

in general and blacks in particular. It should definitely be added to every library.

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Joel Williamson. *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) xviii, 561 pp., \$25.00.

Almost twenty years ago Joel Williamson, professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, began work on this book, envisioned as the definitive history and reinterpretation of black-white relationships in our time. Along the way he modified his conceptions many times and detoured in 1977-78 to write *New People*, a study of the physical and cultural mixing of blacks and whites.

Williamson's central thesis as it ultimately evolved is that black-white relationships had assumed their present form by 1915, molded since 1850 in the "Crucible of Race" by the interplay of three white "mentalities": Liberalism, holding that blacks had the possibility of making progress; Conservatism, believing that blacks are, and always will be, inferior to whites; and Radicalism, seeing blacks as retrogressing toward their "natural state of savagery" with no place in the American society of the future. According to Williamson it was the Conservative mentality—the belief in black inferiority—which triumphed in 1915 and "persists strong and essentially unchanged" in white American thought—both Southern and national—until the present.

How well does Williamson's thesis hold up? Although the Conservative mentality *had* reasserted itself by 1915, and *did* dominate white thought at least until World War II and perhaps into the 1960s, there has been substantial tempering in the last short generation, with more whites assuming more liberal attitudes toward blacks. The thesis, then, as Forrest McDonald said in an earlier assessment, is "outmoded," and thus only partly correct. Certainly the existence of the National Association for Ethnic Studies and many others in which blacks and whites work together in complete equality is indication that white attitudes toward blacks are not monolithically Conservative.

Williamson's book is also weakened by numerous efforts at psychoanalysis, sometimes accompanied by such conditional words as "if," "seemingly," "it is possible," and "conceivably." Only one example should suffice: in analyzing late Victorian white male sexual thought and behavior in relation to rape by blacks, Williamson says (308) "White men were projecting upon black men extravagant sexual behavior

because they were, at varying levels, denying ordinary sexual behavior to themselves.” And yet on the previous page he had said “It seems unlikely that white men, in fact, much denied themselves sexual pleasure with their wives or with white women in general.”

Occasional typographical errors, use of inappropriate words, and uncritical use of sources further mar the book. For example: “sterile” for “impotent” (309), “disciples” for “discipline” (446), “functually” for “functionally” (522), and the United States with 8,000,000 people in 1902 and later, rather than the correct 75,000,000 and more (446).

But, aside from these shortcomings, *The Crucible of Race* has great value as an excellent historical narrative of black-white relationships in America. Virtually every significant person, event, and episode—historical and literary—is treated, with detail rarely found elsewhere. There is no bibliography and only two illustrative figures or charts, but the index is thorough and the extensive notes show that the author has drawn deeply from his sources.

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