INTRODUCTION

C. Vann Woodward: An Assessment of His Work and Influence

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C. VANN WOODWARD was born in 1908 in the Arkansas hamlet of Vanndale and grew up in Morrilton, a small town on the Arkansas River fifty miles above Little Rock. His family was rooted several generations deep in Southern soil; his father was a public-school administrator and later a college dean; during his high-school and college years Woodward knew Rupert Vance, Howard Odum, and Will Alexander, intellectuals and liberals who were trying to push the South in the direction of greater cosmopolitanism and racial tolerance. From these associations Woodward absorbed influences that were to help shape the course and concerns of his career.

After graduating from Emory University in 1930 and teaching for a year at Georgia Tech, Woodward journeyed to New York, where he earned an M.A. in political science from Columbia University in 1932. Returning to Atlanta, he taught for another year at Georgia Tech until a depression-induced layoff of thirty faculty members jettisoned him into the ranks of unemployed academics, in 1933. Woodward had by then achieved a reputation as a young radical and dissenter from Southern folkways, a reputation that did not increase his popularity with Georgia legislators who controlled the purse strings of Georgia Tech. Woodward had formed friendships with black as well as white

intellectuals in Atlanta; he had visited the Soviet Union; and, worst of all, he became vice-chairman of a committee to protest the conviction for "insurrection" of Angelo Herndon, a black Communist who had spoken with bitter eloquence at a relief demonstration outside an Atlanta courthouse.

Woodward's sympathies both as a scholar and as an activist were enlisted in behalf of justice for the downtrodden. He wanted to write history "from the bottom up," and fastened on agrarian radicals in general and on Tom Watson in particular as a subject for research. Obtaining access to Watson's papers and armed with a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation (one of the earliest ironies in the career of an ironist), Woodward moved to Chapel Hill in 1934 to begin graduate study in history. He probably learned less from his classes and seminars at Chapel Hill than he did from his associations with other liberals and radicals at Milton Abernathy's bookstore, from his research in the Watson papers and his independent reading in Southern history, and from his friendship with the young history professor Howard K. Beale. Studying with Beale and reading Charles A. Beard helped to shape in Woodward's mind a concept of American history as a conflict between classes and economic interest groups. These concepts, reinforced by his sympathy for the underdog, formed the framework for the interpretation of Southern history between the Civil War and World War I that he put forward in his first three books: *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (1938); *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* (1951); and *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (1951).

After receiving the Ph.D. in 1937 for his dissertation on Watson, Woodward took jobs as an assistant professor at the University of Florida from 1937 to 1939, a visiting assistant professor at the University of Virginia in 1939–1940, and an associate professor at Scripps College in Claremont, California, from 1940 until he entered the navy in 1943 for three years' of service as a lieutenant in the Office of Naval Intelligence and the Naval Office of Public Information. His naval career included the writing of an outstanding book about the largest naval engagement in history, *The Battle for Leyte Gulf* (1947).

After the war Woodward joined the Johns Hopkins faculty. During his fifteen years in Baltimore, he published four books (plus a large number of articles and reviews, listed in the bibliography at the end of this volume) that reshaped the field of Southern history: *Reunion and Reaction* and *Origins of the New South* in 1951; *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955); and *The Burden of Southern History* (1960). *Strange Career* alone has reached a huge reading audience in its four editions; it is unquestionably the single most influential book ever written on the history of American race relations.

The Woodward bibliography testifies to the continued volume of his writings since he joined the Yale faculty as Sterling Professor of History in 1961. Most of these writings have taken the form of essays, reviews, and introductions to books written by important figures in Southern history, the most recent being his definitive edition of Mary Boykin Chesnut's Civil War diary. These shorter pieces, several of which were published together in the book *American Counterpoint: Slavery and Racism in the North–South Dialogue* (1971), have done almost as much to fashion our perception of the Civil War/Reconstruction era and of the second Reconstruction as Woodward's earlier books did for the post-Reconstruction South. In addition, Woodward has delivered an enormous number of invitational lectures in the United States and abroad and has held various fellowships and visiting professorships or lectureships in three countries. Since his retirement from Yale in 1977, he has resided in Hamden, Connecticut, where he continues his numerous scholarly activities, including the editorship of the forthcoming eleven-volume Oxford History of the United States.

How can one gauge a scholar's influence? Some relatively superficial means are readily quantified: book sales, citations to his or her work, awards, elections to office in professional associations, and incorporation of his or her views into leading textbooks. Measured by these tests, C. Vann Woodward is surely among the most important historians of his time. Several of his books have gone into multiple printings, and, cumulatively, have sold approximately a million copies. His entries in published citation indexes and in the footnotes of historical monographs must be counted by the column foot. *Origins of the New South* won a Bancroft Prize. He has been elected to the presidencies of the Southern and American historical associations and to that of the Organization of American Historians. Nearly all American history texts written

in the last generation adopt his views on Southern and post-Reconstruction history, and he is the author of the section covering those years in one of the most widely used and respected texts.

Less easily measured, but more important, is the impact of one thinker's work on that of others. Influence may be transmitted through direct teaching, through private, as well as public, critiques of manuscripts and books, through setting an example for emulation, through offering ideas or observations of sufficient originality and inherent interest that others feel compelled either to attack or to extend them, or, to put the point in its most general terms, through framing the agenda for a field of study. Woodward has directed some forty Ph.D. dissertations, and, as the essays in this book show, he has attracted some of the best students in the discipline during his career. On each of them, as well as on numerous other graduate and undergraduate students who have taken his courses, he has had a considerable, often a profound, effect. Industrious without being joyless, politically active without compromising his scholarly integrity, friendly but not hovering, never patronizing, Woodward by his personal example has affected many friends and colleagues, in addition to his students. The qualities of his written scholarship—clarity, comprehensiveness, subtlety, and lightness of tone coating an obvious seriousness of purpose—have pleased and affected more.

