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The Ongoing Burden of Southern History: Politics and Identity in the Twenty-First Century South by Angie Maxwell, Todd Shields, and Jeannie Whayne

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Maxwell, Angie, Todd Shields, and Jeannie Whyne, eds. *The Ongoing Burden of Southern History: Politics and Identity in the Twenty-First Century South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012. xix + 208 pages. Hardcover \$42.50.

Honored almost to the point of embarrassment, the Arkansas-born humanist and American historian of the twentieth century C. Vann Woodward (1908-1999) was an ironic blend of insider and outsider. He grew up privileged in a very poor region and was both conversant with great novelists and poets and fiercely loyal to Clio's Muse. He was a scholar activist whose work was acclaimed by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the Selma March, yet he was also celebrated as a scholar's scholar who trained some forty-one historians at The Johns Hopkins University and at Yale University. In the present volume, edited by political scientists Angie Maxwell and Todd Shields and historian Jeannie Whyne, the contributors reflect on Woodward's work, moving beyond a review of old and new literature to highlight the connections to contemporary scholarship. Above all, they acknowledge Woodward's lasting impact on the fiftieth anniversary of his seminal collection of essays, *The Burden of Southern History*, originally published in 1960, has passed a fiftieth anniversary.

Most true to the nature and characteristics of the historian Woodward is Robert McMath, a historian at the University of Arkansas specializing in southern agrarian movements. McMath examines the flagship essay of *Southern History*, "The Irony of Southern History," and parallels it with another essay on "The Populist Heritage and the Intellectual." Above all, McMath recalls usefully Woodward's twinned and twining but somewhat paradoxical directives for such study, that one should take seriously the complaint of those in a social movement but remain detached from advocacy for their specific political remedies; and that one should not belittle their very real sense of grievance, but avoid pumping for their partisan platform. To these vital perspectives McMath brings the political scientist's concept of "contentious politics," in which partisans contend against their foes, especially if the opposition seems to them entrenched in the major political parties and in dominant financial institutions. McMath then looks at the current Tea Party social movement, taking seriously its heartfelt grievance against globalized banking and finance and also taking seriously the way both leading Democrats and leading Republicans support macroeconomic policies that hurt the small businessperson, especially in the rural South.

Most entertaining, and most fully based on research in Woodward's papers at Yale University and transcripts of interviews stored at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is the essay, "The Therapist of the Public Mind," by James C. Cobb, a trenchant and at times hilarious social and cultural historian at the University of Georgia. Cobb draws on a note by Woodward to his dissertation advisor that he on occasion intended to be a therapist for a public much troubled by social affairs, especially race relations and specifically the long-enduring attachment to Jim Crow. He shows, in a cleverness worthy of the master ironist Woodward himself, that Woodward's concept of a unique "burden" in southern identity became nothing less than a personal burden for the man who found his own first work—on reflection in the smoking ruins of urban unrest in the period 1968-1974—to be overly optimistic and whose revisions and reconsiderations in that period and thereafter are uniformly in this volume judged to be overly pessimistic.

Leigh Ann Duck and Patrick Williams score valid points about what Woodward did not do. Duck, a literary scholar at the University of Mississippi, marks it that Woodward in these few essays describes white men, telling us nothing about women, and nothing about blacks, thus perpetuating in his description of southern identity chauvinist and racist exclusion. Williams, a

political historian at the University of Arkansas, notes that Woodward was so fascinated with the lovable losers and pregnant failures—the carpetbaggers and scalawags and the biracial and even interracial Populists—that he does almost nothing with the winners, the long-running Democratic Party, which, whatever else, must have practiced something other than “dark arts” of force and fraud to make its wildly successful appeal to the masses. Each scholar is right, but each also is making a few essays bear a remarkable weight, since the essays by nature are intended to be provocative and suggestive and are quite different in kind from the thoroughly researched and fully documented (though no less provocative) *Origins of the New South* (1951) or the biography *Tom Watson* (1938).

Political scientists contribute three essays closest to the heart of Woodward’s substantive research on race relations and their particular manifestation in voting and office-holding. Wayne Parent of Louisiana State University takes the 2008 presidential election to test for persistence of a southern identity based on “shared history” and marked by lower incomes, lower wealth, lower educational levels, preponderant rural residential patterns, and heavy concentration of black population—as well as persisting southern connections, that is no great influx of non-southern population. With these statistical markers, Parent finds a persisting political expression of identity in a “shrinking South,” with North Carolina and Virginia being least “southern” and Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana being most “southern” in overwhelming opposition to a black presidential candidate as expressed by rural, poorly educated, relatively poor, generationally persisting southerners. Charles Bullock of the University of Georgia demonstrates that the essayist of the *Burden* was entirely “too pessimistic” about black political participation in the Second Reconstruction (a Woodward term for the latter-day civil rights movement from 1954-1966). A more interesting essay, and one reflecting some sound quantification as well as artful reinterpretation, is contributed by the team of Hanes Walton, Jr., Josephine A.V. Allen, Sherman C. Puckett, and Donald R. Deskins, Jr. This cohort takes Woodward’s “innovative perspective” concerning “neophyte voting behavior” among freedmen both in 1868 and in the period after 1947—times when people denied the right to vote were suddenly and in large numbers permitted to vote. In both instances, Woodward insisted that the newly enfranchised showed “maturity” and “wisdom” instead of naiveté—and certainly no corruption. The team offers quantitative tests for each region of the former Confederate states, and then extends the test into the period after Woodward’s death. They conclude by praising Woodward for his optimism and faith in democracy as well as his useful diagnostic tool for testing voting behavior among those so newly come to the suffrage.

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