

BOOKS

Historical roots of black poverty today

THE ROOTS OF BLACK POVERTY

Jay R. Mandle
Temple University Press, 1978

SOCIAL ORIGINS OF THE NEW SOUTH: ALABAMA 1860-1885

Jonathan Wiener
Louisiana University Press, 1978

In the past two decades, the most creative writing by American historians has centered on the South, and particularly on slavery. Beginning with the work of Kenneth Stampp and Stanley Elkins in the 1950s and running through more recent books by Eugene D. Genovese, Edmund Morgan, Herbert Gutman and others, historians have thoroughly reexamined the South's "peculiar institution" and its impact on both black and white Americans.

Lately, post-emancipation Southern history has attracted increasing attention. The new books by Jay R. Mandle and Jonathan Wiener—both young Marxist scholars—reflect growing interest in the aftermath of slavery. Both also reflect the most recent developments in a long historical debate over the impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on American life.

The history of the post-war South has gone through a series of distinct interpretations. The traditional view, which survived into the 1960s, saw Reconstruction as a descent into barbarism, from which the South was mercifully rescued by the courageous efforts of white "Redeemers." Although thoroughly discredited by historians, this is probably still the prevailing popular view of the period.

During the 1950s and 1960s, a group of "revisionist" historians, influenced by the civil rights movement, drew attention to the positive achievements of state Reconstruction governments and the progress made by blacks in social and political life. Although arguing that Reconstruction did not go far enough, especially in its failure to distribute land to the former slaves, the revisionist view was far more positive and optimistic than the earlier blanket condemnation of Reconstruction.

Most recently, perhaps reflecting the waning of the civil rights impulse and the cynicism of the '70s, we seem to have entered a new phase of interpretation. Several writers have claimed that little of sig-

nificance changed in the South as a result of the Civil War.

Mandle and Wiener both reflect this latest emphasis on continuity, on the continuing subordination of blacks rather than progress toward racial equality. Their overall portrait of 19th century Southern history is indeed bleak.

Mandle, a professor of economics at Temple University, attempts in his book to explain the origins of modern black poverty, sensibly arguing that its roots lie in the aftermath of slavery. Well into this century the South remained, as Franklin Roosevelt called it, "the nation's number one economic problem." The reason, Mandle argues, was the survival of the plantation economy, which mired the region and especially its black population in a pattern of economic underdevelopment. Blacks, it appears, were poor because the South, and particularly the plantation region where most blacks lived, was poor.

In little over 100 pages, Mandle sketches a model of southern economic development. The plantation system remained virtually stagnant from 1865 to World War I, he claims. Resting on the coercion of the labor force, the plantation economy suppressed alternative employments that might have enabled blacks to escape their poverty. Not until the cut-off of European immigration during World War I, forcing northern industry to turn to blacks as laborers, did migration out of the plantation region become a real possibility.

Under the impact of the massive migrations beginning during World War I, the plantation system first cracked, then disintegrated. By the end of the 1940s, it no longer existed. But its legacy of poverty has haunted blacks to the present day.

Mandle's book certainly represents an advance over the recent writings of neo-classical economic historians who believe the sharecropping system worked to the best advantage of all involved.

In attempting to survey the South since the Civil War in so brief a compass, Mandle has, perhaps inevitably, ignored historical development. He creates an entirely static model of the plantation economy, and seems to treat the period from 1865 to World War II as a homogeneous, unchanging unity.

The most serious problem is that Mandle gives no sense of how the plantation

system was shaped in the conflict between planters and black laborers. His discussion of the black response to their economic situation is thin and misleading. Drawing on the work of Genovese, he claims that a culture of paternalism survived the Civil War and shaped black-white relations after it. But while Genovese used "paternalism" in a very specific historical sense, as a particular set of social relations under slavery, Mandle employs it to cover just about every non-economic feature of Southern life—social, political and psychological.

Actually, Mandle's argument is less reminiscent of Genovese than of Stanley Elkins, who insisted 20 years ago that slavery had infantilized blacks, producing a "Sambo" personality. Similarly, Mandle (with no supporting evidence) assumes that black culture was dominated by a "debilitating culture of black dependency," an "ideology of subservience" that made resistance to the plantation regime impossible. Even a cursory study of black politics since the Civil War would reveal how misleading is this assertion.