Woodward's chosen period and region have become "his" in much more than the usual sense for a historian. It is hard to think of a serious book or an important scholarly article written on the post-Reconstruction South or on modern American race relations in the last generation which does not repeat, take issue with, flesh out, test on other data, or carry out the implications of some idea first adumbrated or at least first fully enunciated by Woodward. No other recent American historian has so dominated an area of study. Indeed, Woodward has become a sort of one-man establishment, an idol to be chipped away at, a landmark to be assaulted and defended in scholarly frays—a curious position for a born dissenter who is no doubt more comfortable, as he himself observed about Tom Watson, in the role of a rebel.

Solid research and a felicitous writing style account only partially for Woodward's present ironic position. More important considerations are that he has attacked problems of profound and lasting importance and that he has propounded compelling and

original interpretations. What were those problems, what central empirical propositions has he advanced, and how have they been received?

In his famous attack on "consensus history," John Higham singled out one historian of the 1950s for retaining the "progressive historians' " stress on socioeconomic and ideological conflict, their sympathy for the underdog, and their self-consciously moral stance, and for emphasizing, as the progressives had, discontinuity over continuity.[1] It was not mere chance that this one historian was Woodward, for he had set out from the beginning not only to re-evaluate and reorder Southern history—indeed, with respect to many issues, to impose order for the first time—but also to attack the prevailing consensus view of the South's experience. For a Southern "consensus school" long predated its national counterpart, and the Dixie branch was at the height of its influence in the 1930s and 1940s.

After all, more than a decade before Higham's bête noire Daniel Boorstin looked into the American political mind and found it empty, W. J. Cash had noted a similarly incogitant and undifferentiated genius in the Southern intellect.[2] Nor were the North Carolina journalist's flat and timeless generalizations about the region typical only of the gifted amateur. To economist Broadus Mitchell, the South in 1880 had been "homogeneous . . . one family, knit together and resolute through sufferings"; its leaders were "far-seeing, public-minded, generous-natured . . . true patriots"; and even so notorious an evil as child labor in the textile mills had initially represented "philanthropy; not exploitation, but generosity and cooperation and social-mindedness."[3] In one of the then standard histories of the post-Reconstruction South, Philip A. Bruce viewed the region's two chief strengths as a belief in white racial "superiority" and the Southerners' "complete homogeneity as a people." In his short chapter on the politics of the 1880s and 1890s, Bruce did not mention Populism.[4] While strenuously denying national uniformity in thought and culture, the Nashville Agrarians, furthermore, implied that nearly all Southerners took the same stand as they did. And Ulrich B. Phillips's works, with their climatic determinism, their rosy view of race relations during and after slavery, and their racist "central theme," dominated professional historians' views of the section.[5]

Tom Watson was, among other things, an attack on the myth of an everlastingly solid South. "What [needed] proof and demonstration at that time," Woodward later noted, "was that there were ever any exceptions, any evidence against the once prevalent . . . assumption that 'things have always been the same!' "[6] Originally conceived as part of a collective biography of seven tribunes of the common people, *Watson* presented a most imperfect hero whose stark change from racial egalitarian to race-baiting, religiously bigoted demagogue emphasized the discontinuity of Southern history at the same time it created, in Watson's Populist phase, a usable past for Southern liberals and radicals. Breaking points and disconnections were similarly main themes of *Reunion and Reaction,* with its story of a corrupt bargain that ended Reconstruction; of *Origins of the New South,* which painted the "New Departure Democrats" as strikingly different in character from the South's pre-war rulers and, in general, described the period between Reconstruction and the First World War as one of transition, contradiction, class and race conflicts, and unfulfilled possibilities; and of *The Strange Career of Jim Crow,* a demonstration that absolute segregation was not a "natural," unchangeable condition, since there had been a time when significant exceptions existed.

Nor did Woodward abandon his anticonsensus theme in later publications. His editions of the works of three extraordinary Southern dissenters, Lewis Harvey Blair, George Fitzhugh, and Mary Boykin Chesnut; his harsh critique, in *American Counterpoint,* of Cash's "two fundamental theses . . . of unity and . . . of continuity"; and his anxiety that such recent books as those by Carl Degler, Jonathan M. Wiener, and Dwight B. Billings, Jr., represent a recrudescence of consensus theories of Southern history—all indicate the persistence of Woodward's concern with this issue.[7]

Yet Woodward did not invariably highlight discontinuity and dissent. In fact, he seemed to take considerable glee in pointing to connections as well as disconnections that differed from those which previous observers had noticed or owned up to. For example, the pro-industrial and pro–Northern-capital policies of the New Departure Democrats appeared to him more like those of the antebellum Whigs, and, of all people, the Reconstruction Radicals, than most previous historians, who had usually referred

to the New South Conservatives as "Bourbons," had noted or been willing to admit. Even their extensive defalcations, mention of which had previously been taboo, and their notorious ballot-box machinations, for which most previous observers had offered racist defenses, identified the Conservatives as close kin of the Radicals. And although John D. Hicks and most other historians had seen Progressivism as a fulfillment of many Populist impulses and programs, Woodward viewed the two movements, or at least their Southern branches, as much less similar.[8]

While always attentive to class, race, and geographical divisions within the South, Woodward also forcefully reminded Southerners of the aspects of historical experience that all groups in the region shared. Whites or their ancestors had a common heritage of military defeat, occupation, and forced reconstruction; blacks had been subjected to the illiberal "peculiar institution" and whites had betrayed Locke to defend slavery; and majorities of both whites and blacks had had to live with "un-American" poverty. In stressing these facets of sectional identity, Woodward neatly turned on its head the then conventional Yankee contrast between a backward-looking, problem-laden South and a more moral, generally prosperous, invincible nation, as well as the Fugitives' conception of a nobler, less materialistic Dixie.

But despite his implied rejection of the "American South" school's denial of Southern exceptionalism, Woodward was more open to notions of consensus, and the motivation for his views was perhaps less different from those of certain "consensus historians," than is sometimes noted.[9] In fact, his openly presentist purpose in the essays "The Search for Southern Identity" and "The Irony of Southern History" was not entirely unlike Boorstin's policy-related reading of the American mind in *The Genius of American Politics.* "Historical circumstances," not adherence to a political theory, Boorstin believed, accounted for America's prosperity and freedom and explained why "nothing could be more un-American than to urge other countries to imitate America." Likewise, Woodward hoped that an America attentive to the lessons that he drew from Southern—and Northern—history would be less likely to try to enforce conformity in thought and actions at home and abroad, to stake all on the defense of a single institution, such as slavery, segregation, or laissez-faire capitalism, or to engage in "the fallacy of a diplomacy based on

moral bigotry" or even "preventive war."[10] Varying purposes and alterations in focus from one to another aspect of Southern and American society, then, have led Woodward to emphasize consensus or disunity, stability or change, as the situation and his aims required.

