

The Southern Ethos

The Changing Politics of the South;

edited by William C. Havard, *Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972. 755 pp. \$17.50.*

HERE THIRTEEN PROFESSORS take up the themes of V. O. Key's *Southern Politics*, updating them in a comprehensive survey. Their labors are organized into four political and geographical compartments, *viz.*, "The Evolving States" (Virginia, Florida, Tennessee, Texas), "The Wavering States" (Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina) "The Protest States" (Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, South Carolina) and "Revolt in Washington," plus introductory and overview chapters by the editor. Though the interpretative insights, particularly in the case of the "Protest States," are something short of sagacious, the book does contain a wealth of information about geo-demographic voting patterns, about factions and personalities, and about the kaleidoscopic movement of politics and events during the great upheavals this region has lately undergone.

In many places and in many ways the vagaries of local politics seem merely to reflect those of the nation at large; for example the schizophrenic inconsistency of the Arkansawyers in rejecting an avatar of the native genius, such as Jim Johnson, for a Fulbright or a Rockefeller, the rise of the incorruptible and admirable Lester Maddox in Georgia, the changing of the order in South Carolina, the politics of resistance in Louisiana, the failure of will and nerve among the state leadership in Virginia and the consequent collapse of the initially brave and heroic effort at "interposition," the erosion of Southern power in Congress—these are matters of general as well as of academic concern. None of the symposiasts exhibits the literary and analytical skill that we might expect from a John Synon or a Phyllis Schlafly, but each

writes interestingly and on the whole adequately about his subject. Unfortunately, however, when the academic analyst turns his perceptual gaze southward his vision becomes confused by the *Zeitgeist* and tends to focus on the trivial or the respectably erroneous and to make them the bases of his commentary (notable examples in one or both regards are prominent on pages 438-39, 450, 464-65, 500, 517 and 518). The academic and journalistic notion that the Southerner's thought and action in all things secular and sacred is inspired by a phobia toward Negroes is a self-perpetuating myth—a hardy perennial in the garden of prejudice. The myth encourages the analyst to juxtapose the words and deeds of hotheads and extremists of an earlier era with contemporary phenomena (pp. 490, 515), to apply pejorative terms like "alienation" and "authoritarian" to anti-Jacobin political views (p. 500), to see expressed veneration for the federal system as a "code" allusion to race segregation (pp. 439, 509). It enables him to find a high correlation between the candidacy of Senator Thurmond in 1948 and that of Senator Goldwater in 1964 by suggesting that "both were perceived as segregationist candidates" (p. 441) and to explain the Southerner's allegiance to the values and ideals of an older America as an "escape mechanism" (p. 489).

One of these days, perhaps, an open-minded and enterprising analyst may make a startling discovery about the practical effect of the Negro question in Southern politics: that it has not worked toward getting conservatively principled men—or, for that matter, demagogic men—elected to office as often as it has worked against them. Indeed, it has provided a convenient and skillfully exploited smokescreen whereby liberal Southern politicians—Fulbright, Sparkman, Hill, in illustrative particular—have managed to persuade their electorates that they are the true representatives of the Southern spirit.

Although, as Havard appears to imply, the number of Southern states holding to

the integrity of the Confederate tradition may now have shrunk to four or five, it may well turn out that from these states will come—perhaps has come already—the movement that will call the liberal establishment to justice and deliver us from the hypocrisy and ideological babble now disguised as “civil rights,” but Havard only sees these states as “destined to remain for an indeterminate time closer to the model of post-Reconstruction politics than to what is generally perceived as the national model.” Whittaker Chambers, however, observed in *Cold Friday*:

Ages change, politics shift and slither—the conservative spirit does not change. It adjusts because it is a summation of human wisdom, and in a sense organic. . . . [It] bends or yields to what is passing, but maintains, as the light shines in darkness, what is everlasting. . . .

The organic spirit in society has not been eradicated, despite increased urbanization, with its concomitants of boosterism, employeeism, educational acculturation, the infestation of “New Breed” politicians, social and economic patronage persuasions, and the ascendancy of national over regional norms.

The Democratic primary election of 1972 in Florida provided factual as well as symbolic evidence that where change, growth, alien cultural influx, reapportionment and so on have become especially pronounced, the effect has not eliminated that organic integrity which many Southerners regard as basic Americanism. Similarly, the voting returns on national and local issues in Michigan, Maryland, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and other areas outside the South also indicate a spirit of rebellion against the liberal dispensation which may be rapidly coming to ferment and may presage a political uprising comparable to that of 1896 in support of William Jennings Bryan.

Reviewed by TOMMY W. ROGERS