For a more detailed investigation of the situation, readers can turn to Jonathan Wiener's study of five black belt counties in western Alabama in the years after the Civil War.

As Wiener observes, the shape of the plantation economy was the outcome of a complex, many-sided class conflict, in which planters, emancipated slaves, merchants, and aspiring industrialists played a part. The sharecropping system did not emerge full-blown from the ashes of the Confederacy. It was, in effect, a compromise between planters' desire for a controlled labor force, and the ex-slaves' passion for possession of land or, barring that, independence from white supervision.

Planters at first attempted to work the freedmen in gangs. Blacks responded by resisting and in persistent complaints of "labor shortage" in the post-war years. Planters turned to state legislatures to coerce black labor, passing vagrancy laws and other measures to force blacks onto the plantations, and used the Freedmen's Bureau to force their will upon the freedmen, Wiener argues. And the planters resorted to violence, dominating the Ku Klux Klan and employing it against freedmen whose work was not considered satisfactory.

Wiener is acutely aware of the importance of political struggles in shaping the evolution of the southern economy. Reconstruction emerges as a brief interlude when blacks were able to influence legislation and protect their right to a share of the crop on plantations. With the end of Reconstruction, planters not only reenacted the old vagrancy laws, but used their political control to impede industrial development and to thwart the attempt of merchants to control the supply of credit to blacks.

Wiener's main sources of information are the manuscript census returns, which give a considerable amount of information about the wealth of merchants and planters, and Alabama's newspapers. Unfortunately, he has not studied the private manuscript collections of planters, or the extremely important Freedmen's Bureau Papers in the National Archives.

Had he done so, he would have been able to convey a more immediate sense of everyday life in the Alabama black belt. He probably would have treated planters and merchants less as homogeneous groups than as classes with their own internal divisions. And her certainly would have modified his picture of the Freedmen's Bureau as the agent of the planter class.

The Bureau's labor policies did assist planters in obtaining plantation laborers, but their efforts to protect the civil rights of blacks flew in the face of planter demands for total control of the labor force. Even in Alabama, it was the planters who wanted the Bureau to leave the state, the freedmen who hoped it would remain.

Mandle and Wiener both exemplify the recent trend toward downplaying the significance of the Civil War and emancipation. It seems unlikely that such a bleak view will be able to encompass the many changes that took place in the post-war years, including the rise of black politics and the agrarian revolt. A convincing synthesis of the history of the South after the Civil War is still to be written, but when it is, as these books show, it will have to place at its center the survival of the plantation economy and the struggle for control of the black labor force. ■

—Eric Foner

Eric Foner teaches history at City College, CUNY. He is the author of *Tom Paine* and is writing the volume on Reconstruction for the *New American* series.

Spook homeward, agent

SPOOKS: THE HAUNTING OF AMERICA—THE PRIVATE USE OF SECRET AGENTS

By Jim Hougan
William Morrow, New York, 1978

Jim Hougan, *Harper's* Washington editor, spent the past four years researching the world of private intelligence. He probed the inner-workings of a "secret metropolis the size of Pittsburgh" that threatens our democratic society.

Thousands of American intelligence agents, who have moved from the federal government (CIA and FBI) to the more lucrative private sector, are spooking America. They have made *Mission Impossible* agencies specializing in covert operations available to the highest bidder. Their clients include the upper crust of corporate America: Hughes, Hunt, Rockefeller, Getty, Ford, Mellon, ITT, IBM, Exxon and GM. Even McDonald's has become a client by putting Intertel (the private intelligence firm based in the Bahamas' Paradise Island) on its payroll to investigate two of its own franchise holders.

Hougan reveals a web of payoffs, kickbacks, assassinations, and revolutions. We watch Robert Vesco, the mysterious "man behind the scenes" of the Watergate affair, engage people like Orlando Bosch (anti-Castro political terrorist), Paul Louis Weiller (reputed to be the original "French Connection"), Mafia boss

Sam Trafficante, and the Drug Enforcement Agency, in a bungled attempt to eliminate "socialism from the Western hemisphere as a whole." Or we follow then Vice-President Richard Nixon, Greek shipping tycoon Stavros Niarchos, Big Oil, and the CIA in an effort to destroy Aristotle Onassis.

