

Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860. By Lacy K. Ford, Jr. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. Pp. xiii, 414. \$39.95.

Three fundamental problems mar this deeply researched, marvelously written study. First, despite the fact that he treats men in particular cases as acting out of pure self-interest, Lacy Ford's broader generalizations attribute cultural and ideological, not material, motives to them. When in 1818, for instance, the state legislature appropriated an amount equal to four times the normal annual state budget to build canals and roads into the South Carolina upcountry, Ford declares that "most of the criticism came from those who resented the state's promoting other interests more vigorously than their own," rather than from principled libertarian opponents of all governmental subsidies (p. 17). When the same body floated bonds to pay for nearly half of the construction costs of extending railroads into the upcountry in the 1850s, "the most adamant opposition" to one especially costly line, Ford remarks, "originated in those sections of the state which stood to gain little from the project," and repeated struggles over subsidies represented a "battle of selfish interests" in which critics "manipulated the electorate's fear of active government sponsorship of private corporations" to protect their "own personal or local interests" (pp. 315, 317).

Yet these and other similarly self-interested disputes over banks, taxes, and interest rate ceilings, Ford asserts, convinced yeomen that civic virtue and "republican" independence were under attack. Fears of action by the South Carolina state government, in turn, allowed whites to be "more easily convinced" than they would have been

otherwise that Lincoln and the northern Republicans represented a danger so extreme that by 1860 secession was the necessary response (p. 337). In the Richard Hofstadter-David Donald "status revolution" hypothesis, abolitionists are viewed as attacking slavery not out of moral concerns, but to guard their social standing in the North against the rise of the capitalist *nouveau riche*. Likewise, Ford's "slave-labor republicans," anxious about subsidizing southern special interests, lash out at yankees who might meddle with slavery (p. 365).

But why should yeomen (or abolitionists) aim at the more distant rather than the closer target, especially since to assault the outsider, they had to coalesce with their alleged enemies at home? Why should governmental favoritism to some stimulate general uneasiness with any governmental action at all, particularly among those who benefited from special state-backed privileges? Since a substantial majority of South Carolina white families owned slaves, and since the cotton boom of the 1850s brought considerable prosperity and more than doubled the average slave's price (p. 261), isn't the abolitionist menace to an institution in which southern whites had such a large material stake a sufficient and more straightforward explanation for secession? Although Ford does not do so, consider the counterfactuals: would South Carolina have seceded if there had been no Whiggish activity by the state government during the 1850s? Would it have seceded in 1860 if Stephen Douglas, John Bell, or John Breckinridge had won the presidency? What seem to me to be the obvious answers to these questions (yes and no, respectively) strongly imply that the struggle over who should rule at home and what the state government should do was much less important to secession than that of home rule and what the national government might do.

The second problem is that while Ford repeatedly challenges other scholars, he never formulates either their or his own hypotheses clearly enough that either set of contentions could be falsified. What Steven Channing or William Freehling would term irrational fears, such as charges that the Tariff of 1828 endangered republicanism, that banning servitude in new territories would "enslave" South Carolina whites, or that southern yeomen were about to be "proletarianized," Ford makes part of a coherent ideology of liberty and independence, and, therefore, a rational apprehension (pp. 125, 138, 354). What James Banner and others would see as an undemocratic polity, in which the malapportioned legislature, not the people, voted for the governor and for presidential electors, party competition was successfully discouraged, and one man, the profoundly antidemocratic John Calhoun, exercised a political domination unparalleled in the history of any other state in the country, Ford takes to be the expression of a Caucasian proslavery libertarian consensus (pp. 102, 143, 173, 193, 287). What Eugene Genovese might treat as aristocratic speculation, investments in fledging railroads, Ford holds up as an example of portfolio diversification by capitalist entrepreneurs out to "make a fast buck" (pp. 234-36, 275). Is this revisionism or name-changing?

Third, although his simple statistical treatments of samples of socioeconomic data drawn from the manuscript census returns are solid and will fascinate economic historians, Ford abjures systematic quantitative analyses of returns in the nullification and 1851 secession elections, the central political events in antebellum South Carolina history. From the relatively low bivariate correlations (computed by other scholars) between support for or opposition to the Nullifiers in 1832 and various economic and social variables, Ford deduces that "ideological and tactical" not demographic indices, accounted for voting patterns (p. 137). He makes no effort to test more complex models himself, and he attributes any leftover, unexplained variance to unmeasured cultural rather than to unmeasured social or economic variables, or to observational errors. In his discussion of the 1851 secession/cooperation election, Ford first asserts that there was little correlation with slavery or with previous contests, and then, without openly examining any evidence at all, attributes the cooperationist victory to an alliance of "Whiggish entrepreneurs and yeoman" (pp. 206, 208). This traditional socioeconomic

interpretation, which follows Arthur Cole, is strikingly at odds with Ford's cultural glosses, which follow Mills Thornton, of parallel events. Ford does not comment on the apparent contradiction, as he does not on other elections.

Economic and social historians would be well advised to read Ford's insightful treatments of self-sufficiency and the cotton-railroad boom of the 1850s in Chapters 2, 6, and 7, but to ignore his rhetorical, illogical, and meagerly supported grand themes.

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