

From Slave South to New South: Public Policy in Nineteenth-Century Georgia. By Peter Wallenstein. (The Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1987. Pp. xii, 218. Notes, bibliography, index. \$27.50.)

This study of state and local government programs and finances in Georgia from 1830 to 1890 is the most important book on southern political history published in this decade and the best study ever of public policy in a southern state. Concise, well written, and often strikingly insightful, it should be speedily issued in paperback and read by every serious student of American political history, as well as assigned in undergraduate and graduate classes.

For Wallenstein, policy was not the outcome of clashing ideologies or the competition of spoilsmen, but of the conscious, rational efforts of social groups—planters, merchants, yeomen, poor whites, and, after the war, freedmen—to use government to benefit their class. Antebellum merchants and planters favored and others opposed subsidies to the Western and Atlantic Railroad not because of opinions on the proper sphere of governmental activity, but because the rich expected to gain markets while poorer people, espe-

cially those outside the region that the road served, saw only the prospect of paying higher taxes. In the late 1850s, the representatives of "yeoman counties" in the legislature endorsed a financing scheme to equalize school funds for all white children, while many from "planter counties" fought it. The absurdly malapportioned legislature of 1850 taxed town lots at five times the rate of slaves and seven times the rate of rural land, and the entirely unrepresented free people of color paid poll taxes twenty times as high as those on whites.

Treating all facets of government—taxation, internal improvements and their regulation, legislative apportionment and the structure of local government, eleemosynary institutions, schools, military pensions—and spanning three eras of political history, Wallenstein demonstrates connections, continuities, and discontinuities that more limited studies have missed or merely asserted or assumed. Expropriation of Indian lands and late antebellum profits from the Western and Atlantic allowed the state before the war to expand services while keeping taxes low. At the level of the state and county governments, secession equalized. Property-tax rates in 1864 were fifteen times those of 1860, and greatly exceeded Reconstruction-era levies, while poll taxes, adjusted for inflation, declined during the war. Benefit payments to poor soldiers' families had to skyrocket to keep down desertion from the army, while the wealthy sank their savings into rebel bonds. It was the Confederate, not the state government that made the war a poor man's fight by impressing large quantities of supplies—three times the aggregate value of state and local taxes—apparently for the most part from less affluent whites.

The brief, turmoil-filled years of Radical Reconstruction in Georgia, over by 1871, initiated few changes in state policy. A large state debt and the policy of encouraging railroad construction by endorsing the bonds of private companies, for instance, preceded Republican governor Rufus Bullock's regime, which also lacked the time and money to expand the state's fledgling educational system. Much more important than radical rule in the state was the fact of emancipation, which removed slaves as a source of tax revenues and nearly doubled the number of claimants on public services; the passing of the state's ability to finance expanded services from such non-tax revenues as federal land sales and profits of the state-owned railroad; and the assumption of obligations to provide some education and considerable welfare payments to ex-soldiers or their widows. Ignored by most scholars before Wallenstein, the pension programs extended beyond the turn of the century and accounted for an astonishing 22 percent of the state's total expenditures by 1911.

Nevertheless, after as before the war less powerful groups suffered from discriminatory state policies. Redeemer governments repealed the limited exemptions that had shielded the property of the poor from taxation, provided much smaller support to black than to white colleges and schools, and eventually substituted the chain gang for "road duty" as a means of keeping byways in repair. In the late 1880s—not during Reconstruction or the "Progressive Era"—state services first markedly expanded, but they grew for whites only.

Wallenstein's implicit challenges to the views of such scholars as Michael Johnson and Mills Thorton may provoke controversy. Whatever the outcome of battles over this or that "Wallenstein thesis," his book illustrates the increasing attention that historians are giving to the study of public policy and provides a model that should inspire emulation.

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