Multiparty Politics in Mississippi, 1877–1902. By Stephen Cresswell. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995. xii, 285 pp. $40.00, ISBN 0-87805-770-6.)

It was not easy to make Mississippi politically solid, even after the carnival of white Democratic violence in 1875. In this first intensive study of the political movements (Greenback, Republican, Independent, and Populist) that opposed the Democrats during the post-Reconstruction era in the Magnolia State, Stephen Cresswell demonstrates that the repeated efforts of African Americans and white small farmers to fight back against deflation and corruption were savagely put down with a combination of violence, threats, fraud, co-optation of issues, and, finally and most effectively, disfranchisement. Dissent was not confined to the hill country, and the Populist movement was smaller and less effective than its predecessors because the 1890 constitutional convention had robbed most of its po-

tential black and white supporters of their right to vote.

Based on an exhaustive reading of the state's numerous newspapers and on disappointingly elementary statistical analyses of voting patterns in the electorate and the state legislature, this readable, commonsensical monograph is notable more for its solid research than for any novel hypotheses. Rather than offering any independent evidence of the economic causes of the small farmer revolt or painstakingly examining its language, culture, or ideology, as other recent studies have, Cresswell focuses on political campaigns and legislative activity. The Greenback-Republican fusion candidate in 1881 probably won the governor's race but was counted out by Democratic election officials. The opposition coalition, shaky statewide because of the inevitable power struggles between black and white politicians and splits over the tariff and inflationary measures, was strong enough in some individual counties to win local offices and, in the heavily black Delta, to force the Democrats to share power. In 1889, however, the Democrats, faced with the specter of a national anti–election fraud bill and the first straightout Republican campaign since 1875, bludgeoned the opposition into temporary submission and then passed a poll tax and a literacy-and-understanding test that suppressed the Republicans until 1964. Although Democrats engaged in somewhat less race-baiting and violence against the Populists than they had against earlier parties, that may have been, one might suggest, because the Populists were less of a danger, polling a maximum of 28 percent of the much-reduced statewide gubernatorial vote. Regardless of hard work by talented leaders, regardless of ingenious economic programs to attack the century's worst depression, regardless of the falsity of the charge of endangering white supremacy, when the vast majority of African Americans had been disfranchised, Populists had little chance in a restricted electorate still controlled by the fathers of fraud.

Cresswell generalizes confidently about the socioeconomic makeup of and the continuity between the several movements on the basis of shadings on maps and informal comparisons of columns of social and economic data from the counties where the opposition did particularly well or poorly—methods rejected a generation ago as outmoded. When everything else about the research, analysis, and writing is so well and carefully done as it is here, why are historians content with a different and lower standard when it comes to statistics?

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