

# The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country 1670-1920.

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## ***The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country 1670-1920 (review)***

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Civil War History

The Kent State University Press

Volume 37, Number 1, March 1991

pp. 94-95

10.1353/cwh.1991.0028

REVIEW

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### **In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

94CIVIL WAR HISTORYConfederate Unionists and the War," consists of a dozen biographical sketches of Unionists who eventually supported the Confederacy. Yet from this small sampling, the author makes sweeping generalizations, comparing the different tendencies of Whigs and Jackson Democrats regarding their loyalty to the Union. Donald F. Reynolds East Texas State University The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country 1670-1920. By Peter A. Coclanis. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. Pp. 370. \$39.95.) Has any state attracted a larger number of first-rate historians in the

last quarter century than South Carolina? Since the mid-1960s, a splendid new work of history on the Palmetto State has been published about every two years. Among the most significant are: Joel Williamson's *After Slavery*, Steven Channing's *Crisis of Fear*, Thomas Holt's *Black Over White*, Peter Wood's *Black Majority*, Daniel Littlefield's *Rice and Slavery*, Orville Vernon Burton's *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions*, Charles Joyner's *Down By the Riverside*, James Roark and Michael Johnson's *Black Masters*, Drew Faust and Carol Bleaser's books on James Henry Hammond, Theodore Rosegarten's *Tombée*, and Lacy Ford's *The Origins of Southern Radicalism*. Now add Peter Coclanis and *The Shadow of a Dream* to the list. This is an impressive and daunting work of economic history based on a staggering amount of research and extensive reflection. Coclanis convincingly explains the rapid rise of South Carolina's low country in the seventeenth century, and its steady decline in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rejecting the notion that early Carolina experienced a prolonged frontier existence or self-sufficient economy, Coclanis asserts that almost from its inception as an English colony, the Carolina low country played a critical role in the Atlantic economy. He firmly fixes the expansion of rice production (and, to a lesser extent, indigo) in the eighteenth-century imperial system as Carolina "conformed almost perfectly to the mercantilist conception of the ideal colony" (77). The consequence of this economic growth was the concentration of immense wealth among a considerable number of families in colonial South Carolina. "[N]owhere else in British North America or perhaps the world for that matter did so sizable a population live so well" (90). Then, during the antebellum era and especially in the aftermath of the Civil War, low country rice faltered and failed in the international marketplace as it was buffeted by the competition of rice raised in the East Indies, as well as in Texas and Louisiana. The demise of rice, combined with the planters' inability to restructure or to diversify the economy left the low country one of the poorest regions in one of the nation's poorest states. This abbreviated summary cannot convey the subtlety and intricacy of Coclanis's exposition, nor his mastery of economic theory and detail. Neither does it address his fascinating but sometimes tangential excursions into Charleston architecture, geology, soil analysis, flora and fauna, and the morbidity and mortality of low country residents. As economic history—Coclanis prefers to characterize it as "historical sociology"—this volume comes equipped with all the proper accouterments: dense prose, abundant quantification, some sixty tables, 128 pages of footnotes for 160 pages of text. For readers inclined to embrace economic history, let the following serve as a tantalizing attraction: "Rather, they [several scholars] argue that gains in shipping were due mainly to organizational changes, particularly those due to economies of scale. Such changes—the fall over time in the number of guns per vessel and the rise in the ton/crew ratio, secular declines as well in freight rates, mean port-times, and the F.O.B./C.I.F. price differential are considered key sources of economic growth" (99). Other readers may desperately yearn and search in vain for a quote, a comment, a remark by a rice planter, a merchant, a factor, a slave, or anyone who happened to inhabit South Carolina a century or more ago. Those readers will have to be satisfied with frequently florid discourse and periodic literary allusions to the likes of Shakespeare, Lenin, and Langston Hughes. The...

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DONALD F. REYNOLDS

East Texas State University

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The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country 1670-1920, space-time organization is theoretically possible.

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