

Two-Party Politics in the One-Party South: Alabama's Hill Country, 1874-1920. By Samuel L. Webb. Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1997. Pp. xi, 220. \$34.95.

Woodrow Wilson got only 70% of the votes in the 1912 presidential election in Alabama, a dozen years after the disfranchisement of many poor whites and over 90% of the state's then overwhelmingly Republican African-Americans. What was the lineage of the remainder of the largely white Republican voters of 1912? Were they new men, industrialists and their allies or employees in Birmingham and other cities, attracted by the Republicans' traditional high tariff stance and alienated by the Democratic party of William Jennings Bryan? Were they ex-Unionists, non-slaveholders from the Hill Country in the north or the Wiregrass region in the south who had opposed the Black Belt slavocracy before the Civil War, joined the Republican party during Reconstruction, and stayed more or less loyal to it afterwards? Or were they latter-day Jacksonian communitarian opponents of "the market," as well as of strong government and Reconstruction activism, independent voters in the 1880s and Populists in the 1890s? Studying some of the major political leaders who opposed the Democrats in 15 (chiefly, in 5) Hill Country counties from the 1870s through 1920, Webb emphasizes the third group and says that they mostly backed the "progressive" Theodore Roosevelt, not the more "conservative" William Howard Taft.

Webb advances what might be called the "Bull Moose Populist" thesis to counter Sheldon Hackney's discontinuitarian view in *Populism to Progressivism in Alabama* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969) that Populists were not modern reformers, but reactionary agrarians. Disillusioned after being fraudulently counted out and then engulfed by the Democrats in the 1890s and losing potential black and poor white supporters in the

disfranchisement of 1901, the Populists, according to Hackney, took little part in the progressive movement. While Webb shows convincingly that some Populist leaders converted to Rooseveltian Republicanism and were not as irrational and anxious about their status as Hackney contends, Webb's unsystematic methods undermine any generalizations about the behavior of the masses of Populist voters or even of lesser Populist leaders. Moreover, Webb's cultural-ideological interpretation of Populists as the direct heirs of anti-centralized power Jacksonianism contradicts his view of them as subsequent Bull Moosers. T.R. accepted massive corporations and sought a powerful government to regulate them. In any event, since Democrats completely controlled state-level policy in Alabama after 1901, ex-Populists who became Republicans could play no effective role in progressivism in the state. Even if Hackney mischaracterized the Populists, then, he was right to call them irrelevant to Alabama progressivism.

Although Webb repeats the Mills Thornton/Steven Hahn thesis (Thornton, *Power and Politics in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1810-1860* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983)) that upcountry yeomen were anti-government and anti-capitalist, his evidence does not support that thesis. For example, two of the most important independent-Republican leaders in the 1880s, William Manning Lowe and Benjamin M. Long, had been antebellum Whigs, not Jacksonians, and Long was a coal mining entrepreneur who favored a high tariff and federal aid to education. (63-64, 69, 73) Indeed, in contrast to Thornton's libertarian thesis, many independent and Populist legislators strongly supported spending more money -- federal, state, or

local -- on schools. (85, 97) Another key leader, Col. James M. Sheffield, was not a subsistence-oriented yeoman, but a rich cotton planter and owner of more than 20 slaves, who, though an erstwhile opponent of secession, spent \$60,000 of his own money outfitting the Confederate troops he raised. Like many other upcountry Democratic politicians, Sheffield bolted from the Democratic party not out of ideology, but because he believed he'd been robbed of a nomination for office. (38, 41, 53) Populist leader A.P. Longshore was a lawyer, general store owner, and longtime chief executive of Shelby County who dabbled in real estate and lent money -- hardly proof that part of what Webb calls the "core" of Populism was "anti-creditor." (92-93, 186) And when Webb wants a Jacksonian-style comment about post-Civil War events, he is often forced to turn to from any upcountry source to Black Belt newspaper editor Robert McKee. (48-51, 55, 62, 124, 12, 215)

It is true, of course, that elites rarely entirely resemble the masses they lead. But since he performs no statistical analysis of election returns and does not systematically trace the previous or subsequent political stances of leaders below the topmost county level, Webb cannot tell whether the elites' experiences were like those of their followers or not. Moreover, the majority of voters and political activists in the Hill Country were Democrats. Without studying them, as well as the opposition politicians, Webb cannot validly generalize about what motivated politicians' divergent political courses. Hill Country Democrats may have been the real neo-Jacksonians, or they may have differed markedly from the anti-Democrats in wealth, education, social status, occupation, racial views, or a whole range of other possible traits. And Unionist-Republicans' ideologies or social statuses may have been quite different from those of Populist-Republicans or industrialist-Republicans. We simply cannot learn such things from Webb's

account because few historians, even ones as knowledgeable and conscientious about certain kinds of evidence as Webb is, currently receive training in statistics or research design. It is sad to have to conclude that Webb's painstaking research, forcefully-argued thesis, trenchant comments on the disfranchisement movement and its consequences, and careful and pleasant writing style is severely undermined by a conventional historical education.

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