The conflicts that Woodward highlighted were more complex than the liberal-conservative, realty-personalty, or frontier-seaboard clashes of Parrington, Beard, and Turner, or the pietist-liturgical dichotomy of those more recent opponents of the political-consensus view, the "ethnocultural" political historians. Thus, Populism, in Woodward's eyes, was not merely a conflict of sections, of farmers and city dwellers, of ideologies, of economic interests, of classes, of competing elites, but all of these and more. Anyone who comes to grips with *Watson* and *Origins* and *Strange Career* can never again describe racial conflicts and alliances, the racial ideologies of men and women of both races, and the behavior of people of different groups toward each other so starkly and simply as he was able to do before. And as committed as Woodward at times seemed in some battles—for example, in those over charges that the Populists were antidemocratic and backward-looking and over the timing of the adoption of segregation—he maintained a degree of skepticism, an air of detachment and ironic distance that freed his vision from the constraints of blind partisanship. While Woodward shared many characteristics with the "progressive historians," then, he largely avoided their oversimplification and their restrictive biases.

Woodward's influence stems in part from his mastery of the ironic technique.[11] There are two basic ironic categories—situational irony and verbal irony—and Woodward employs both with consummate skill. Situational irony is an ironic state of affairs or an event viewed as ironic; verbal irony is an ironic style of speaking or writing. The latter is a means of communication; the former is the thing communicated. The essence of situational irony lies in an apparent contradiction or incongruity between two events or meanings, a contradiction resolved when the literal or surface meaning turns out to be one of appearance only, while the initially incongruous meaning turns out to be the reality. Those who hold or perpetrate the plausible but false meaning are thereupon revealed as hypocritical and self-serving, or naive and

comic in their smug self-assurance. Verbal irony shares this incongruity between appearance and reality. The author of an ironic passage intends something quite different from the literal meaning of his words; the reader must reject the surface meaning and reconstruct the passage to find the hidden and incongruous "real" meaning.

Verbal irony can be either satiric or comic. Satiric irony is a form of blame by means of apparent praise, of deliberate overstatement to lampoon the object of such overstatement. Comic irony is a form of praise through apparent blame, of understatement in order to lead the reader to sympathize with the subject of the irony. Woodward employs both satiric and comic irony, though like most ironists he relies mainly on the former. Consider, for example, this description in *Origins of the New South* of Francis Dawson, a transplanted Englishman who became editor of the Charleston *News and Courier* and a zealous advocate of Southern salvation through Yankee-style capitalism and industrialism: "In Dawson's metropolitan and unprejudiced eyes there was nothing in old Charleston that could not be improved with an eye to Pittsburgh."[12] Only the dullest of readers will fail to recognize that Dawson is the object of satirical irony and that the words "unprejudiced" and "improved" must be translated into something close to their opposites in order to reconstruct the sentence's real meaning—a meaning shared by the author and reader but not by Dawson. The following example of comic irony illustrates Woodward's occasional use of this technique. Describing the political machinations of the Louisiana Lottery Company, he refers to its successful effort in 1879 to write the company charter into the new state constitution, "where it would be beyond the reach of fickle legislatures and ungrateful governors."[13] The reader, having already learned of the lottery's attempts to corrupt public officials, and of "reformers' " attempts to curb it, understands that the words "fickle" and "ungrateful" are doubly intended criticisms both of the lottery and of its critics, who were often merely politicians who refused to stay bought.

Verbal irony can be broad and obvious, as in much of Mark Twain's writing, or subtle and ambiguous, as in Henry James's. Although the examples of irony cited in the previous paragraph are fairly obvious to anyone familiar with the general theme of *Origins of the New South,* Woodwardian irony often lies closer

to the subtle end of the scale. Consider this sentence from the preface to the 1971 edition of *Origins,* a sentence about historians rather than about history: referring to scholarly developments during the twenty years since publication of the first edition, Woodward noted that if he were to rewrite *Origins* in 1971 "it is even possible that I should have been able to make use of some of the new historical techniques, methods, and insights that have matured in the last two decades to improve the quality of scholarship."[14] The irony here is so subtle that some readers might insist that the sentence should be read "straight." If pressed, even Woodward might claim that he meant it straight. But to those familiar with Woodward's skepticism about the claims of some proponents of the "new historical techniques," the reference to improving the quality of scholarship carries at least faint overtones of satiric irony. At the same time, Woodward's open-mindedness toward new methods and new interpretations—many of them practiced and advanced by his own students—gives the self-deprecating tone or the phrase "even possible" in this sentence a quality of comic irony. An ironic reading of the sentence, then, uncovers a genuine ambiguity on Woodward's part, a mixed feeling that results from his ability to see through—or, perhaps, his constitutional inability to avoid penetrating—the starkly contrasting opinions of those on each side of a hotly controverted question.[15] It also demonstrates that the reader must often read between the lines for the hidden meaning in Woodward's subtle irony, and that to do that he must be familiar with the larger context of the author's work and ideas.

