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Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808, by Rachel N. Klein

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landholding size; continuing immigration, population growth, and inheritance practices, we are told, made land scarce which led to a more intensive use of the land and to the increased availability of wage labor. It is a sound interpretation with explanatory power, although it is only part of the picture. Changes in the market deserved more attention.

The book concludes with a useful chapter that compares its findings with regional studies of Colombia, Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela, and the Caribbean, and firmly places the formation of the Costa Rican peasant-farmer class in the context of a phenomenon that occurred with variations throughout Latin America. In doing so it puts one more challenge to the rapidly fading idea that Costa Rica's historical evolution was entirely unique.

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Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760–1808. By Rachel N. Klein. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.

With this book Rachel Klein provides the best account yet published of the sweeping social transformation of the South Carolina backcountry during the late colonial and early national periods. In this impressively researched, elegantly written, and carefully argued work, Klein deftly chronicles the evolution of the backcountry from an isolated frontier region still vulnerable to deadly Indian raids as late as 1760 into a settled staple-producing region capable of supporting a confident and influential planter elite by 1810. Klein's study both deepens our understanding of the rise of a self-conscious planter elite in the backcountry and broadens our understanding of how that emerging elite eventually cooperated with the long-established lowcountry gentry to forge the "exceptional social and political unity" which characterized nineteenth-century South Carolina. Readers, like this reviewer, who disagree with Klein's class-centered interpretation, may quarrel with Klein's conclusions, but they will surely not dispute the excellence of her scholarly craftsmanship or deny the significance of her achievement.

The crux of Klein's argument lies in her contention that the South Carolina backcountry's aspiring planter elite was engaged in a "dual struggle" (p. 2) during the latter half of the eighteenth century, fighting with one hand to win political equality with the entrenched elite of the coastal parishes while struggling with the other to consolidate and enhance their own position as the legitimate leaders of backcountry society. Thus the backcountry's celebrated struggle for political equality at the state level, Klein maintains, "cannot be understood independently of class tensions and accommodations within the backcountry itself" (p. 2). It is to the examina-

tion of this complex set of class tensions and accommodations that Klein devotes most of her attention. Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century as propertied men (storekeepers, millers, surveyors, etc.) close to the center of active but essentially local networks of commerce and exchange, the backcountry's would-be planters searched diligently for a staple suited to their region's soil and climate, expanded their land and slave holdings whenever possible, and combined to push anyone who did not share their vision of a region dominated by commercial agriculture to the margins, both socially and geographically, of backcountry society.

Within this general interpretive framework, Klein views the Regulator movement of the 1760s as an effective, planter-led movement to control landless hunters and bandits who were at best a nuisance and at worst a threat to the stable backcountry social order envisioned by the emerging elite. Klein admits that the bloody inland civil war which terrorized the backcountry during the American Revolution was not, at its core, a product of internal class conflict, but she does contend that whiggish backcountry planters sometimes used this brutal partisan warfare to expand their influence. After the Revolution, backcountry planters, increasingly confident of their status within the region, moved, albeit haltingly, to establish political alliances with the less conservative members of the Lowcountry gentry. The common interest of both elites in the furious, and highly speculative, land grab of the 1790s, Klein suggests, facilitated the alliance-making process. Emboldened by their new-found strength and assisted by their new-found allies, backcountry planters pushed hard for a stronger voice in state government, and their efforts culminated in the much-heralded "Compromise of 1808," a complicated constitutional arrangement which gave the backcountry and the coastal parishes roughly equal representation in the state legislature. This compromise significantly enhanced the backcountry's political clout, but it did so, Klein points out, only after the skittish lowcountry gentry was persuaded of the backcountry elite's firm commitment to slavery and only on terms that ensured that the state's black-belt, expanded to include the plantation-oriented middle districts as well as the coastal region, would retain its predominant voice in state affairs.

Klein believes that by 1810 the imposition of planter hegemony on backcountry society was well-nigh complete. Backcountry planters had won grudging recognition of their political equality from the proud tidewater elite. Cotton, though not the breeder of planter ambitions, had brought new wealth and stability to the backcountry and helped solidify the planters' social position. An intricate, though *ad hoc*, strategy of assertion and accommodation gained the planters social peace with the surrounding yeomen majority, and early planter involvement in the revival movement that swept the region during the early 1800s effectively muted any possible evangelical critique of either slavery or planter luxury. Thus backcountry planters had successfully cultivated a genuine, if conditional, internal harmony that protected their own status and power, and in doing so,

Klein concludes, guaranteed that their region would long be characterized by social hierarchy, vast inequalities of wealth, and chattel slavery.

For all its apparent cogency, however, Klein's argument is flawed at crucial points. Her definition of the planter class as an elite characterized by its "wealth relative to the region's white majority," its "relative freedom from farm labor," and its members' "ability to involve themselves in a variety of alternative activities" (p. 7) seems far too imprecise for a study devoted primarily to the emergence of planters as a class. Moreover, Klein's insistence that backcountry planters were not capitalists rests almost entirely on her choice of a cramped Marxist definition which holds that capitalism exists only where there is a well-articulated free-labor market. To be sure, planters used slaves rather than free labor, but their aggressive acquisition of wealth and their use of that wealth (capital) to develop and refine products (export staples), to seek new markets, and to build infrastructure suggests that planters devoted most of their economic energy to doing exactly what capitalists are supposed to do. Claiming that these planters were not capitalists surely obscures more about their actions, and even their own self-understanding, than it reveals. And finally, the complex mix of assertion and accommodation that Klein sees as the path leading to planter hegemony could just as easily be interpreted another way. Many of these "accommodations" were, in fact, planter concessions to yeomen demands. The planters' wealth certainly had its influence, but the power of the yeomanry's numerical majority was not small in a society where numbers counted not only at the ballot box but also in the militia units crucial to protection against slave insurrection. A democratic-republican political ideology which "identified yeomen with planters by emphasizing their joint position as independent household heads" (p. 304) prevailed in the region because it satisfied both groups. The yeomen, comfortable in their independence and enjoyment of political rights, declined to use the shared rhetoric of political equality to mount a radical challenge to inequalities of wealth not because they had been cowed or tricked by planters, but because such a challenge would have been fundamentally incompatible with the existence of a social order which tied freedom to the control of productive property and the autonomy of households. For all its faults, such a social order was as much a product of the backcountry yeomanry's social vision as it was that of the planters' class will.

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War of Another Kind: A Southern Community in the Great Rebellion. By Wayne K. Durrill. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. 288 pp.

Was the Civil War a rich man's war and a poor man's fight? Wayne K. Durrill claims it was that and something more in *War of Another Kind*.