

relations. Thomas's book would also be appropriate for classes in constitutional history, or twentieth-century U.S. studies. The works are also useful for providing lecture materials and selected source documents.

Floyd College

T. Ralph Peters

David Carlton and Peter A. Coclanis, eds. *Confronting Southern Poverty in the Great Depression: "The Report on Conditions of the South" with Related Documents.* Boston & New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996. Pp. viii, 168. Paper \$7.50; ISBN 0-312-11497-4.

Begun in 1993, the Bedford Series in History and Culture, edited by Natalie Zemon Davis and Ernest R. May, has become a wonderful addition to the study and teaching of American history. Designed as a week's worth of reading that combines a short narrative introduction with primary documents related to important personalities, events, writings, or critical historical eras, the Bedford books have uniformly been of high quality and especially helpful in developing the capacity for critical thought and analysis among undergraduate students. David L. Carlton and Peter A. Coclanis, editors of *Confronting Southern Poverty in the Great Depression*, have continued the fine standards of the series. The particular challenge they confront is in convincing students and others that the major document they have selected to explore poverty in the South during the 1930s, "The Report on Economic Conditions of the South," can speak to generations that are often unaware of that poverty--past or present. "Whether of southern origin or not," the editors note, "Americans today might well have a difficult time believing that the South was once defined in part as a uniquely poor region in a land of plenty. Those who have grown up during the glory years of the so-called Sunbelt, in particular, might find it surprising, even a little implausible, that a bit over fifty years ago the South was called 'the Nation's No. 1 economic problem' by no less an eminence than the president of the United States."

The "Report on Conditions of the South," published in 1938 by the federal government, was indeed crucial, not only in forcing national attention on southern poverty during the Great Depression era, but equally important in the role it played in President Franklin Roosevelt's attempt to "purge" his own Democratic Party of its right wing, primarily southern, opposition during the 1938 political election. Behind the famous Roosevelt attack on southern critics of the New Deal like Senator Walter George, whose Georgia re-election campaign first prompted FDR to proclaim the South as the "nation's number one economic problem," lay other significant concerns. It was pro-New Deal southern liberals like Francis Pickens Miller and young Clark Foreman, the first official New Deal "Adviser on Negro Affairs," who with a handful of other liberal white southerners within and outside the Roosevelt Administration,

wrote "The Report" with the expressed hope to focus attention on the South and produce a favorable federal response to what they saw as the basic causes and effects of the South's poverty. Carlton and Coclanix explore this and other critical themes linked to the study (over a half a million copies had been distributed by the end of 1938), including the complex relationship involving race, the "distinctiveness" of southern poverty, and white southern liberals; debate over "The Report's" explanation of the historical causes for the poverty in the region (purchasing power and colonialism); and, the conflicting reactions within the South and the nation to "The Report." Following their perceptive introduction that outlines these and other issues, the editors provide a complete text of "The Report," photographs depicting poverty conditions, three "Life Stories" from white and black tenant farmers and a cotton mill worker in the 1930s, statistical data on farm income, soil erosion, illiteracy rates, and other information from Howard Odum's 1936 study, *Southern Regions*, which strongly influenced the writers of "The Report," and, finally, primary sources such as Roosevelt's 1938 "purge" speech, southern editorial commentary on the South as the "nation's problem," and the "resolutions" of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, an organization created out of the 1938 debates concerning southern poverty and race relations and involved in combating those issues during the next two decades.

With a basic introduction to the history of the South and the New Deal era, *Confronting Southern Poverty in the Great Depression* should be a solid source for the teaching of twentieth-century America as well as courses on the American south and African-American history. As with the other Bedford books, this volume includes a helpful bibliography.

Denison University

John B. Kirby

Brian Holden Reid. *The Origins of the American Civil War.* London & New York: Longman, 1996. Pp. xv, 440. Paper, \$19.76; ISBN 0-582-49178-9.

This is the fifteenth volume in Longman's "Origin of Modern War Series." Its author is a Senior Lecturer in War Studies at King's College, London, and Resident Historian at the British Army Staff College in Camberley. Developing his thesis that wars in general, and the American Civil War specifically, are the result of a series of ironically well-intentioned acts, Reid maintains that "whatever the strength of public opinion, and electoral shifts of opinion, it is the *action*--the decisions taken by politicians--which determine the chain of circumstances that result in war or peace." Tragically, for America in 1861 these decisions led to the "decisive event in American history." Both Unionists and Confederates believed the conflict would be brief and all combatants would return home by Christmas; such optimism was reflected in the length of the first enlistments. Such naiveté is understandable, Reid explains, because