Woodward's technique of verbal irony includes the skillful use of quotations. After devoting several pages to a description of embezzlements, defalcations, and other peccadilloes by post-Reconstruction Southern officials, he quotes a statement by an early historian of this era: "The incredible waste and robbery of the Reconstruction Era was followed as soon as that era ended by the most careful handling of the public funds. Nowhere has there been so little peculation and defalcation on the part of officials in charge of the public treasuries."[16] This vivid satire, accomplished by the quotation of filiopietistic historiography following evidence of Redeemer roguery, makes Woodward's point more effectively than any other rhetorical device could have done. Or consider the following quoted assertions by spokesmen for the

Southern textile industry, juxtaposed with data showing that the annual profits of the industry averaged 22 percent while the workers' wages averaged three dollars per week: the mill owners professed to be motivated by a "philanthropic incentive" to provide "employment to the necessitous masses of poor whites," which offers them "elevating social influences, encourages them to seek education, and improves them in every conceivable respect."[17] Finally, let us examine the following quotation from the New York *Tribune* in 1879 criticizing movements in Southern states for repudiation or readjustment of state debts: "Wherever slavery existed," declared the *Tribune,* "the moral sense was so blunted and benumbed that the white people as a whole is to this day incapable of that sense of honor which prevails elsewhere."[18] Coming from a city that had produced Boss Tweed, Jim Fisk, Jay Gould, and other assorted rascals, this was delicious irony indeed. It struck one of Woodward's favorite targets—the Yankee self-image of superior virtue.

This image, especially with regard to the antislavery movement and race relations, is the subject of Woodwardian irony in several essays in *The Burden of Southern History* and *American Counterpoint* as well as in *The Strange Career of Jim Crow.* In two essays whose titles contain the word "Irony," the national myths of innocence, virtue, and success become the topic for sober analysis by the ironist whose Southern perspective provides the detachment that allows him to deflate those myths.[19] Like all examples of irony, these essays have a moral purpose; they are intended to expose fallacies in the American self-image with the hope that a more realistic perception will nudge national behavior a step or two closer to national ideals.

Apart from these essays, the most powerful and sustained applications of Woodwardian irony occur in *Origins of the New South,* particularly in the earlier chapters. Even more unforgettable than the examples of verbal irony already cited from the book are Woodward's ironic portraits of the leading actors of the New South, which establish the book's thematic framework. Democrats who are really Whigs in disguise busily demolish the traditional principles of Jacksonian democracy. "Redeemers" implant the very Yankee institutions and values against which the antebellum South had fought. "Bourbons" celebrate the past while embracing a laissez-faire version of the future. The Reconstruction settlement

involves a sacrifice of Reconstruction's ostensible purpose—black rights—to obtain its "real" purpose of Yankee capitalist domination. The Democratic party of white supremacy maintains itself in power against challenges by white dissidents by manipulating black votes or collaborating with black voters, while the Republican party of hard money and Negro rights allies itself with agrarian antimonopolists, repudiationists, and rednecks. The spokesman for black upward mobility through hard work allies himself with the economic elite, North and South, whose enterprises benefit from a docile, static, low-wage Southern labor force. A gospel of economic progress and prosperity produces educational regression and poverty for the rural masses, and a colonial relationship with the North. "Progressives" preside over a massive retrogression in the political and legal rights of black people. In each of these ironic contradictions, the context makes clear the real meaning Woodward intends to convey. The reader is subtly led to agree with the author's perception of the self-interest, hypocrisy, arrogance, or naiveté of his subjects.

The evocative power of the ironic contrasts is enhanced by the sudden shift from an ironic to a straight style when the author is dealing with the aspirations and activities of poor whites and blacks. While the values and programs of Bourbons, Redeemers, Democrats, Republicans, industrialists, and New South propagandists are to be viewed with ironic detachment, the values and programs of their opponents and critics—above all the Populists—are to be taken literally. The incongruity between Tom Watson's Populist support for black rights and his later racist demagoguery is not irony but rather tragedy, a microcosm of the Populist tragedy brought about by the frustration and bitterness of unjust defeat. As in a Bach fugue, a distinct and compelling theme emerges from this Woodwardian counterpoint of irony and tragedy.

Other historians present their interpretations by explicit assertion, by statistical demonstration, by the piling up of examples or quotations, by carefully selecting evidence, by rhetoric or argument. While not necessarily shunning these devices, Woodward relies on irony to a greater extent than does perhaps any other historian. The influence of his work is testimony to the power of the method. Woodward's students could hardly escape the healthy contagion of this approach. Alert readers will discover numerous instances of irony among the essays in this volume as

well as in other writings by the same authors. This is a function not only of the teacher's precept and example, but also of the subjects he and his students have chosen to write about, for the complexities and contradictions of the South, of race relations, and of Reconstruction offer more scope for irony than do most other topics in American history.

Woodward's range of knowledge and the flexibility and sheer playfulness of his mind have cast up so many new and striking ideas that there are many "Woodward theses"—some merely accepted, some repeatedly confirmed, some extended, some challenged, some forcefully disputed, some discarded, some (in our view, unfortunately) ignored. Probably the most familiar of these hypotheses are the two that have been most disputed—the "Jim Crow thesis" and his depiction of the background of the Compromise of 1877.

Strange Career contains, as it were, three related but separable arguments of different levels of generality. The broadest is that there is no "natural" form to relationships between people of different races. Unless bound by laws, people will intermingle, separate, or do each simultaneously in different social spheres or each sequentially at different times in their lives. Only legal regulations can enshrine strict segregation and/or the relatively unbroken subordination of one group to another. The second theme, in its most general statement, is that there have been temporal variations in Southern race relations. The politician's cry of the 1950s and early 1960s—"Segregation forever!"—ignored the past as surely as it failed to hold back the future. The third contention was that Reconstruction was succeeded by a transitional era in race relations which was much less uniform and at least somewhat less harsh than that which began in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The position of blacks deteriorated around the turn of the century, and the possibilities for interracial social contact on anything like an equal basis were almost wholly cut off.

