Reassessing the 1930s South ed. by Karen L. Cox, Sarah E. Gardner (review)

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The great challenge is that neither the micro nor the macro was ever static or monolithic. As has been well documented, enslaved peoples shaped, to their fullest ability, the experience of captivity and forced labor. Nowhere was that truer than in the area of reproduction, as Luke acknowledges in her early chapters. The agency that lay midwives asserted on the plantations and during Reconstruction was profoundly challenged, however, when they encountered scientifically educated physicians and their allies in state governments.

Luke reminds readers that the forces arrayed in support of introducing scientific advances into childbirth were diverse and varied. African American physicians, usually men, struggled to secure adequate education, residencies, and hospital privileges before the 1960s. Nurses of all races faced resistance in achieving formal education and professional status. State governments were hampered by inadequate budgets and little political will to commit to their African American citizens. When federal dollars arrived in the 1920s through programs like the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Act (1921), physicians and reactive politicians screamed "socialized medicine" and undermined programs as often as they implemented them. Racism ran through all of these efforts, as the author acknowledges.

Midwives were victimized by this mind-set while their continued practice contributed to its perpetuation. So long as racism limited efforts to secure medical education for African American physicians and nurses, and the chronic poverty of rural southern African Americans made them an undesirable patient pool for white doctors, then there was tolerance for state-sanctioned lay midwives. By the 1970s, that all changed. Physicians found new economic opportunity in obstetrics, especially if their patients possessed private health insurance. At the same time, nurse-midwives, who have always been predominantly white, sought a monopoly as the only legitimate nonphysician childbirth attendants. Luke documents the creation of a two-tiered system in many parts of the South in which less affluent women were attended by nurse-midwives and privately insured women saw physicians.

Luke asserts "that the juggernaut of scientific hegemony forced into obsolescence a brand of care that held intrinsic value" (p. 145). This author helps readers see how scientific medicine was integrated into lay midwifery but demonstrates that this sharing of knowledge and skills was opportunistic. Scientifically educated doctors and their government and professional allies did not recognize the "intrinsic value" of lay midwifery, sacrificing traditional practice on the altar of science.

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Reassessing the 1930s South. Edited by Karen L. Cox and Sarah E. Gardner. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018. Pp. viii, 261. $45.00, ISBN 978-0-8071-6921-6.)

This collection of thirteen essays from contributors with backgrounds in history, art, and literary studies offers a broad and engaging examination of the 1930s South. At the same time, it interrogates notions about the South and the ways those notions were formed. It is an expansive topic that editors Karen L. Cox and Sarah E. Gardner take on, and the volume makes a valuable

contribution in fleshing out the conversation. The essays successfully push back against what the editors describe as the artificial but culturally powerful binary that has either pathologized or romanticized the South and instead reveal the complexity, contradiction, and tension in southerners' responses to change.

It seems to me that the volume's true value is its probe into how notions of the South are constructed and produced, although that aim is not explicitly framed as such. Readers see this process through the examination of various forms of cultural media, including art, literature, documentary writing and film, theater, visual arts, academic accounts, and news reporting. Additionally, the focus on culture allows the authors to assess new as well as familiar topics from fresh perspectives, helping explain the heft and longevity of particular constructs about the South.

Several essays describe contemporary perspectives that gestured toward southerners' need for a radically different South. Emily Senefeld shows how the Highlander Folk School helped build support for the labor movement, and she convincingly positions these activities as central to a broader culture of southern radicalism. Robert Hunt Ferguson takes a fascinating look at the radical social vision of William R. Amberson, a physiologist and Southern Tenant Farmers' Union leader who rejected the entrenched agricultural system and New Deal rural programs. As an alternative, Amberson helped found the Delta Cooperative Farm on the principles of collectivism and interracial cooperation. Coauthors Rebecca Sharpless and Melissa Walker discuss the fieldwork of social scientists Ruth Allen and Margaret Jarman Hagood, who documented rural women's labor and asserted a powerful gendered indictment of southern economic and social systems as the root of women's poverty and disempowerment. The essay will be useful for historians interested in comparing this fieldwork with that conducted in other regions by home economists in agricultural extension service, who also pressed gendered critiques.

