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Referees' Reports

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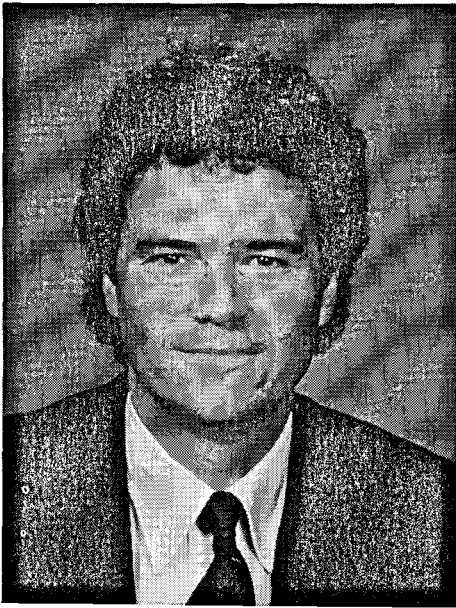
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Edward L. Ayers



Courtesy University of Virginia University Relations.

I am embarrassed to admit how much I like this essay. It seems to me just the sort of thing historians, especially senior historians, should be writing, both for our leading professional journals and for a general readership. It is elegant, revealing without being self-indulgent, engaged in current debates without being strident. Although I am a specialist in the field with which this piece deals and thus familiar with the literature, I found myself pulled along by this essay's momentum, by its revelations and emotional power. I imagine that historians who do not specialize in southern history or the history of race relations will find it even more useful, a way to get a fix on the important issues it discusses.

A caveat: my enthusiasm may seem a result of being favorably mentioned in the

essay. I was both surprised and enormously flattered to find my work there. All I can say is that I had been deeply impressed by the essay from the very beginning and would have written just as enthusiastic an endorsement in any case. It is possible, too, that my respect for the author—clearly revealed by internal evidence—heightened my appreciation. Upon reflection, his reputation seems all the more reason to publish the essay: people will want to know what he thinks, how his thought has evolved in the twelve years since *The Crucible of Race*. Joel Williamson is a major name in the profession and will attract readers.

I do have one suggestion. While the piece is beautifully written, doubling back to key issues and images in very effective ways, some of the discussion of historiography could be tightened up a bit, it seems. Williamson introduces *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, for example, and then discusses it again later in the essay. He is using the book for different purposes in the two places, but the repeated discus-

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sion detracts from some of the power in the essay as it builds toward its conclusion. Indeed, it might be that the author would do well to bring the early historiography closer to the beginning of the essay, setting the scene for the writing of *After Slavery*, and discuss the later historiography in a separate part.

Other than that, I am afraid I like this essay pretty much as it is. Historians, as the reception of Peter Novick's book reveals, are fascinated by other historians, the evolution of their work, and its relationship to their lives and times. Joel Williamson's essay will constitute a memorable instance of this genre and I encourage the *Journal of American History* to publish it.