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The Burden of Dependency: Colonial Themes in Southern Economic Thought, by Joseph J. Persky

Lacy K. Ford, Jr.
University of South Carolina - Columbia, ford@mailbox.sc.edu

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of American sectarian success: "Humans want their religion to be sufficiently potent, vivid, and compelling so that it can offer them rewards of great magnitude. People seek a religion that is capable of miracles and that imparts order and sanity to the human condition" (p. 275). Historical variation, change through time, sophisticated if conditional explanation, much less an appreciation for the complexity of American Christianity or American religion generally are largely lost in this account. Lacking this discernment, readers might better return to the authors' original articles, which at least uncovered interesting church membership trends without the benefit of a dubious "history" and shallow philosophizing.

JON BUTLER
Yale University

ANDREW BILLINGSLEY. *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African-American Families.* Foreword by PAULA GIDDINGS. New York: Simon and Schuster. 1992. Pp. 444. $27.50.

Andrew Billingsley, a sociologist, has been writing about the state of the African-American family for a number of decades. In this volume, he gathers a pastiche of materials—history, biography, autobiography, sociology, and statistics—to explore the past, present, and the future of the African-American family.

At its heart, this is an inspirational work. Billingsley amasses proof that even in the face of racism and concomitant poverty in the United States, the majority of African Americans have demonstrated their many capacities and sustained the traditional family form that, he argues, has often been key to personal and group stability and achievement.

His message is directed to African Americans despairing after more than a decade of recriminatory, retrogressive pronouncements and policies at the federal level and beyond. It also responds to resurgent neo–culture of poverty theorists who sell their perspective to policy makers eager to justify the retrenchment of social programs on the grounds that black people are endemically mired in disorganized social forms and that public money will not help. Finally, the book addresses those who claim that racism and structural obstacles are so pervasive that African-American families and communities are doomed.

Billingsley exhorts all of these groups to pay attention to the manifold evidence of African-American survival and accomplishment, and to consider how much more this group could accomplish if its members were "surrounded by a social environment which propelled them forward" (p. 316). In short, Billingsley carves a middle ground out of the polarized contemporary discussion of race and public policy and argues for the dual responsibility of the individual and the state to the cause of African-American advancement or racial equality.

Billingsley covers a lot of territory in this volume addressed more to the general than the academic reader. One of his key strategies is to demonstrate the falsity of popular assumptions regarding African-American life. For example, he shows statistically and anecdotally that the black family today is not synonymous with teenage unwed mothers and their households; that there are not substantial socioeconomic differences between American-born and Caribbean-born blacks in the United States; that African Americans are generous philanthropists and volunteers, not principally recipients of charity. Billingsley effectively raises and overturns biases that have so often been used to marginalize this population.

The author, however, seems somewhat unresolved about his position regarding certain fundamental institutions of society. For example, he celebrates the arena of opportunity that the military has provided young black citizens, despite the fact that he recognizes that only an institution inherently associated with violence and death has created such opportunities, and despite the fact that if other institutions of society were similarly open, African-American youth would not have to look disproportionately to the military. Similarly, Billingsley's model institution, the traditional family, is celebrated as a necessary condition for successful African-American life. Yet on the one hand, his data show how compromised its existence has become (for whites as well as blacks), and on the other hand, some of his anecdotal evidence shows that unwed mothers, for example, can succeed on their own.

Finally, Billingsley seems not to have sorted out his attitudes toward the gender dimension of African-American life. At one point he claims that African-American men face more difficult life circumstances than African-American women. But Billingsley demonstrates that women have difficulties, too—from salary differentials to feelings of self-worth, from the wages of single parenthood to the stories of individual accomplishment that, in the main, have been selected to celebrate the achievements of African-American men. In fact, Billingsley demonstrates that gender problems and general inequities are pervasive and occur both inside and outside of the traditional family form.

RICKIE SOLINGER
University of Colorado, Boulder

JOSEPH J. PERSKY. *The Burden of Dependency: Colonial Themes in Southern Economic Thought.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1992. Pp. xi, 183. $28.50.

