

in changing both American religion and American homes is both compelling and overstated. Unquestionably, Methodism was the single most significant denominational contributor to the movement toward heart religion and domesticity in nineteenth-century America. One wishes, however, that the author had more clearly placed the Methodist record in the larger context of the Second Great Awakening and the changes that that movement effected toward religious seriousness, individual ability, and individualism throughout Protestantism and society in general.

Also, while the author shows a strong relationship between Methodism and domesticity, he exaggerates the extent to which Methodism is central in explaining the importance of the family and the extent to which domestication is central in explaining early Methodism. One could argue that the Methodists were merely following the pattern of many other groups before and since who became a family-like fellowship (note, for example, the contemporary popularity of the Bill Gaither song and hymnal, "The Family of God," which is used in many denominations) or who carried their evangelistic concerns to their homes. The Methodists were unique, however, in at least one important respect: more than any other major nineteenth-century denomination, they provided spiritual leadership opportunities for women (see chapter 12). While domestication is one useful way of interpreting Methodist history, there are other modes that are no less important; some of these (the importance of status and class in the rise of Methodism, the idea of separation from the world, a comparison of the foundation stage and the "middle age" or institutional stage of religious movements, and the importance of women) the author discusses with insight although he does not focus on them. In summary, Schneider has written a good book on a subject of developing interest; however, if his interpretive framework had been more broadly conceived, his good book would have been an even better one.

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American Agriculture: A Brief History. By R. Douglas Hurt. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994. Pp. xii, 412. Illustrations, maps, suggested readings, appendix, tables, bibliographical note, index. \$34.95.)

Agriculture occupies a special place in American history with images of farmers reflecting Jeffersonian agrarian ideals. In a nation whose food exports now reach around the globe, farming has changed from early frontier cultivation into an efficient agribusiness. Agriculture once constituted the primary way of life for generations of American families; today less than 2 percent of the population of the United States is classified as farmers.

Although R. Douglas Hurt describes this current work as a brief history, readers will perceive it as a major re-analysis of this agricultural transformation. Hurt focuses more on narratives than on traditional listings of statistics and employs a topical approach within chronological timeframes as reflected in the context of social, political, and economic forces. His treatment is not simply blind praise for hard-working farmers but a tale leavened with less desirable aspects such as greed, racism, abusive farming techniques, speculation, and outright corruption. Nonetheless, his approach is objectively balanced, and he poses the obviously recurring question, did American farmers wish to maintain their essentially small subsistence-style operations, or were they eager participants in the growing market economy with its commercial production? He maintains that many farmers viewed themselves, perhaps contradictorily, as pursuers of both ends of the agricultural spectrum. Those readers interested in this perspective as pertinent to agrarian values might wish to begin with Hurt's stunningly perceptive essay entitled "Agrarianism" (pp. 72-77).

Hurt views the period 1865–1900 as one of the most revolutionary in terms of change. Slavery ended in 1865, while expensive mechanization and increased demands for capital combined with unfair commodity marketing to buffet helpless farmers much like straw in the wind. Clearly the Gilded Age was not golden for all, and farmers suffered at the lowest rungs of the economic ladder.

By the early twentieth century economic trends in terms of commodity supply and demand became more favorable. Hurt comprehensively summarizes these trends in his chapter entitled the "Age of Prosperity" (pp. 221-79). However, increased farm technology and policies of the federal government induced many farmers into over-production by World War I. Seeds of disaster were thus planted for the grim 1920s with their collapsing markets and sagging farm values followed by the debacle of the Great Depression in the 1930s. In response, New Deal programs set in motion the basis for ever-expanding farm programs.

A popular slogan in the 1970s became "Get Bigger, Get Better or Get Out." Many small and middle-sized farm operators did precisely that—often whether or not they wanted to do so. Correspondingly, present-day federal farm funding concentrates more on new specialty programs such as biotechnology and less on conventional price-support/loan programs. Solidly researched, beautifully written, and replete with maps and illustrations, Hurt's agricultural history becomes the new standard reference and is destined to be the definitive study for many years in the future.

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