

demonstrates, with many sectors of the agricultural economy experiencing considerable growth. In terms of recreation, culture, education, and even rural industries, the period was characterised as much by development and change as by stagnation and decline. The case is forcibly and convincingly made. Yet, as Sheail intimates in his characteristically thoughtful piece, there can be dangers in imposing too unified a picture on an untidy past, and a consideration of some of those aspects of the inter-war countryside which are omitted from the volume would, perhaps, have presented a more nuanced case. In particular, it is striking that there is no real consideration of what many people would mean today by 'the countryside', fields, woods, hedges, and the various semi-natural environments, including wetlands and heaths. By looking at these, a less positive picture of the inter-war years might have emerged, one involving the wholesale collapse of traditional forms of management and the increasing dereliction of important habitats. The 'depends where you look' objection can be raised in another way. One theme which runs strongly through many of the contributions is that of 'counter-urbanisation', the gradual spread of suburbs and commuters into rural areas, and the decline of a clear distinction between the rural and the urban. As the penultimate paragraph of Howkin's excellent overview of the period ('Death or Rebirth?') puts it:

Perhaps somewhere around 1930 rural history, in the way we have hitherto understood it – as cows and ploughs, as landlord, farmer and labourer, or as cottage and castle – comes to an end. Or, at least (to paraphrase Churchill) comes to the beginning of the end.

Yet such a view, while certainly true everywhere to some extent, was unquestionably far truer of the home counties than, say, of Lincolnshire, Norfolk, or other more resolutely agricultural areas. Here the impact of suburban expansion and 'counter-urbanisation' was, it can be argued, much more muted until after the Second World War. Only then did the massive decline in the number of people actually working on the land, coupled with significant increases in mobility resulting from the proliferation of car ownership, really bring about a major change in the character of rural life.

But these are minor quibbles. This is an excellent volume, which opens up a vital new area of historical enquiry, and yet at the same time manages to provide (despite the disclaimers of the editors) a general overview of the period, one which is unlikely to be superseded for many years to come. It should be essential reading for all those interested in the history of the countryside in the twentieth century.

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Stephen Cresswell, *Rednecks, Redeemers, and Race: Mississippi After Reconstruction, 1877–1917*, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2006. x + 283 pp. \$45.00 cloth. 1578068479.

This is the third volume in the Heritage of Mississippi series, a multi-volume project sponsored by the Mississippi Historical Society and intended to supersede the

two-volume *History of Mississippi* edited by Richard A. McLemore and published by the same press in 1973. The author, a professor of history at West Virginia Wesleyan College, is uniquely qualified to write this book for he has already published a study entitled *Multiparty Politics in Mississippi*, which covers essentially the same time period. The work under review is primarily a narrative synthesis based largely on secondary sources and contemporary newspapers with little original interpretation.

Cresswell wisely emphasises the dichotomy between continuity and change during this critical forty-year period in the history of the state. On one hand, there were substantial economic and social changes in Mississippi after Reconstruction. The system of plantation slavery gave way to sharecropping and the crop-lien system. There was some urban growth in a state that had only five towns with a population of 2,500 or more as late as 1870. This period also witnessed an increase in railroad mileage as well as growth in such industries as timbering, sawmills, and cotton textile mills. Nevertheless, there was much that did not change. Despite some diversification in agriculture, cotton remained the principal crop, and race continued to be the defining characteristic of this black majority state, which pioneered the disenfranchisement of African Americans and was frequently marred by incidents of lynching, whitecapping, race riots, and peonage.

However, despite its persistent pattern of racial injustice, Cresswell contends that Mississippi was in many ways a progressive state in the early twentieth century. It was the first in the nation to adopt the statewide primary for state and local elections; the first to ratify the prohibition amendment to the Constitution; one of the first to phase out the notorious convict lease system; and one of the first to enact a strong child labour law. Indeed, asserts Cresswell, the flamboyant racist but otherwise progressive Theodore G. Bilbo, who was elected governor in 1915, 'had the most successful administration of all the governors who served between 1877 and 1917' (pp. 212–13).

Notwithstanding some progressive reforms and some changes in infrastructure and economic development, Mississippi in 1917 remained overwhelmingly rural and poor with its population sharply polarised by race. It would require subsequent events, most importantly World War Two and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, to bring significant change to the state.

Cresswell has provided the general reader with a workmanlike, though occasionally fascinating, account of this Deep South state during the four decades that followed Reconstruction. As with most books, there are some minor factual errors. Thus, it was Adams County, the site of Natchez, that had the highest per capita income in the nation on the eve of the Civil War. And North Carolina, not South Carolina and Georgia, was the leading antebellum producer of naval stores. One might also question the failure to divide the bibliography between primary and secondary sources as well as the omission of newspapers from the list of sources although they are cited extensively in the notes. However, such minor complaints do not detract from the worth of a book that will prove extremely valuable to those with little previous knowledge of this important period in Mississippi history.

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