

JONATHAN M. WIENER. *Social Origins of the New South: Alabama, 1860-1885*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. 1978. Pp. xiii, 247. \$14.95.

In this broad, ambitious, and important book, Jonathan M. Wiener argues that the black belt planter elite reconstructed its hegemonic class position after the Civil War by shepherding its wealth despite the death and destruction of war, forcing black labor into a new oppressed state, employing political power to beat back a challenge by crossroads merchants, forming an opportunistic alliance with Yankee financiers to prevent the rise of an industrialist class in Birmingham until that potential Southern bourgeoisie in effect agreed to subject itself to planter domination, and spawning a "nonbourgeois agrarian ideology" (p. 187) to justify planter rule. Thus, the South was condemned, in the term of Wiener's thesis director, Barrington Moore, Jr., to follow "the Prussian Road" to modernization. Interesting and well-written, the book is a forceful statement of an original and coherent thesis. Yet I found it unconvincing at certain crucial points.

From a sample of individual United States census records for five Alabama black belt counties from 1850 through 1870, Wiener calculates the rates at which families continued to rank among the richest landholders in each decade, concluding that the 1860-70 rich planter persistence rate (43 percent) was comparable to the 1850-60 rate (47 percent). His methods may be questioned on two counts. First, the white population of these five counties decreased by nearly 16 percent from 1850 to 1870, yet his sample of rich planters in each year, 236, is the same. The result is that a white male adult had about one chance in thirty of being included in the planter elite, as Wiener defines it, in 1850, but one in twenty-five in 1870. He has thus biased his technique toward finding increasingly greater persistence. Second, he charts not individual, but family, persistence and does not change his procedure for calculating persistence rates to take this into account. "If two sons or both a planter and a son appeared in a subsequent list," Wiener informs us (p. 236), "that was counted as two cases of persistence." Again, this decision inflates his persistence rates, for planters' sons who inherited sufficient property are counted in the numerator, but not the denominator. Sons—or daughters—who moved away, changed names, died, or inherited insufficient property just disappear from the equation.

Wiener contends that the planters, faced with a "labor shortage" because freedmen refused to work like slaves, created a "coercive mode of labor control" which "bound" black sharecroppers through legal as well as violent restrictions on the free labor market (p. 70). However, he presents almost no evidence that the laws were actually enforced, that the planters could be effective monopsonists for long, that croppers could not escape exploitative employers by moving on (stealthily if need be), that the income the blacks received was less than their marginal product, or even that blacks persisted in the same area long enough to make his non-free market contention plausible.

The 1866 and 1867 Alabama crop lien laws gave merchants and landlords equal rights to seize a tenant's crops to settle a debt. In 1871 the legislature gave landlords superior rights, and in 1885 and 1887 the legislature outlawed merchant crop liens entirely in half of the black belt counties but allowed their continuation in most counties of the state. Without closely analyzing the genesis of these acts or the nature of the coalitions favoring and opposing them, Wiener paints a picture of merchant challenge and devastating planter response which drove independent storekeepers out of the black belt and into the hill country, there to supply the white yeomanry. Yet it is difficult to see that the merchant challenge was all that grave: in the one black belt county for which Wiener gives complete figures, merchants owned but 2.6 percent of the real estate value in 1870, while that county's "planter elite" owned 63 percent (pp. 112-13). Moreover, he does not differentiate between city, town, and crossroads merchants, whose interests no doubt often clashed. And since adequate data from tax records or the 1890 individual census schedules do not exist, Wiener cannot test for the effect of the 1885 law, which best illustrates his merchant-planter conflict thesis, by tracing economic conditions of merchants in the eighties. While it seems obvious that the 1885 law must have discouraged black belt merchants, it is less clear why the 1871 law should have had such an impact, and Wiener's inference that the 1871 law caused the variations he traces in merchant persistence in the two areas in the seventies appears shaky.

In C. Vann Woodward's "New South," capitalists co-opted planters and donned nostalgic memories like sheep's clothing. In Wiener's, planters forestalled "a bourgeois revolution" (p. 137) and evoked the Lost Cause to justify their continued rule and combat proponents of the "New South Creed." But Wiener's evidence is compatible with the view that the planter-industrialist and Montgomery-Mobile versus Birmingham clashes were between capitalistic, profit-maximizing interest groups, rather than socially competitive classes. And, though he makes

some interesting criticisms of the "New South Creed" hypothesis, the refurbished Old South creed that Wiener extracts from newspapers, speeches, and pamphlets seems too disorganized and fragmentary to have served as a full-blown instrument of class hegemony after the war.

Despite its flaws, Wiener's book should focus controversy, stimulate research, and enjoy a wide readership.

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