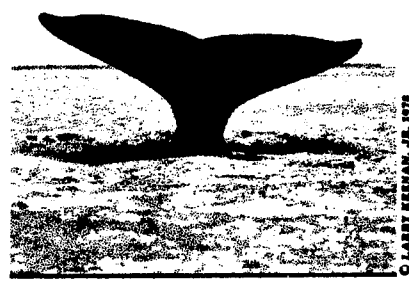
Spooking is not confined to right-wingers and conservatives. Liberals and left-liberals also resort to it. "Nixon is a convenient fall-guy," says Hougan, but the worst is not over.

Hougan quotes an authority who claims that "for every bugging device in the hands of government, there are 300 in the private sector." Since World War II, multinational corporations have established their own intelligence agencies, enabling them to operate above the law or in alliance with government agencies. In Venezuela, for example, the CIA has merged with Exxon's Creole (spying) subsidiary resulting in Exxon's being the CIA and vice versa.

The spooks haunting America are no mere apparition. Tax dollars have supported an intelligence community that, originally established to protect American democracy against foreign enemies, has now turned against the same democracy on behalf of an oligarchic corporate sector.

—Douglas Bradley
Douglas Bradley is a free-lance writer in Madison, Wisc.

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PERSPECTIVES

Old labels are no guide to Charles Evers' insurgent politics in Mississippi

By Jason Berry

IN HIS "INSIDE STORY" (NOV. 22), JOHN JUDIS WROTE, "Charles Evers, the black Senate candidate, ran a fairly opportunistic race, trying to attract white votes with anti-welfare, anti-integration rhetoric, reportedly telling black leaders that he meant nothing of the kind." ¶In all deference to my friend Judis, let's look at what really happened in Mississippi.

¶When I agreed to work for Charles Evers in the Senate campaign this fall, it had been seven years since he ran statewide (for governor); while I'd written extensively about politics, I'd had no partisan involvements since working as his 1971 campaign press secretary.

I was initially concerned by his opposition to busing, since Charles had led the fight for it in Mississippi. But I quickly saw an enthusiastic response, by some of the poorest black communities in Mississippi to his attacks on busing and welfare. These are admittedly code words for '60s conservatism, and in using such code words, the Fayette mayor was appealing to discontented whites. But Evers' logic is anything but cynical.

His position was that most kids being bused were black, and they were taken from their neighborhoods into white areas. He pointed to black schools in once close-knit neighborhoods, now shrouded in weeds. Evers drew some of his most powerful responses when he told black crowds, "Talk about busin', look what it did. They bus us to their schools and fire our teachers. We used to have 400 black principals, now we only have 25. We used to have about as many black coaches. Now you know how many we got, black folks? Twelve."

His repeatedly stated position was support of "strong, integrated, neighborhood schools"—which meant if whites lived in the area (as many do, hence black-busing) then they would have to go to black schools.

As for welfare, Evers has been a vocal critic of the welfare system for roughly a decade. "I hate welfare. I hate it with a passion, because it degrades a person. I stand for workfare.... The federal government and industry should work hand in hand to create jobs for our folk." As with busing, the people most enraged by his criticism of welfare were liberals. Blacks generally were very receptive, particularly when Evers called for a child-support law to force fathers to provide for deserted children.

Perhaps his positions are conservative. I frankly don't know. The welfare bureaucracy has clearly failed, and if a black leader in Mississippi attacks it, I'm willing to consider alternatives.

There were more important political developments in Evers' Senate campaign, however, than these issues. He ran a highly visible campaign, on little money, with overtones of the old populists. He attacked Mississippi Power and Light and South Central Bell for rate increases, opposed deregulation of natural gas and criticized the oil corporations for unfair profits. He was the only candidate to support the extension of the ERA and the Voting Rights Act—and his lone endorsement from a white group came from the Mississippi Federation of Business and Professional Women, fifty-white, a traditionally-minded group that made a pol-

itical quantum leap because of his ERA stand.