That segregation and other forms of racial discrimination were highly but not perfectly correlated in the South necessarily complicated Woodward's treatment of the subject and made the evaluation of evidence relevant to his thesis a very tricky matter indeed. Did voluntary segregation by blacks in churches, lodges,

and businesses, much of which developed during Reconstruction, a time when blacks wielded considerable political influence, indicate that Woodward was wrong? Did the fact that black political power declined, but was by no means extinguished, in the post-Reconstruction South support or damage his case? Did the patterns of legal and private segregation of antebellum urban free people of color and often their exclusion from services otherwise open to the public, which Richard C. Wade and Howard N. Rabinowitz found, disprove or replace the "Jim Crow thesis"? Could state studies, such as those by Charles E. Wynes on Virginia, Joel Williamson on South Carolina, or John W. Graves on Arkansas, validate or invalidate Woodward's theory?[20]

Such questions suggest a further ambiguity in Woodward's notion, which may best be illustrated with the elementary statistical concepts of mode, mean, and variance. In examining Jim Crow's life span, should one focus in each period on the dominant tendency (the mode), the average circumstance (the mean), or the extent of the divergencies (the variance)? If the mode is the proper object of attention, and if one ignores the possibility that there may be more than one important facet to an era, then Woodward's case is lost, as he, of course, realized from the beginning. For although segregation was rarely the prime method of social control under slavery, after 1865 segregation and racial discrimination have been and in many respects still are the dominant features of the historical picture in every era. If, at the other extreme, it is the temporal or spatial variance or the variation across different social institutions at the same time which is at issue, then the simultaneous emergence of voluntary separation and political potency, the replacement of exclusion with largely private, imperfectly enforced segregation and subsequently with strict legal Jim Crow, and the different political and social experiences of blacks across the Southern states all buttress Woodward's contention. If the mean is the crucial statistic, then assessing the surviving data becomes much more difficult—does the fact that integration in nineteenth-century first-class railroad cars is rarely mentioned, for example, prove that it was so conventional as not to attract attention, or, rather, that it rarely occurred? —and the problem of weighing the relevant situations in different social institutions becomes virtually intractable.

Although Woodward did not formulate the "Jim Crow thesis"

in exactly this manner, our reading of *Strange Career* convinces us that he was more interested in variation than in averages, and much less concerned with mere predominant trends than with either of the other parameters. Surely this is one implication of his discussion of the "paternalistic" and "competitive" models of race relations and of the variation in patterns in different countries in "The Strange Career of a Historical Controversy." If our reading is correct, then in spite of attacks, the career of the thesis still flourishes. In any case, despite its tentative and heavily qualified statement and the passage, with the decline in legal segregation and expressions of virulent racism, of the conditions of rigid and unbroken racial separation in the South which gave rise to the argument in the first place, the notion stimulated a great deal of research that has added, and continues to add, both depth and breadth to our knowledge of race relations.[21]

If "Jim Crow" suggested both more intensive examinations of subsets of the Southern universe to which it was originally applied and the extension of the same or similar theories in studies of patterns of race relations outside that time and place, the plot of *Reunion and Reaction* could be tested only by logic and by minute and painstaking analyses, mostly of the same documents Woodward had used. It seems curious, therefore, that major assaults on this interpretation of Woodward's were so long in coming, for these tasks required less additional research than did studies of race relations in previously unexamined cities or states, and the open Beardianism of the "Compromise thesis" was generally under much more serious attack during the 1950s and 1960s than was the social theory underlying "Jim Crow."

Critics have made four major points against *Reunion and Reaction:* that evidence for the economic part of the Compromise is sparse; that the fact that major parts of it were not carried out casts doubt on whether a deal was actually cut; that Woodward's account overestimated the importance of certain behind-the-scenes participants and of the Southern Democrats in particular, and of the financial segment of the understanding in general; and that the whole election settlement was "insignificant," since black civil rights would have been abandoned by either Democrats or Republicans anyway and since there was never any chance that Whiggish Southerners would bolt in sufficient numbers to rejuvenate the Southern Republicans.[22]

No one of these arguments is entirely persuasive. First, conspirators destroy evidence, and many of those involved in the events of 1876 and 1877, such as Major E. A. Burke of Louisiana, undoubtedly did so in this case. The surprising thing is not that there is so little but that there is so much surviving evidence. Second, as Woodward pointed out in his reply to Peskin, many political agreements have been violated, and, in any case, some of the most important provisions of the 1877 understanding were kept. The third and fourth contentions are more serious, but both rely too much on hindsight to be entirely convincing. Benedict fails to take sufficient account of how contingent the situation must have seemed to Hayes and his entourage, how desirous they must have been to ensure against failure or continued deadlock, and therefore how important they must have considered every vote that might potentially contribute to the Ohioan's slim margin. By neglecting to consider the overwhelmingly negative Republican reaction to Hayes's Southern policy, when the policy became clear, as well as the continuation, through at least 1890, of Republican efforts to build a Southern Republican party and to safeguard the Negro's constitutional liberties, Gillette writes off the GOP's commitment to black rights and the possibility of a biracial Southern coalition too early and too absolutely, and therefore underestimates at least the temporary importance of the Compromise.

A third idea central to Woodward's work has been his attempt to draw from the general pattern of American and particularly Southern experience chastening and moderating lessons for the present. A recognition of the South's past burden—sin, defeat, occupation, and poverty—would, he hoped, save the nation from stifling dissent at home and from engaging in misadventures, bred by hubris, abroad. The historian thus became not only a moralist but also society's psychoanalyst, seeking to eradicate "childish" behavior and to avoid future traumas by bringing past experiences to consciousness. No doubt this is a difficult undertaking, for as Robert B. Westbrook has pointed out, societies are prone to "cultural amnesia," particularly when less scrupulous analysts purvey quicker and less painful nostrums.[23] Perhaps the chief irony for the historian who points out ironies is that the demonstration is likely to be largely futile, for more conventional maxims are much easier for the public to accept.

Although Woodward concentrated on the South in this endeavor, the principles he deduced from Northern history were not so different from the ones he derived from the Southern experience.[24] After all, he realized that the components of the historical Northern self-image are "myths," that they represent only what he termed "the illusion of pretended virtue," that no part of the nation has been entirely innocent, invincible, and prosperous, that America's overweening self-confidence and optimism are not justified. Even many in the antislavery movement were not fully egalitarian or entirely free from racist sins. The Civil War was less than the moral crusade sometimes hazily remembered. The Yankees' failure to reconstruct the South in the image of New England and the rapid disillusionment of many of them with the attempt hardly augured well for American attempts to impose this country's will on others. Prosperity has always been unevenly distributed. The point is not that Northern history validates American myths, but that Southern history so much more obviously does not that it provides a superior vantage point for attacking a set of historically inaccurate self-conceptions which are used to buttress what Woodward believes are misconceived present policies.

