Freedpeople in the Tobacco South: Virginia, 1860-1900 (review)

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(the principal city of which is Lynchburg), Albemarle (where Charlottesville and the University of Virginia are located), and Augusta (county seat, Staunton).

On both the state-wide and the local level, Blair finds a similar pattern. "People accepted hardships and loss of liberty as long as they were convinced of the necessity and could see that most shared the suffering" (53). Indeed, the mobilization and commitment of manpower and resources reached staggering proportions as the struggle dragged on. Before the war was over, 80 percent of the state's male population of military age (seventeen to fifty) either went into the army or worked in industries serving the war effort. According to Blair, a conflict that began in Virginia as a rich man's war and a poor man's fight was transformed by several key political decisions: legislation passed by the Confederate Congress in December 1863 that revoked the right to hire substitutes; Congressional imposition of impressment in 1863; and a follow-up bill in early 1864 requiring local farmers to sell food to soldiers' families at less than market prices. These measures—"striking achievements" in the author's view (104)—"distributed the pain among various classes" more equitably (106), reduced privation on the homefront, and helped check desertion among veteran soldiers. In the end, however, the South was overwhelmed on the battlefield. One of Blair's purposes is "to restore the importance of military events to the question of Confederate defeat" (8–9).

Blair's research and analysis are not without their shortcomings. He acknowledges that he "could find only scattered testimony from either the poor or families of soldiers about the perception of the relief measures adopted by local, state, and Confederate authorities" (9), and he admits that Virginia's experience may not speak for the rest of the South. Nevertheless, he has produced an important, challenging, and innovative study. Civil War scholarship could use more of the fresh thinking that Blair displays on page after page of this valuable book.

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Freedpeople in the Tobacco South: Virginia, 1860–1900. By Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1999) 345 pp. $49.95 cloth $18.95 paper

Kerr-Ritchie's *Freedpeople in the Tobacco South* analyzes the Virginia tobacco belt's slow and depressed transition to capitalist agriculture in the post-emancipation era. The social relations of production are squarely at the center of the tobacco belt's ultimate demise, and the status and struggles of freedpeople both inform and reflect the transformations that he identifies. The actions of government officials are also a significant part of this strongly argued social history. The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (BRFAL), for example, laid

the foundations for much of what transpired during the closing decades of the nineteenth century by virtue of its role in implanting free-labor ideology. Kerr-Ritchie takes a fresh look at several pivotal late nineteenth-century developments, including the Readjuster movement and the formation of the Colored Farmer's Alliance. Topics of particular interest include the shift to the new Bright tobacco cultivar and the growth of the cigarette industry in the Southside, widespread African Virginian landholding, and the early migrations of the 1890s.

Kerr-Ritchie's method is a direct challenge to postmodernism. He also takes aim at an older, largely antiquarian, literature about Virginia. Much of this lively and contentious historiographical discussion occurs in the notes. In the text, Kerr-Ritchie carefully defines the historical terminology that he employs, including class, culture, exploitation, household economy, and ideology. Interestingly, he argues against "sanitized" terms like "African Virginian," but finds nothing remiss in the use of "Negro," particularly in the context of the 1880s and 1890s. His sources are familiar: personal papers, census returns, land tax books, BRFAL and numerous other government documents. He makes sophisticated use of the rich material contained in the BRFAL's monthly reports and letters, although his claim as the first to use them is mistaken. The overall strength of Kerr-Ritchie's research design is to carry the story of emancipation and the transition to capitalist agriculture to the end of the nineteenth century.

Virginia tobacco history—and African Virginian history—after the 1870s have not received the attention that they deserve. Kerr-Ritchie's analysis is a major contribution. His stress on a lengthy economic reconstruction, far more protracted than political reconstruction, adds an important new view of emancipation history.

The relationship between free-labor resistance and the shift to Bright tobacco in the Southside is one of the most enlightening parts of the book. More specialized and small-scale tobacco cultivation, such as Bright culture represented, enabled postwar tobacco lords to replace freedpeople's labor with young male white tenants. That shift occurred as a direct result of freedpeople's labor resistance, as well as such structural developments as prolonged depression and competition from new tobacco areas. As white tenancy came to define the Bright belt, black sharecropping predominated elsewhere; this pattern reflected the conservative backlash. Kerr-Ritchie underscores the importance of the Virginia Supreme Court case *Parrish v. The Commonwealth* (1884) in this context. Generated from a sharecropping dispute, this case handed landowners the greater powers over labor for which they had hankered since emancipation. The formation of the American Tobacco Company, a powerful monopoly resistant to opposition, marked the end of tobacco production as it had been known.

Freedpeople in the Tobacco South rejuvenates the history of labor protest and capitalist agriculture in late nineteenth-century Virginia. Widespread landholding, for the older generation, and migration, for the younger, were culminating experiences of emancipation. These

outcomes were clearly linked to structural economic changes and the advent of free-labor relations. Methodologically, the book is a strong call for the continuing importance of a wide-ranging social history. It represents an important and long overdue contribution to the history of a large and significant African-American population.

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True Gardens of the Gods: Californian–Australian Environmental Reform, 1860–1930. By Ian Tyrrell (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999) 313 pp. $48.00

During the late nineteenth century, reformers in California and Australia exchanged information about plants and insects, crusaded for irrigation, and shared a garden ideal—a desire for balance and beauty. Tyrrell's *True Gardens of the Gods* is a comparative history of a trans-Pacific relationship, but it is also the history of a school of thought. A group of scientists, engineers, fruit growers, and social theorists in both countries argued for the "renovation" of nature as a middle way to economic development.

Tyrrell's book is itself a kind of renovation—a reinterpretation of key figures and events in the early history of conservation and Pacific agriculture. Elwood Mead and Henry George appear as advocates of close irrigated settlement and intensive cultivation; George Perkins Marsh and the Australian thinker Ferdinand von Muller appear as advocates of acclimatization, or the transfer of plants from one region to another. Tyrrell will introduce many readers to Ellwood Cooper, a California fruit grower and amateur entomologist who became the most passionate advocate of introduced predator insects as a method of biological control. Cooper's story argues with greater force and detail than any previous account that the domination of chemical pest control in agriculture did not go uncontested, and that an alternative understanding of the rural landscape had capable advocates at the turn of the century. Tyrrell's narrative contributes to a re-evaluation of conservation—its distant origins and intellectual diversity—that has recently become an important subject among environmental historians.

Tyrell depends upon published and manuscript sources—especially books, government reports, newspaper articles, and letters between the primary figures in his account—using them to good effect and tying them to material changes in the landscape. This elegant book could have easily become an awkward double case study, but the author shows genuine and surprising connections between events in Australia and California, particularly the remarkable exchange of trees—eucalyptus going one way and Monterey pine the other. Government reports provide the narrative with the kind of facts-on-the-ground information that is essential to give flesh to its more intellectual sources. Although