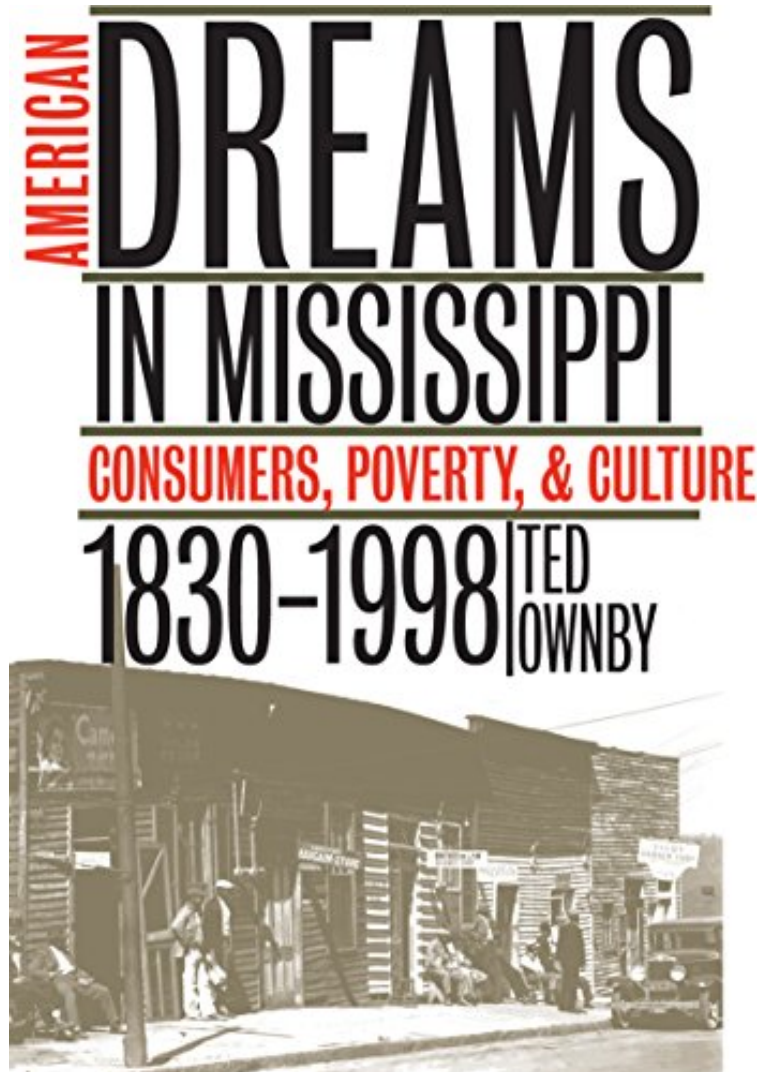


American Dreams in Mississippi: Consumers, Poverty, and Culture, 1830-1998

Ted Ownby

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Ted Ownby : American Dreams in Mississippi: Consumers, Poverty, and Culture, 1830-1998 before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised American Dreams in Mississippi: Consumers, Poverty, and Culture, 1830-1998:

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Insightful Cultural History by a Great Young Historian By A Customer...American Dreams in Mississippi is cultural (not economic) history. It is not about the reasons for poverty, but rather what it MEANS to live in a state that is perpetually impoverished while also living in a nation that bills itself as the Land of Opportunity. In this book, Ownby seeks to redefine the very concept of the American Dream. As his title suggests, there are in fact many dreams. Young and old, men and women, blacks and whites, rural and city folk all

experience these dreams differently, and Ownby gives a voice to them all. With all due respect to the late C. Vann Woodward (who I am certain Dr. Ownby has the highest regard for) *American Dreams in Mississippi* goes beyond the boundaries of conventional history, asking questions historians have never asked about the South and using new kinds of sources like clothing, furniture, cars, and song lyrics as well as literature, general store ledgers, and obscure state documents to break new ground. The chapter "Men Buying Cloth" reveals the important discovery that Mississippi women, contrary to the national stereotype, were historically not consumers. The section on slave purchases is, to my knowledge, the only study of its kind, and the discussions of blues culture and Civil Rights boycotts add a fresh perspective to those topics. If some parts of this book require a little effort on the reader's part, it is only because Ownby's research and documentation are so thorough that he provides not just one but many examples to back up each point. As Ownby lays out in his first chapter, the book is also grounded in solid theory. More works of history should be so "dry." I urge all readers of this book -- especially graduate students in history looking for an excellent example of their craft -- to stick with it. It is well worth the journey.

