

Book Review

Edited by Tom Costa

Wilma A. Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Southern Appalachia's reputation for being a region where slavery was weak, the least Southern part of the Old South, has been challenged on several previous occasions. Here Wilma A. Dunaway mounts a similar but more comprehensive attack. First, she takes a comprehensive approach and considers the entire region of 215 counties in nine states. Second, her study incorporates both statistical analysis and qualitative sources. It may not be quite the definitive treatment she aspires to, but nevertheless comes close.

Dunaway begins by tracing population patterns. Slavery appeared early in the Mountain South, but its growth over time was not uniform or steady. The author identifies several reasons for interregional differences. One was the late opening of the region's southernmost frontier, following the Cherokee removal. Another, fueling the growth of slavery in the more mountainous areas, was the demand for unskilled laborers in extractive industries. The third was the export of surplus slaves to the cotton frontier. By 1860, nearly three of every ten adults in the Mountain South were enslaved, about fifteen percent of the population, with considerable difference between subregions. Free blacks, who endured substantial restrictions, augmented the slave population. About eighteen percent of households in Southern Appalachia owned slaves, compared with nearly 29 percent for the South as a whole. Yet, the slave-owning population in Appalachia dominated the politics, economy, and culture just as it did elsewhere in the antebellum South. As Dunaway shows, the lower level of slavery in the Mountain South produced a society which resembled the rest of the South more than it did the North.

Most Appalachian slaves labored on small or medium-sized plantations that mixed subsistence agriculture with the production of sur-

pluses and cash crops for the export market. Plantation owners usually managed their operation personally. Since labor needs varied over the crop cycle, slaves on small plantations were often put to other tasks, such as livestock care. Large plantations were comparatively rare due to the limited availability of fertile land. Instead, profits were invested in other regional enterprises such as mining and internal improvements. More than two-fifths of the black population was engaged in nonagricultural work. Many Appalachian slaves were employed in towns, engaged in tourism services, transportation industries, herding, and manufacturing.

Statistical analysis forms the heart of the early chapters; later chapters rely more upon qualitative sources. Chapter 5 addresses interracial relations with poor whites. Chapter 6 addresses repression and resistance, followed by a closer consideration of slave culture. This part of the book allows for slave voices to come through, but breaks less new ground. It is, however, essential for Dunaway's goal of a comprehensive treatment.

Scholars of Appalachia will find this a very useful book, but this reviewer found a couple of problems. On page 53, the author fails to distinguish between free blacks who had been bound out by the Augusta County, Virginia court and those who had been bound out in other parts of the state. On page 84, Thomas Jefferson's caretaker at his Natural Bridge property was not a slave but a former slave. These are both small problems, but raise the question about the data presented for other parts of the Mountain South with which this reviewer is less familiar. More annoying, most of the citations in chapter 7 are off by one number.

Two questions arise in terms of study design. First, while the author defines the Mountain South in terms of terrain, she defines the subregions primarily in terms of state boundaries. Why not be consistent and define subregions also by geography, such as by watersheds? Second, this reviewer had reservations about the author's decision to include counties whose western border was marked by the Blue Ridge but more properly belong to the piedmont in terms of economic and social character. It hardly comes as a surprise that this tier of southern counties was found to be different from the rest of the Mountain South.

— Ellen Eslinger
DePaul University