Although he opposed the Kennedy national health insurance plan as too inflationary, he demanded guaranteed health-care benefits for the poor; called for abolition of sales tax on food, medicine, and clothing; and in addressing the state's terrible education problems, said if necessary he was for building more schools. At the same time, he opposed big government as being too wasteful and creating regulatory hardships on small businessmen. He also called for a return to prayer in schools (which is a constitutional not a legislative question). In a state with a deep religious culture, particularly among rural blacks, it hit home. Is this a conservative position? Perhaps so, but again it seems an example to me of how the old code terms of yesterday's conservative-liberal dichotomy are losing their meaning.

Evers ran as an Independent for several reasons. He bolted the Democratic Party long ago when liberals like Hodding Carter and Patt Derian (now with the Carter State Department) abandoned coalition-building in the early '70s to pursue their own national political careers even prior to Jimmy Carter. Likewise, he attacked the state party for never supporting black candidates. The state AFL-CIO did support civil rights aims in the past, but has not supported Evers in two statewide races, even though he was far and away the most progressive candidate. Labor's candidate, Democrat Maurice Dantin, was every bit as conservative as Republican Thad Cochran in opposition to labor reforms, ERA, and the Voting Rights Act.

Evers himself opposed common-situs picketing and supported the state's right-to-work laws, positions I do not share. But there is a more fundamental commitment to the labor movement in Evers, as evidenced in his long-standing support of the Gulf Coast Pulpwood Association, a predominately white, dirt-poor union of pulpwood haulers, who won a strike against Masonite in 1971, with help from Evers. The wood haulers endorsed Evers in 1978, and with their help he carried Jasper and Kemper Counties, two heavily white, one might even say "redneck" counties. They used to call the latter "Bloody Kemper."

Early post-election analyses say the Mayor received 25,000 white votes, which is remarkable when you consider he was still receiving death threats in the 1971 gubernatorial run. But for the better part of a decade now, Evers has done something no other Deep South black politician I know of has done. He has gone directly to pockets of conservative white

rural folk, soliciting their support and trying to build a bi-racial coalition on the basis of bread-and-butter economic issues. This year he had several ex-Klansmen working for him, along with the 1967 campaign manager of Jimmy Swan, a crusty segregationist who once campaigned in a great silver bus with "Save Our Children" emblazoned across it.

Evers is intent on building an Independent political force in Mississippi; it is not being called a party. Although the idea is in planning stages, several key members of the campaign are committed to the idea of a 1979 race for Lt. Governor or Governor, with Evers as titular head of a field of candidates running as Independents for the state legislature. This will force the Democratic Party either to get behind black candidates for local offices, as it has never done in the past, or to do what it has always done, which is conspire to defeat them. But in 1979, history should be on the blacks' side.

A remarkable reapportionment lawsuit, more than a decade in the making, will soon be settled, opening up about 25 predominantly black legislative districts. As there are only four blacks in the Mississippi House (and none in the Senate) today, a well-run Independent ticket in the general election could carry a number of blacks into the legislature, avoiding costly summer primaries.

The Senate campaign was a definite boost to Evers' political strategy, for by appearing with Dantin and Cochran at the various candidates' forums, it marked his acceptance into the Mississippi political mainstream. Thousands of whites who in the past had avoided or simply been unable to hear him, got to hear and see the man, and he won high marks in the press for speaking bluntly about crucial economic issues.

When you consider that we ran the whole campaign on \$80,000—Cochran had a million, Dantin a little less—and managed to capture nearly a quarter of the 132,000 vote, the Senate try takes on new meaning. In putting together the be-

ginnings of a state-wide coalition of blacks, women, disaffected Democrats and some poor whites, Evers has established himself as a pivotal political force to be reckoned with down the road. The challenge now is to build on the base established this fall.

The greatest deterrent to the Senate campaign was money. It is terribly difficult to raise money for a black campaign in Mississippi; it's blacks are the poorest in the poorest state in the country. Black candidates across the country were having money problems. The chief obstacle to Evers' fundraising was the *New York Times* strike, which denied him national media coverage, valuable for fundraising mail-outs and then the general information flow about a politician so necessary in making national contacts. (The National Committee for an Effective Congress—whatever the name means—did not even return my calls.)