Much of the rest of his work may be considered under the rubric of his characterization of the post-Reconstruction South's political forces and its economic development. His portrait of the New South regimes as largely morally bankrupt, politically vacuous, dominated by opportunistic politicians who employed neo-Whig policies to enrich themselves and to turn large parts of the Southern economy over to Yankee capitalists, who used a laissez-faire ideology to starve social services, and who allied at times with blacks and nearly always with the relatively conservative Eastern United States rather than with the potentially more liberal Western states, was strikingly revisionist when it was first offered. But it has since been more often confirmed than revised. Thomas B. Alexander's study of "persistent Whiggery," for example, brought more extensive quantitative support to Woodward's views on that antebellum party's postbellum importance. Paul M. Gaston's detailed exposition of the "New South Creed" generally substantiated Woodward's briefer examination. And attacks on the novelty and pervasiveness of the creed, and the

behavior it justified, by John M. Cooper, Jr., Jonathan M. Wiener, and Dwight B. Billings, Jr., entail serious difficulties of their own.[25] Although Carl Harris has made some dents in the East-West or right fork–left fork thesis and although the seriousness of the black-Redeemer coalition has been questioned, few historians have arisen to defend the New Departurites' morality or policies. Indeed, some recent views of them are harsher than Woodward's.[26]

His emphasis on the importance of the Southern branch of Populism and his image of the Populists as political, economic, and racial radicals have also stood up well. Heirs of the agrarian tradition of Jefferson, Jackson, the Granger-independents, and the Greenbackers, the small farmers who were the backbone of the movement and their usually wealthier leaders accepted capitalism as a system, according to Woodward, but "formed the vanguard against the advancing capitalistic plutocracy."[27] Monographs by Lawrence C. Goodwyn, Robert C. McMath, Jr., and Michael Schwartz agree with him on the significance of the Southern branch of the movement, though they characterize its leadership somewhat differently—McMath and Schwartz to a large extent because they concentrate on its Alliance, not its Populist, phase.[28] Goodwyn, Norman Pollock, and Bruce Palmer, a Woodward student, all emphasize the anticapitalist facet of Populist ideology more than Woodward did, but the difference is primarily one of degree.[29]

Another Woodward student, Sheldon Hackney, has presented the Alabama Populists as more opportunistic and backward-looking than his adviser did. Woodward's assertion that the Populists were uniquely nonracist among nineteenth-century white Southern politicians and that they were singularly successful in appealing for black votes has been directly denied by some critics and indirectly contradicted by studies of Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction scalawags.[30] Still, the most that these arguments show, even if one accepts them at close to face value, is that the Populists were less unconventional politicians than Woodward contended, that his generalizations do not hold everywhere equally, and that he may have somewhat exaggerated the Populists' racial idealism. Henry Demarest Lloyd's "cowbird thesis" about a conspiracy by national Populist free-silverite leaders to force fusion with the Bryanite Democrats in 1896, which Woodward endorsed and embellished, has been disputed

by Robert F. Durden but supported by Pollack and Goodwyn, and currently seems basically secure.[31] Even Woodward himself has largely withdrawn his suggestion that "soured Populists," angry at the use of black votes to beat them and generally frustrated, were especially important in the moves toward Jim Crow and disfranchisement, and others have firmly rejected the notion, which in any case seemed somewhat out of harmony with Woodward's more general portrait of the Populists.[32]

If he was concerned in *Origins* to demonstrate that the South did have a "Progressive Movement," Woodward succeeded in keeping its limitations at the forefront of his readers' consciousness, entitling his chapter "Progressivism—For Whites Only" and highlighting the break between Populist agrarianism and the later middle-class movement, with its largely urban leadership, and the anti-"foreign" nature of many of the specific crusades. Integrally connected with the restriction of the suffrage and the extension of Jim Crow, Southern Progressivism did little to assist the small white farmer and in general "no more fulfilled the political aspirations and deeper needs of the mass of people than did the first New Deal administration."[33]

Much of the scholarship since 1951 on Southern progressivism has taken the form of biography, and since most biographers develop a good deal of sympathy with their subjects, their portraits tend to be less critical of the Progressives than Woodward's synthesizing work was. Nor have such authors as Dewey W. Grantham, Jr., Oliver H. Orr, William E. Larsen, and William D. Miller, the authors of four of the five best of these biographies, felt much compelled to take specific exception to Woodward's conclusions.[34] While two implications of William F. Holmes's perceptive study of James K. Vardaman are that the connection between agrarian reform and progressivism may have been closer than Woodward thought, and that Vardaman did, in the later years of his career at least, accurately represent many small white farmers' material interests, the fact that Vardaman came from overwhelmingly rural Mississippi detracts from the generalizability of the example.[35] Two state studies view progressivism as, in turn, somewhat more reactionary and somewhat more forward-looking than Woodward did, but do not sharply dissent from his analysis.[36] As the author of one of them remarked a decade ago, *Origins of the New South* has survived relatively untarnished

through twenty years of productive scholarship."[37] The only major emendation now necessary in that statement is a change to "thirty years."

Woodward's picture of the postbellum Southern economy as a slowly developing one that, concentrated in extractive industries, remained tributary to Northern capital, shattered Broadus Mitchell's then conventional wisdom, but it has itself suffered from few challenges since. Not only does recent cliometric work on Southern agriculture not undermine Woodward's cautious and evenhanded generalizations, but the concentration on that sector, at the expense of more comprehensive investigations of regional economic development as a whole, leaves his "industrial evolution" and "colonial economy" notions largely untested by the systematic methods of the "new economic history."[38] Even if the neoclassical economists' neglect of these hypotheses can be explained by their desire to work on smaller, more tractable problems and by the underdeveloped state of neoclassical development theory, the lack of attention given Woodward's conclusions by Marxists, whose "dependency theory" seems strongly related to the Southern case as he describes it, is most surprising.[39]

