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Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont (Book Review)

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Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont. By Allen Tullos. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989. xviii + 419 pp. Cloth, \$34.95; paper, \$12.95.)

The chapters of this book wind through the history of the Piedmont like the streams and rivers that drove the region's early textile mills. Chapters run parallel to one another, at various speeds and depths, coursing over the same terrain and yet seldom converging. Chapters rush ahead only to double back on themselves, to swirl in countercurrents, to linger in large and slow-moving pools. Rather than presenting a conventional history of industrialization in the Piedmont, in other words, this book cuts across the histories of the region's classes and genders "in search of motive, desire, social character, and relations of power."

Any judgment about the success of that search depends largely upon the presuppositions and predispositions of the reader, for Allen Tullos does not marshal evidence or make arguments in familiar ways. Unlike historians "intent on an authoritative skein of facts and a well-seamed argument," historians who delimit "lives as lived in a historical time and place" into "fragmented parts of someone else's narrative," Tullos opts instead for extended biographies of a few families and individuals from both the industrialist and the mill worker class. He tries to present their lives with as much fullness as he can, *sometimes removing himself entirely* from chapters based on oral narratives.

Tullos is especially sensitive to authorial imposition, for his book is in large part a meditation on "the fatherly voices that sought to control the historical Piedmont's here and hereafter," the men who possessed the power and the will "to impose consent or silence around family dinner tables, across merchants' ledger books, in pulpits and along pews, down weavers' alleys between rows of looms, and over oak desks at the offices of the region's manufacturers." Tullos, it soon becomes clear, distrusts and dislikes those who spoke with the voice of authority. Stern ministers, abusive husbands, and arrogant industrialists echo throughout his account; joyful religious brethren and admirable entrepreneurs remain largely silent. The book's portrayal of the human costs of southern in-

dustrialization follows a well-established tradition, even as the book boldly innovates in other ways.

The most novel and striking innovation is the focus on the cultural dimensions of the "habits of industry," the habits of striving, discipline, and *subordination* that transformed the life of the Piedmont. Child rearing, church doctrine, work discipline, education, and marriage receive considerable, and welcome, attention. In Tullos's portrayal, the habits of industry fell like cold shadows over the comfortable parlors of privileged families, over churches and schoolhouses, over the factories and mill villages of working people. This dark portrayal owes more to Max Weber, Erich Fromm, and Lewis Mumford than it does to Charles Beard or Barrington Moore, the inspiration for earlier critiques of southern industrialization. The new emphasis may help turn southern history away from what has become an arid debate over the roots of the dominant class of the New South and toward a fuller understanding of the culture and society as a whole.

True to his ideals, Tullos allows his characters their full say even when their testimony subtly conflicts with the parts of the narrative where he takes center stage. The working men and women who tell their stories here, as well as the successful industrialists, often speak in terms of escape from dreary farm life, of satisfaction and accomplishment in the industrial world, of better chances for their children. Tullos's unusual narrative toleration allows us to hear about both the gains and the losses in the Piedmont, though it is clear he believes the losses grievous. His sophisticated account challenges the familiar way historians tell the story of the New South, even as the familiar sad moral remains.

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