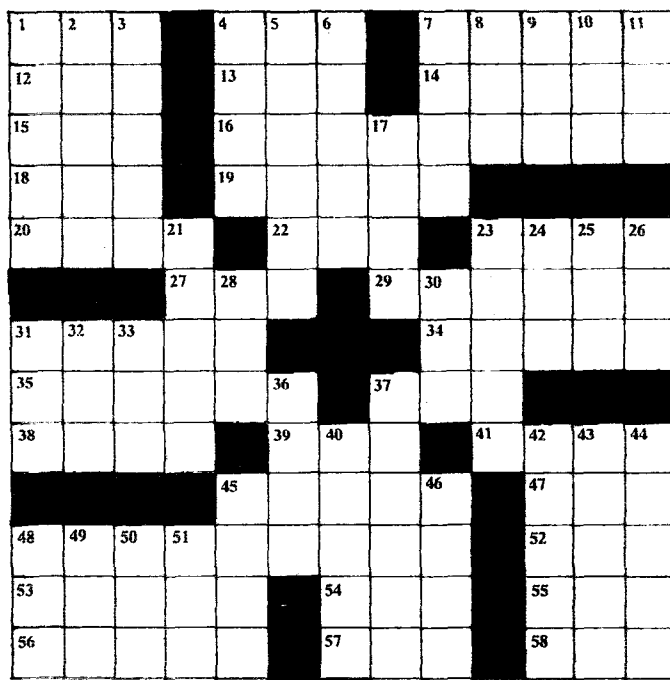
The rise of an Independent movement is the price paid by the Democratic Party in Mississippi for abusing, avoiding, and stealing from black voters for so many years. Still the success or failure of Evers' ambitions will be determined by black support. There are several prominent blacks, like NAACP president Aaron Henry (also co-chairman of the Democratic Party), who have remained in the party fold. The difference is that Evers commands a popular following.

I must admit that partisan politics don't seem to me a likely way of engineering social change. Particularly in Mississippi, the odds are imposing. But the idea of an Independent political movement at the bottom of America intrigues me. Although my politics are to the left of Evers, I admire the man because he endured when other civil rights figures abandoned work on behalf of the poor.

Jason Berry, author of *Amazing Grace: With Charles Evers in Mississippi*, was a county organizer in Evers' recent Senate campaign. He is currently at work on a television documentary about New Orleans jazz families.

Currently Newsworthy

By Jay Shepherd



ACROSS

- 1 Where luxury resides, often
- 4 Navy rank (abbr.)
- 7 Aircraft equipment
- 12 Hockey star Bobby
- 13 Darjeeling
- 14 French writer Zola
- 15 Wedding vow
- 16 Scene of a summit
- 18 Fisherman's need
- 19 Endured
- 20 Gaelic tongue
- 22 On the ____ (at large)
- 23 Prefix with dynamics
- 27 Crafty
- 29 Advertisement
- 31 Hemispheric org.
- 34 Barrel part
- 35 Make beloved
- 37 Understand
- 39 Rend

DOWN

- 39 Eggs
- 41 Certain walkway
- 45 Creme de la creme
- 47 By means of
- 48 Newsmakers with a new face
- 52 Road curve
- 53 Wake up
- 54 Youth
- 55 Soak, as flax
- 56 Avarice
- 57 Mata Hari, for one
- 58 Make a stab at
- 1 French valley
- 2 Passion
- 3 Jobs
- 4 Common catch-alls, for short
- 5 With care
- 6 Margaret Mead subject
- 7 Comedian Foxx

8 "I ____ camera"

- 9 504, to Caesar
- 10 Boxing champ
- 11 Blusher's cheeks
- 17 Partner to circumstance

- 21 Organic compound
- 23 Daisy's cousin
- 24 Greek vowel
- 25 Speed up, as a car
- 26 Valuable mineral
- 28 Mauna ____
- 30 Sugar (suffix)
- 31 After ready
- 32 Vane direction
- 33 Nabokov novel
- 36 Contemporary therapy
- 37 Petty tyrant
- 40 Early stringed instruments
- 42 Ward off
- 43 Stingy one
- 44 Sickly white
- 45 Ogled
- 46 Whirlpool
- 48 In the ____ (assured)
- 49 Wander
- 50 Draw
- 51 Mao ____-tung

Answer to last week's puzzle