Two other major avenues of research toward which Woodward pointed the way either have not been much traveled or have only begun to attract other scholars. Although David Potter believed that Woodward's 1960 "Age of Reinterpretation" essay was "widely regarded as his most significant single piece of work and as one of the major contributions to the interpretation of American history," others have not elaborated on the implications of his "age of free security" thesis for American economic and intellectual history.[40] Turner's frontier thesis, on which Woodward's was patterned and to which it was comparable in scope, decreased in plausibility as increasing urbanization was accompanied by no noticeable decline in political democracy or individualism. But Woodward's assertion that nineteenth-century American economic growth was quickened by the country's low level of military expenditures, as well as his notion that our earlier comparative freedom from the threat of foreign attack encouraged a careless optimism and a penchant for "demagogic diplomacy," should have appeared even more likely as the 1960s and 1970s wore on, for the postwar disarmed Japanese and German

economies sustained much higher growth rates than our garrison-state economy did, and worldwide nuclear anxiety and economic trauma brought malaise even to America. In fact, it may be that, as Woodward remarked about the theme of irony, history "had caught up with" the historian "or gone him one better"—that, whereas the Turner thesis attracted attention because post-1893 conditions made it seem open to attack, the "free security" contention appeared too obviously correct to deserve rebuttal or require support.

The second intellectual pathway, that of comparative history, and particularly of comparative Reconstruction, is a road that has not as yet been taken very far by very many American historians, except those studying slavery and antislavery. In organizing a series of lectures by twenty-two historians for the Voice of America in the mid-1960s, as well as in drafting general comparative essays and delivering three stimulating public lectures on comparative Reconstruction (only one of which has yet been published), Woodward perhaps more than any other American historian helped to make the profession aware of the comparative approach. Although the demands of mastering languages and sources in two or more countries, as well as the academic depression of the 1970s, have no doubt impeded the growth of the field, incisive studies, including Thomas Holt's essay in this volume, are beginning to appear.[41]

Ideas are a scholar's world and his legacy. Woodward's have already had an enormous influence on both the professional and the lay audience. His books, essays, lectures, and editions do not merely delight passive readers; they stimulate them to intellectual action. And in his case, the legacy, far from being exhausted, is still being built up. The endowment will last for many years to come.

NOTES

1. Higham, "The Cult of the 'American Consensus': Homogenizing Our History," *Commentary*, 27 (1959), 93–100; idem, "Beyond Consensus: The Historian as Moral Critic," in Higham, *Writing American History: Essays on Modern Scholarship* (Bloomington & London, 1970), 138–56 (originally pub-

lished in the *American Historical Review*, 67 (1962), 609–25). The reference to Woodward appears on p. 146 of the second article.

2. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York, 1941).

3. Broadus Mitchell, *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South* (Baltimore, 1921), pp. 90, 95, 104, for the quotations; and, similarly, pp. 161, 163.

4. Philip Alexander Bruce, *The Rise of the New South* (Philadelphia, 1905), pp. 4, 437–53. Holland Thompson's *The New South* (New Haven, 1920) was a partial exception to the consensus theme, and, of course, the serious study of Southern Populism had begun by the time Woodward started working on *Watson*. Especially important in this regard was Alex M. Arnett's *The Populist Movement in Georgia* (New York, 1922).

5. Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston, 1929), p. 3 and passim; "The Central Theme of Southern History," reprinted in E. Merton Coulter, ed., *The Course of the South to Secession* (New York, 1964), pp. 151–66.

6. John Herbert Roper, "C. Vann Woodward's Early Career—The Historian as Dissident Youth," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 64 (1980), 14.

7. Degler, *Place over Time: The Continuity of Southern Distinctiveness* (Baton Rouge & London, 1977); Wiener, *Social Origins of the New South: Alabama, 1860–1885* (Baton Rouge & London, 1978); Billings, *Planters and the Making of a 'New South': Class, Politics, and Development in North Carolina, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill, 1979).

8. For a review and listing of these studies, see Allen J. Going, "The Agrarian Revolt," in Arthur S. Link and Rembert W. Patrick, eds., *Writing Southern History: Essays in Historiography in Honor of Fletcher M. Green* (Baton Rouge, 1965), pp. 364–66.

9. Michael O'Brien, "C. Vann Woodward and the Burden of Southern Liberalism," *American Historical Review*, 78 (1973), 589–604, stresses the anti-consensus theme but also notes that Woodward attempted to tie Southern identity to what O'Brien calls "one sensation . . . the experience of poverty and defeat." Calling this regional consensus theme "as much of a half-truth as Phillips' belief that white supremacy made the South," O'Brien charges that Woodward's "Southern Liberalism" accounts for this assertedly flawed hypothesis and implies that there is necessarily something contradictory about simultaneously holding consensus and conflict views, as Woodward undoubtedly did. It seems to us that the wellspring of the "Search" and "Irony" essays is nationally, not just regionally, focused political values and that the view that people are united by some things and divided over other, perhaps equally fundamental issues, creates no logical difficulties. Sheldon Hackney deals with several of the same issues in "*Origins of the New South* in Retrospect," *Journal of Southern History*, 38 (1972), 191–216.

10. Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago, 1953), p. 1; Woodward, *Burden*, pp. 193–210.

11. Among the many scholarly studies of the use of irony in literature, we found the following to be the most useful: Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago, 1974); and Douglas C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London, 1969).

12. *Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge, 1951), p. 146.

13. Ibid., p. 12.

14. Ibid., 2nd ed. (1971), p. viii.

15. See his "History and the Third Culture," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3, no. 2 (1968), 23–36.

16. *Origins of the New South*, pp. 73–74.

17. Ibid., pp. 134, 222, 224.

18. Ibid., p. 88.

19. "The Irony of Southern History" and "A Second Look at the Theme of Irony," in *The Burden of Southern History, rev. ed.* (Baton Rouge, 1968), pp. 187–211 and 213–33.

20. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820–1860* (New York, 1964), pp. 266–77; Wynes, *Race Relations in Virginia, 1870–1902* (Charlottesville, 1961); Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina during Reconstruction, 1861–1877* (Chapel Hill, 1965); Graves, "The Arkansas Negro and Segregation, 1890–1903" (M.A. thesis, University of Arkansas, 1967); Williamson, ed., *The Origins of Segregation* (Lexington, Mass., 1968); Woodward's "Strange Career of a Historical Controversy," in *American Counterpoint*, and Howard N. Rabinowitz's *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865–1890*, paperback ed. (Urbana & London, 1980), refer to, summarize, and analyze nearly all the literature.