10 of 29 people found the following review helpful. Racial Patterns not Buying Patterns
By A Customer
Dr. Ted Ownby of the University of Mississippi has attempted to explain the social patterns of Mississippi from 1830-1995. In doing this, he has focussed on the buying patterns of the state's public. Through analyzing extensive sources and census records, Dr. Ownby has attempted to show that the buying power of poor Mississippians and the state's economic caste system led to political differences between black, poor white, and wealthy white Mississippians. In analyzing buying power, Dr. Ownby has failed to take into account C. Vann Woodward's famous essay on Race and Economics (1956). In Woodward's address he stated that the caste system was much more racial than class. The buying power of black Mississippians was not effective because they were poor, but rather they were poor because they were black. Dr. Cecil M. Cooper's 1989 groundbreaking analysis: *Dollar's and Cents Segregation: Black and Green in Rural Mississippi*, speaks along the same lines. Dr. Cooper has stated that Black Mississippians and poor white Mississippians had little access to wealth. However, poor white Mississippians had more access to credit. Credit was denied to African-Americans for the most part. If not denied black credit was used against black political efforts. Although Dr. Ownby's work attempts to tackle a very important issue, race and economics, he fails to give a coherent documentation on buying power from 1830-1990's. His reasons for choosing those dates are also unclear. It is one in a long line of academic books that fails to drive at the real reason for race division: social class. More research and documentation are needed for this book to successfully overcome its deficiencies.

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. fascinating take on consumerism with race and how the American ...
By Aimee L
fascinating take on consumerism with race and how the American Dream of acquisition plays out in different times for different people

The dreams of abundance, choice, and novelty that have fueled the growth of consumer culture in the United States would seem to have little place in the history of Mississippi--a state long associated with poverty, inequality, and rural life. But as Ted Ownby demonstrates in this innovative study, consumer goods and shopping have played important roles in the development of class, race, and gender relations in Mississippi from the antebellum era to the present. After examining the general and plantation stores of the nineteenth century, a period when shopping habits were stratified according to racial and class hierarchies, Ownby traces the development of new types of stores and buying patterns in the twentieth century, when women and African Americans began to wield new forms of economic power. Using sources as diverse as store ledgers, blues lyrics, and the writings of William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Richard Wright, and Will Percy, he illuminates the changing relationships among race, rural life, and consumer goods and, in the process, offers a new way to understand the connection between power and culture in the American South.

From Library Journal
Ownby (history, Univ. of Mississippi) has produced a provocative social history that examines the consumer behavior around four powerful dreams (abundance, democracy of goods, freedom of choice, and novelty) from a multicultural perspective. Instead of asking what is distinctive about Mississippi history, Ownby looks at what goods meant to various groups of Mississippians. In the antebellum period, the plantation economy produced shopping habits that kept society stratified. By the 20th century, new types of shopping and buying patterns had been established, challenging the old hierarchies and allowing women and African Americans to wield new forms of economic power. Ownby views the forces of consumer goods, shopping, and advertising as sources of liberation and empowerment for the underclass. His work "tries to treat with care and sympathy both those who chose to spend money for pleasure and liberation and those who chose not to do so." Ownby creatively uses a wide variety of secondary and primary source materials, often punctuated with photographs and illustrations, to illuminate the changing nature of Mississippi society and offers a new understanding of the connection between power and culture in the South. Recommended for academic libraries.
A Charles C. Hay, Eastern Kentucky Univ. Lib., Richmond
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From Booklist
Mississippi has frequently been portrayed as an economic, political, and racial backwater, even by fellow southerners. Of course, the seemingly chronic racial violence there during the civil rights era dramatically reinforced that image. Ownby, a professor of history and southern studies at the University of Mississippi, has utilized store ledgers, literature, and music lyrics to track economic and cultural changes

in Mississippi from the antebellum period to the present. This is an intensely researched, detailed study that is dry, sometimes tedious, but surprising and revealing. Topics such as race relations, consumer habits, sexual roles, and attitudes toward political authority are examined and generally shown to be more complicated than the images usually served up by the mass media and even historians. This is a valuable work of social history that could encourage a re-evaluation of many premises about the Deep South. Jay Freeman With this well-written and thoughtful book, Ownby adds an unexpected case study to the burgeoning literature on American consumerism. "Choice"