spirit.” She claims that her view, by diverting attention from “the onset of competitive self-interest” as the principal solvent of deference to the leadership of a partisan gentry, makes possible a new understanding of the transition from republicanism to democracy (260). But instead of describing the process, her account assertions its logic. She argues that “there was only one way out of this endless battle of reputations,” which led to a “whirlpool of dissension,” namely, “the anonymity of party” conflict in which “politics became a war between opposing armies rather than a personal contest of reputations” (261, 260, 261).

Freeman’s approach points to a novel way of understanding the passions participants brought to the political conflicts of the early Republic, but her focus on personal honor excludes consideration of most of the issues over which these conflicts arose. This emphasis, in turn, begs an unanswered question: How could men for whom honor came first have managed to accomplish anything of note? In her penultimate paragraph, she claims that the central legacy of the founders is hope, because “these fallible, flawed people could accomplish great things” (288). Clearly she feels their success in replacing a political culture rooted in personal honor with a two-party system that restrained its excesses ranks highly among their accomplishments. But I had trouble seeing how her “grammar of political combat” helps us to understand the other achievements of the founders, particularly their implementation of a republican system of government on an unprecedented scale and its preservation in a decidedly hostile world.

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The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s–1880s. By Bertram Wyatt-Brown (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2001) 395 pp. $55.00 cloth $19.95 paper

Wyatt-Brown’s Shaping of Southern Culture is an attempt to sum up his perspective on the development of Southern thought in the noted time period. The work consists of twelve essays, five previously published, divided into three roughly chronological sections: “Race and Politics”; “Grace: Southern Religion in Transition”; and “War and Aftermath.”

The opening section consists of three essays, the first an attempt to apply Wyatt-Brown’s well-nigh patented concept of “honor” to African-American slaves in the South. Curiously, this endeavor results in a rehashing of previous work by Genovese, Elkins, Styron, and Patterson.1 It also rests heavily on well-known slave narratives, such as those of

Douglass and Ibrahima, and sheds little new light on this matter. In the second essay, the author looks at the Revolutionary Era, again with “honor” at the forefront of his analysis. He emphasizes—again in unoriginal fashion—that the Founding Fathers premised their sense of “honor” on the fact that they were not slaves and not African. Though interestingly argued, Wyatt-Brown brings little new knowledge or insight to the subject. The final essay in this section deals with Andrew Jackson, duels, honor, and the peculiar nature of Southern violence—an oft-visited topic, too; it barely makes any mention of “race.”

The second section consists of four essays that examine religious practices among backwoods whites, religious justifications for slavery, and theological rationales for disunion. These chapters are heavy going, with page after page of elaboration—even, for example, of the well-known Southern belief that God was on their side. Moreover, in irritating fashion, the author seizes every opportunity to point to the overriding primacy of “honor” in motivating their actions and thoughts.

The final four chapters deal with the coming of the Civil War, the struggle itself, and its aftermath. We are told, not surprisingly, that slavery was the root cause for the secession, but it was “Southern honor that pulled the trigger.” Once again Wyatt-Brown plunges into the swamp of knife duels, fist fights, and associated innovative forms of violence that marked the Southern way of life (178). The chapter on the war applies “honor” to the motivation of Southern soldiers, while examining McPherson’s and Wiley’s work on the subject of why soldiers fought. He looks briefly, in this context, at the Fort Pillow massacre. Nothing earth-shaking is in these chapters; the analysis relies mainly on secondary sources.

Wyatt-Brown’s examination of the tragic aftermath of the war for white Southerners relies on such well-known sources as Chestnut, Woodward, and Fletcher. There is much of Margaret Mitchell, and little attention is paid to the plight of the African-Americans. Finally, he leaps forward to the violence unleashed against blacks when the South “redeemed” itself and to such now well-known and much-covered events as the lynching of Anthony Crawford and the Wilmington race riots. These last chapters, seemingly all written for this book, have a consistency and narrative flow that are absent from the earlier articles, which seem to have been arbitrarily placed into certain categories for editorial purposes.


A fine mind is at work in this book, grappling with important problems. But the valuable material does not start until halfway through the work, by which time all but the most dedicated readers will have long since lost interest. In sum, this is an arbitrary and largely unsuccessful attempt to explain Southern history through the prism of “honor.”

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*Family Men: Middle-Class Fatherhood in Early Industrializing America.* By Shawn Johansen (New York, Routledge, 2001) 249 pp. $21.95

Johansen has written a thoughtful book about fatherhood among middle-class U.S. northerners between 1800 and 1860. Concerned that common sources used for family history, such as advice manuals, are better for determining ideals than realities, the author has examined the private collections of letters and diaries of more than ninety families in order to describe and analyze what men actually did to fulfill their parental responsibilities. In the introduction and an essay on sources, Johansen recognizes his sample as overwhelmingly middle-class (almost one-third are merchants or lawyers), urban (only 14.1 percent farmers), and native-born whites. In addition to the biases inherent in these attributes, he notes that only families that remained on relatively good terms for a long period of time would produce a record that would have a significant impact on a study like his. Deep-seated anger (the kind that might result from poor parenting) would be unlikely to leave a personal written record. Implicit in what he says is the fact that separation for extended periods was also necessary to produce letters if not diaries.

Johansen argues that the topic of fatherhood has been too long ignored, in part because of the powerful links between family history and women’s history, given its concepts of separate spheres and domesticity for the period. The emphasis on women’s roles in the family, and their presumed increase in the early nineteenth century, has rendered fatherhood so inconsequential as apparently to need no study. Johansen suggests, however, that a more careful examination of fatherhood before 1800 and after 1900 would show less clear-cut patterns than historians assume. Overall, the study is well grounded in the appropriate historiography.

This book shows the error of ignoring fathers. The author makes a convincing case that men played a central role in the lives of their children throughout much of their lives. Because Johansen finds continuity to be the central theme of fathering, he organizes the book according to the life course. Early chapters focus on young men and their decisions during the early years of their marriages and how the arrival of children affected their lives, eliciting ambiguous emotions of resentment and love. Men were involved with their children from birth (even attending the delivery on occasion), playing with them, nursing them when sick,