21. For instance, chapter 6 of George M. Fredrickson's *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York, 1981) is entitled "Two Strange Careers: Segregation in South Africa and the South."

22. Thomas B. Alexander, "Persistent Whiggery in the Confederate South, 1860–1877," *Journal of Southern History*, 27 (1961), 324–25; Allan Peskin, "Was There a Compromise of 1877?" *Journal of American History*, 60 (1973), 63–75, and Woodward's response, "Yes, There Was a Compromise of 1877," ibid., 215–23; Michael Les Benedict, "Southern Democrats in the Crisis of 1876–1877: A Reconsideration of *Reunion and Reaction*," *Journal of Southern History*, 46 (1980), 489–524; William Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869–1879* (Baton Rouge and London, 1979), pp. 333–34, 449–50.

23. Robert B. Westbrook, "C. Vann Woodward: The Southerner as Liberal Realist," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 77 (1978), 54–71.

24. Several of Woodward's essays, including "The Age of Reinterpretation," "The Northern Crusade against Slavery," "Seeds of Failure in Radical Race Policy," "A Second Look at the Theme of Irony," and "The Aging of America," undercut Michael O'Brien's contention in "Woodward and the Burden of Southern Liberalism" (p. 601) that Woodward "accepted the homogenized version of the American past" contained in the writings of national-consensus scholars.

25. For much more extensive reviews, see Paul M. Gaston, "The New South," in Link and Patrick, eds., *Writing Southern History*, pp. 316–36, and Hackney, "*Origins of the New South* in Retrospect." On Wiener's *Social Origins of the*

New South, see Kousser's review in *American Historical Review,* 84 (1979), 1482–83. Billings's *Planters and the Making of a 'New South'* repeatedly flogs a straw man. Compare, e.g., his treatment of quotations from Woodward on pp. 39 and 219 with their statement in the original context. See also the review of Billings's book by Peter Kolchin in *Agricultural History,* 54 (1980), 252–54.

26. Harris, "Right Fork or Left Fork? The Section-Party Alignments of Southern Democrats in Congress, 1873–1897," *Journal of Southern History,* 42 (1976), 471–506; J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880–1910* (New Haven, 1974), pp. 14–18, 36–38.

27. *Tom Watson,* pp. 217–19.

28. Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York, 1976); McMath, *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (Chapel Hill, 1975); Schwartz, *Radical Protest and Social Structure* (New York, 1976).

29. Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962); Palmer, *'Man over Money': The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill, 1980).

30. Hackney, *Populism to Progressivism in Alabama* (Princeton, 1969); Robert Saunders, "Southern Populists and the Negro, 1893–1895," *Journal of Negro History,* 54 (1969), 240–61; Charles Crowe, "Tom Watson, Populists, and Blacks Reconsidered," ibid., 55 (1970), 99–116; Lawrence J. Friedman, *The White Savage: Racial Fantasies in the Postbellum South* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1970), pp. 77–98. That scalawags were seldom paragons of antiracist virtue does not negate the fact that they successfully appealed to blacks, and, in office, delivered on the most important of the promises they had made to their black constituents. See, e.g., Nelson M. Blake, *William Mahone of Virginia: Soldier and Political Insurgent* (Richmond, Va., 1935); Lillian A. Pereyra, *James Lusk Alcorn: Persistent Whig* (Baton Rouge, 1966); Jeffrey J. Crow and Robert F. Durden, *Maverick Republican in the Old North State: A Political Biography of Daniel L. Russell* (Baton Rouge, 1977).

31. Durden, *The Climax of Populism: The Election of 1896* (Lexington, Ky., 1965). Woodward's concept of "Pseudo-Populism" (*Watson,* p. 330), developed in Goodwyn's "shadow movement" thesis, is key to the debate over the specific instance of the conflict between Populism and its paler twin in 1896.

32. For Woodward's original view, see *Watson,* p. 419, and for his more recent qualifications, see *Burden* (1968 ed.), p. 163, and "The Ghost of Populism Walks Again," New York *Times Magazine,* June 4, 1972, p. 66. On the connection between Populism and suffrage restriction, see Kousser, *Shaping of Southern Politics,* pp. 5–6, 161, 195, 220–21, 246, 259.

33. *Origins,* p. 395.

34. Grantham, *Hoke Smith and the Politics of the New South* (Baton Rouge, 1958); Orr, *Charles Brantley Aycock* (Chapel Hill, 1961); Larsen, *Montague of Virginia: The Making of a Southern Progressive* (Baton Rouge, 1965); Miller, *Mr. Crump of Memphis* (Baton Rouge, 1964).

35. Holmes, *The White Chief: James Kimble Vardaman* (Baton Rouge, 1970).

36. Raymond H. Pulley, *Old Virginia Restored: An Interpretation of the Progressive Movement* (Charlottesville, 1968); Hackney, *Populism to Progressivism in Alabama.*

37. Hackney, "*Origins of the New South* in Retrospect," p. 213.

38. Stephen J. DeCanio, *Agriculture in the Postbellum South: The Economics of Production and Supply* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1974); Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge, 1977); Robert Higgs, *Competition and Coercion: Blacks in the American Economy, 1865–1914* (Cambridge, 1977); Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1978).

39. Actually, Billings's view of the Southern economy in *Planters and the Making of a 'New South'* is closer to Woodward's than Billings contends.

40. Potter, "C. Vann Woodward," in Marcus Cunliffe and Robin W. Winks, eds., *Pastmasters: Some Essays on American Historians* (New York, 1969), p. 388.

41. E.g., George M. Fredrickson's "After Emancipation: A Comparative Study of the White Responses to the New Order of Race Relations in the American South, Jamaica, and the Cape Colony of South Africa," in David G. Sansing, ed., *What Was Freedom's Price?* (Jackson, Miss., 1978), pp. 71–92; and his book *White Supremacy.*