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Aaron W. Marrs. *Railroads in the Old South: Pursuing Progress in a Slave Society*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2009. 288 pp. ISBN 978-0-8018-9130-4, $58.00 (cloth).

Was the antebellum Old South backward and, consequently, slow to adopt railroads? This is an interesting and important question. The antebellum Old South experienced high income per capita but was slow to modernize. Slow railroad development, it has been suggested, was both a symptom and a cause of the Old South's backwardness. This is the question that historian Aaron W. Marrs addresses in *Railroads in the Old South*.

The book contributes to the literature by adopting a cultural study of rail technology, by examining previously sparse primary sources coming directly from individual's diaries, from entrepreneurs' letters and various railroad company internal and stockholder reports, and by concluding that the Old South was more complex, flexible, and advanced than we thought. The author claims to side with Ulrich Phillips, Leo Marx, Eugene Genovese, and Gavin Wright, but for his own reasons.

Marrs sets up his approach for a cultural study of rail technology by analyzing how different social groups interacted with rail technology. The first chapter, "Dreams," examines how promoters and entrepreneurs dreamed with rails. Southerners were as curious about railroads as northerners. And, some southerner entrepreneurs vigorously promoted railroads but faced limitations mostly from political rivalries. The next chapter, "Knowledge," describes the origin and advancement of knowledge embedded in the civil engineers who built southern railroads. Civil engineers who located and built southern railroads were part of a national network sharing knowledge and techniques, and moved north and south. Engineering knowledge was identical in the North and the South. The interaction between slaves and the rails is examined in the third chapter, "Sweat." Slaves perspired in an unexpected collaboration with whites and free blacks to

build the railroads, demonstrating the flexibility of the Old South in adapting to new social situations and technological developments. The interaction between managers, workers, and business activities is examined in two chapters, "Structure" and "Motion." Southern railroad companies discovered the difficulties of coordinating work along the rail line and, Marrs shows, implemented divisional structures and rulebooks even earlier than northern railroads. Coordination of work resulted in punctual and regular service for cotton exports and for other commodities moving into the hinterland. Coordination even integrated some innovative activities, as equipment production created inventions such as the barrel car. Railroads not only coordinated the work performed by railroad employees but, in an indirect manner, also coordinated wider economic activity. Railroad depots set the locations for slave markets. Finally, the interaction between rail users and railroads is studied in "Passages" and "Communities." Exploring contemporary literature and personal diaries, Marrs recovers descriptions of travelers' sensations and also examines changes in perceptions of time and of reality. Negotiations with important groups like Sabbatarians or the federal government's post office are also described.

Marrs, thus, concludes that railroads in the Old South were not as incipient as we thought. He shows convincingly that both in the South and the North one can frequently find qualitative evidence (i) of entrepreneurs and other citizens promoting railroad development, (ii) of rivalry between different regions or social groups delaying the arrival of railroads, (iii) of a nationwide common pool of ideas and engineers that built railroads, (iv) of a complex organization of work to provide rail service, and (v) of life changes for many with rail transport. These are all important and novel findings evidencing the Old South's (at least moderate) capacity to use new technology and modernize.

But, if one is to follow this line of argument, one would be led to believe that both the North and the South developed a similar intensity in railroad building and use during the antebellum period. However, we know this is not the case. The differences in track miles built, railroad earnings, and traffic between the North and the South during the antebellum period were great. Marrs acknowledges this at the beginning of the book's introduction—but leaves it aside for the rest of the book. By examining and describing a complex interaction between railroads and the Old South, Marrs makes an important contribution and takes us a step forward answering the question posed, but he does not fully answer it. In order to answer this question, at least two issues need more careful discussion.

First, it is important to consider the interaction between railroads and geography. A comparison of the North's and the South's geography

would have been helpful to understand if the South's lower use of rail was a symptom of social backwardness or of privileged geography.

Second, although Marrs does discuss briefly some of the difficulties southern railroads experienced raising private capital, he does not delve into this issue deeply enough. The Old South had developed a sophisticated merchant network with Europe, why did not Europeans finance railroads in the South, as they did in the North? Or was it that railroads were not expected to be profitable? Why?

As these questions attest, the book is thought-provoking. Although it does not fully answer the question posed, the archival work is nicely knit together to provide a better understanding of the complex changes Old Southerners experienced with railroads during antebellum era. The chapter on the role of slavery in construction and operation of the railroads provides unexpected and eye-opening insights. And the book will trigger many valuable questions in the reader's mind. Independently of whether the reader is a business historian, a cultural historian, an economic historian, or a historian of technology, it is certainly worth reading the book.

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Leslie Tomory. *Progressive Enlightenment: The Origins of the Gaslight Industry, 1780–1820*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012. xii + 348 pp. ISBN 978-0-01675-9, $28.00 (cloth).

The urban gaslight system was arguably the most important antecedent to the great technical networks that came to dominate life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Leslie Tomory's fine account of how this system was created at the turn of the nineteenth century will redress a spectacular void in the current literature. It is a book that should be read by historians of technology, of urban infrastructures, and of corporations and capitalism. Tomory's story is largely a British one, but he is careful to situate gas lighting's emergence in late-eighteenth century England in its larger European context. Indeed, he suggests that the development of the initial apparatus and approaches was an example of "multiple simultaneous inventions," following as they did widespread interest in using the products of