

understanding free labor as a system predicated (in no small part) on fraud to identifying capitalism as a system based on the theft of surplus labor. However, Luskey does not address how the Civil War's exposure of free labor's shortcomings led Americans to attempt to adjust the system—to push back against “free market” wage labor—by either reconstructing and reifying hierarchies of race through Jim Crow and ethnic segregation or organizing along class lines through trade unions and radical politics. (It is telling that Luskey's crucial descriptor is “fraud” and not “exploitation.”) Finally, Luskey only nods to the ultimate fraud of free labor (one not perceived as such by his protagonists): that its basic pledge of cheap farms in the West required genocidal war against Native people and the appropriation of Native lands. Put another way, the author's cogent emphasis on what we might deem certain microfrauds of a maturing economic system obscures at times—and only at times—a fuller consideration of that system's macroviolence and exploitation.

That said, *Men Is Cheap* is a splendidly written and remarkably well-researched study—one chock-full of fascinating vignettes, mini biographies, and insights. Its stories illuminate how a conflict fought in the name of freedom required the dependence and compulsion of millions and the ways in which the preservation of the Union and slave emancipation were bound to an emerging capitalist culture that countless Americans perceived as fraudulent. This is essential reading for students of capitalism and the Civil War era.

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Southern Scoundrels: Grifters and Graft in the Nineteenth Century. Edited by Jeff Forret and Bruce E. Baker. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2021. 272 pp. Hardcover, \$40.00. ISBN: 978-0-8071-7219-3.

doi:10.1017/S0007680521000878

Reviewed by R. Scott Huffard Jr.

The American South has always posed an interesting set of questions to business and economic historians. Over much of the twentieth century, scholars posited the dynamic growth of the North as the model for capitalist development, seeing the South as either a precapitalist entity outside the system or a warped version of or deviation from the true

nature of capitalism. Business historians examining the distinctive development of the nineteenth-century South have typically focused their inquiry on the “New South” era, which witnessed the rise of industrialization thanks to the influence of railroad corporations, textile mills, and country stores. More recently, scholars associated with the “new history of capitalism” have shifted focus to the plantation as a site of capitalist exploitation and innovation, and they have highlighted the centrality of the South to the global economy and shown how the region was tied into national networks of credit and exchange. In these new accounts, the South takes center stage in the rise of global capitalism and the region pioneers methods of labor control, drives innovation in new forms of credit, and produces cheap commodities used in factories around the world. This new approach has been enlightening, yet it has also demonstrated the need for even more work to tell the story of southern capitalism. In both the older and new approaches to studying the history of southern business, the focus has been on how big structures and economic forces shape the lives of white and Black southerners and how these southern businesses interact in a regional, national, and global marketplace.

In *Southern Scoundrels: Grifters and Graft in the Nineteenth Century*, the editors and contributors reorient our attention to the nitty-gritty details of southern capitalism. In particular, there are shades of Michael Zakim and Gary J. Kornblith’s edited collection *Capitalism Takes Command* (2011) here, and the authors respond to the call from this 2011 volume to trace the rise of capitalism more through changing mentalities and mores than through the rise and fall of large corporations and institutions. The historical actors—slave traders, counterfeiters, confidence men, special detectives, and unscrupulous Confederate officials—presented in this volume are sometimes obscure, and they are certainly far from admirable figures, but in their dealings with the market they allow us to see these subtle shifts and to recognize the bounds of the larger structures that shaped the southern economy. The authors make a crucial point that these scoundrels were not deviants or marginal figures in southern society. Rather, they served as “functionaries of the emerging capitalist order” (p. 8). This aligns with Forret and Baker’s more expansive definition of capitalism that recognizes the need to look at the system outside of its ideal form.

As the editors, Jeff Forret and Bruce E. Baker, remind us in the introduction, the book’s setting in the South—a region with a peculiar brand of business—is crucial to the success of these “scoundrels.” Swindling was in some ways a distinctively southern trait, as Forret and Baker note the “long tradition of tricksters” coming out of backcountry and African folk traditions (p. 7). The rural and largely agrarian nature of the South heightened the importance of personal connections and

trust, opening up spaces for con men to reinvent themselves and misrepresent their wares; white men were able to take advantage of the inherent contradictions of the slave trade by misrepresenting the histories of the enslaved men and women they sold; and the tumult of the Civil War presented opportunities to a wide range of profiteers and confidence men. After the war ended, southerners were able to take advantage of the New Orleans black market or, in the case of William Faucett, wed a career of violence to a newly ascendent Ku Klux Klan and the reassertion of white supremacy. The best of the chapters in this volume make connections like these that reveal structural truths about the nature of the South and capitalism at large. For example, one can better understand rehibition laws and how they applied to Louisiana's fraudulent slave trade through the story of a single trader instead of a top-down reading of legal codes, and in the dealings of this one unscrupulous slave trader we can recognize how the entire business of selling human beings rested on these frauds and shady dealings. Similarly, David Schenck's sequestration activities show not just personal dishonesty but the heavy-handed and corrupt nature of the Confederate war effort, and an itinerant preacher's journeys demonstrate the tenuous nature of trust that bound together Mississippi's credit networks and the cotton boom at large.

If one could make any criticisms, the collection feels at times a little disparate and diffuse, as it spans a very wide temporal and geographical range. A volume that takes the reader from the Mississippi cotton boom to the coalfields of postbellum Virginia is inevitably going to stumble into the thickets of the age-old southern history debate over continuity and change, and with such a low-level focus, one can lose sight of a larger narrative and of how federal and corporate power shaped the South over the course of a tumultuous century. But casting a wide net was perhaps the point here and this is hardly a fair critique given the strength of these essays. In the introduction, Forret and Baker note that "we lack an account of how capitalism developed in the South"; while this volume does not attempt to give us this account, it does give us the pieces to build a more synthetic story of southern capitalism (p. 7). If we are to see the South as essential to the rise of global capitalism, then the lives of these "southern scoundrels" should be of interest to business historians of all stripes.

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