In this volume, Joseph J. Persky offers a brief but suggestive analysis of the recurring "colonial economy" theme in popular southern thought. Sketching

an overview of the evolving colonial economy argument from the late colonial era until the end of World War II, Persky is convincing on his two major points: that across two centuries a diverse array of southern thinkers shared a belief that the South suffered from a debilitating economic dependence on other parts of the world, and that although these thinkers found common ground in identifying dependency as a source of the region's persistent economic woes, they could not agree on either the causes of regional dependency or the proper remedy for it.

Despite his emphasis on the ubiquity of the colonial economy complaint, Persky rightly emphasizes the remarkable heterogeneity of southern thought throughout the long period under study. According to Persky, the South's internal debate, although it went through a variety of incarnations, was usually between champions of an agrarian South, specialized in staple crops and committed to free trade, on the one hand, and proponents of a diversified South, strengthened by commerce and industry and supportive of neo-mercantilist government policies (including protectionism), on the other. Persky traces the agrarian strain of southern thought from the young Thomas Jefferson, through John Taylor of Caroline and the mature John C. Calhoun, to the southern populists of the late nineteenth century, and finally down to the Nashville-based Agrarians of the 1930s. Broadly cast, agrarian thought saw the South's comparative advantage in agriculture as the key to wealth accumulation in the region and viewed protectionism and other federal policies favoring financial and manufacturing interests as the chief sources of regional dependency. The intellectual genealogy of the diversification argument charts from the Virginia Federalists of the 1790s through avowed southern nationalists, such as J. D. B. DeBow, of the antebellum era and the conservative Redeemers of the postbellum decades, to Rupert Vance's Chapel Hill school of regional sociologists of the 1930s. These advocates of balanced regional development saw indigenous commerce and industry as the keys to sustained economic growth and viewed the South's dependence on outside capital and imported consumer goods as identifying marks of its colonial status.

Overall, Persky provides a stimulating introduction to the American South-as-colonial-economy hypothesis, and his attempt to place the argument within the larger framework of the dependency theory now often used to explain the relationship of Latin American economies to those of more developed nations is laudable if not entirely persuasive. But Persky's study also has its limitations. First, it attempts to examine the idea of the South as a colonial economy apart from any systematic analysis of the southern economy. Thus, Persky can conclude that many different southerners found the colonial economy argument a useful polemic, but he cannot evaluate its validity as an explanation of the South's enduring economic problems. Second, Persky, like many of the thinkers he studies, largely ignores the possibility that the South's long-term failure to generate self-sustaining economic growth or an independent entrepreneurial tradition resulted not from the "imperial" manipulation of self-serving elites, whether within or without the region, but from the reluctance of the region's electorate to finance the requisite program of human capital development and the indifference of much of the region's population to the skill acquisition needed to nurture indigenous growth.

LACY K. FORD, JR.
University of South Carolina

TIMOTHY J. GILFOYLE. *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790–1920.* New York: W. W. Norton. 1992. Pp. 462. $24.95.

Timothy J. Gilfoyle has placed the history of commercialized sex at the center of urban geography, the market economy, and political culture. Building on two decades of scholarship on prostitution, urban social life, and working-class culture, Gilfoyle has written an ambitious and riveting descriptive history of the ways in which commercialized sex became central to New York City's political economy and social relations.

Between 1790 and 1920, Gilfoyle convincingly argues, "sacred sexuality" became secularized as market relations transformed sexual relations. After 1820, a subculture grew around the practice of prostitution, creating an underground economy that made some New Yorkers, particularly those who owned real estate used for commercialized sex, fabulous fortunes. Alongside prostitution grew another subculture of "sporting men" who defied women's growing demands for a single standard of sexuality and middle-class respectability. Resisting women's growing control over domestic life and moral reform, growing numbers of men were drawn to prostitution for the leisure and recreational sex that marriage supposedly forbade.

During the nineteenth century, prostitution gradually moved from the fringe to the core of urban social life. Mapping the changing geography of prostitution, Gilfoyle has produced the first historical cartography of urban commercialized sex. Using an impressive array of sources, he takes the reader through the changing topography of community-based prostitution. Through meticulous research, he demonstrates how brothels, cabarets, concert saloons, theaters, and masked balls all institutionalized promiscuous sexuality. The twin subcultures of prostitution and sporting men—depicted by reformers as an alternative culture—in fact buttressed and linked everything from ward politics to real estate values. Commercialized sex, in effect, became an integral part of leisure, neighborhood life, urban politics, and economics.

After the Progressive Era's criminalization of pros-