Technological change shaped conceptions of the South in relationship to modernity, as several chapters illustrate. Two essays closely examine cultural production associated with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Lisa Dorrill offers a fresh take on post office and courthouse murals; they showcased dam engineering, electricity, and conservation measures but failed to depict those affected, thus glossing over social issues the TVA supposedly addressed. Ted Atkinson urges readers to rethink southern encounters with modernism, previously interpreted as antagonistic. He compellingly argues that the documentary *The River* (1938) and the play *Power* (1937) exemplified "TVA modernism," a perspective that viewed technology and infrastructure as crucial to the transformation of the South and its unification with the nation (p. 125). While federally supported cultural production could serve New Deal objectives, Scott L. Matthews illustrates that southerners sought to control notions of place and identity for their own purposes. In response to an alarmist photo essay published in 1938 by *Collier's* magazine on sharecropping in Greene County, Georgia, local elites, federal photographers, and sociologist Arthur F. Raper developed an alternative narrative in newspapers, a congressional speech, and Raper's *Tenants of the Almighty* (New York, 1943). Douglas E. Thompson also disrupts notions of the South as backward by suggesting that southerners eagerly adopted automobiles but in ways that "fit their understanding of themselves as possessing independence, self-reliance, and freedom" (p. 108).

Another important theme in this collection is race. Nicholas Roland's excellent essay examines how the organizers of the 1936 Texas Centennial

Exposition sought to project values of modernity and racial harmony despite the reality of ongoing discrimination, the denigration of black people's cultural contributions, and the promotion of historical imagery celebrating white dominance. Ella Howard draws on Home Owners' Loan Corporation residential security maps to describe patterns in segregation and discriminatory mortgage-lending practices in five cities, pointing out that redlining practices were not monolithic. Steven Knepper's important essay shows how the writings of African American poet and scholar Sterling Brown and sociologist Charles S. Johnson debunked the myth of pastoral contentment on the plantation and unveiled the harsh realities for black laborers.

Several essays oriented toward literary studies explore the connections among place, identity, and experience by examining the life and work of notable southern literary figures. Anthony J. Stanonis shows the connection between New Orleans tourism and Tennessee Williams's work. Bryan A. Giemza lyrically reflects on E. P. O'Donnell, whose prizewinning works helped shape modern southern literary culture but were forgotten after World War II. Robert W. Haynes explores the mix of southern and familial culture, place, and identity that stood in for region in the work of three dramatists, including the understudied Horton Foote.

This fresh and provocative volume is packed with discussion that will benefit not only historians of the South but also those concerned with other regions. Scholars conceptualizing encounters with modernity and modernization will find it useful as well. I have a few quibbles. The editors offer a provocative, but in some ways incomplete, introduction to the volume's purposes. I think that readers would also benefit from a more expansive discussion situating the volume within recent scholarship on the South, particularly regarding the topics of modernity, modernism, and modernization. Finally, I wish there had been a bit more explicit discussion of why a reassessment is required, beyond the need to press against the legacy and limits of binary representations. That said, I will often be returning to this volume.

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The Greater Good: Media, Family Removal, and TVA Dam Construction in North Alabama. By Laura Beth Daws and Susan L. Brinson. The Modern South. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019. Pp. xvi, 184. $54.95, ISBN 978-0-8173-2008-9.)

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) has had a tremendous impact on north Alabama since 1933. Most visibly, its dam building brought all kinds of benefits, including jobs, flood control, and electrification. But it had costs, too, especially for the more than 2,500 Alabama families forced to relocate when the TVA took their land. Laura Beth Daws and Susan L. Brinson focus on the TVA's efforts to shape public opinion in north Alabama, particularly regarding the construction of the Wheeler, Guntersville, and Pickwick Dams, and on the experiences of those most affected—the relocated families. They argue that the TVA successfully used media, especially local print media, to create an almost entirely positive image; in doing so, the TVA and the media ignored the harsher reality for many relocated families.