-American culture, "by having something of their own to hold to, most bondsmen survived slavery, bending when survival dictated but not letting their spirit be broken" (180).

Slavery began to dissolve with the start of the Civil War. While some slaves were loyal to "Ole Massa," most chose freedom at the first opportunity. Over 38,000 black soldiers died in Union service, a mortality rate nearly 40 percent higher than that of whites. In the postwar period whites were especially resentful of black participation in politics, although they exaggerated its extent. Both groups were inexperienced in dealing with their new relationship, and they had to grope toward solutions. One of their successes was the development of sharecropping which had some advantages for each group. But the postwar South was changing and "perhaps the ultimate tragedy of slavery and Reconstruction is that it prepared neither the blacks, nor the whites, nor the southern economy for a changing market system" (213).

When an author deals with such a large topic, one can always find points on which to quibble. Does Boles ignore the non-slavery factors, such as states' rights, that helped unify the South? What happened after the war to the urban blacks whom he discussed at some length in the prewar era? But one does not have to agree with each point to recognize that this is a superb synthesis of the best scholarship on black southerners. If the other volumes in the *New Perspective on the South* series match this one, editor Charles P. Roland will have produced a landmark in southern studies.

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