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The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860. By Wilma A. Dunaway.

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and *Shem Pete's Alaska: The Territory of the Upper Cook Inlet Dena'ina* (1987).

Shirley A. Hauck, Ph.D.
Folklore North

The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860. By Wilma A. Dunaway. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996. 448 + xvii pages, maps, tables, diagrams, index. \$49.95 cloth; \$21.95 paper.

The First American Frontier makes important contributions to studies of Indian - White relations, Appalachian studies, world-systems analysis, studies of frontiers, and United States history. Her thesis is that Southern Appalachia—parts of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, and all of West Virginia—was not an isolated, subsistence, precapitalist enclave. Rather, its connections to the world-system underdeveloped the region. She bases her argument on extensive sampling of county statistics, diaries, travelers' accounts, and other primary data.

The book is organized in ten chapters. The first and the last emphasize theoretical issues. The intervening eight chapters present the data and use it to rethink theoretical issues. The book opens with a summary of the extant images of Appalachia, including the strawman of the "happy yeoman" and "barter merchants" and "fierce egalitarianism" (pp.3-4). Dunaway argues that these are mistaken images derived from overly narrow local histories. She argues that this can be remedied by embedding local histories in their larger contexts, a task to which a world-systems perspective is eminently well suited.

Her summary of the world-systems perspective is straightforward. The pursuit of profits draws capitalists to search constantly for new markets, new, cheaper, sources of raw material, and new, cheaper sources of labor. These pursuits, in turn, drive capitalist expansion and the incorporation of new areas along ever changing frontiers. Dunaway locates Appalachian history within world-system accounts of Anglo-French-Spanish rivalry for control of the New World. She notes how the three powers attempted to exercise dominance through preemptive colonization, and how all competed for alliances with Native groups, especially Cherokees, to use against the others, and how their territories served as

buffer zones between the European empires. Thus, "Settler Appalachia was *born capitalist*" (p. 15, emphasis in orig.).

Incorporation necessarily entails changes in political, economic, cultural, labor, gender, and environmental relations. It requires the displacement of native peoples, elimination of land held in common, development of land tenure arrangements that promote consolidation, and articulation of the local environment with the world economy. Her discussion of the disruptions of indigenous cultures and transformations of relations with the environment are useful additions to world-systems analysis.

Chapter two tells the story of the transformation and destruction of Cherokee and other Native American groups as a consequence of incorporation into the world-system. She notes that exploration and claims on the region were largely preemptive, as each European rival sought to block the others from access and control of peoples and resources. During the seventeenth century repeated epidemics reduced indigenous populations by some 90%. The effects of disease were exacerbated by European induced wars between various groups in a web of shifting, treacherous alliances.

British policy dictated frequent subsidization of the "Indian trade" in order to promote alliances. This trade became a means to political domination as Cherokees and others became dependent on European goods. The associated alliances required that Native groups fight with and for their European allies against other Europeans and other Native groups. In the process vengeance raids became commercialized slave raids, and Cherokee political organization became more centralized.

The political transformation was part of the economic transformation from subsistence farmers to commercial hunters. As African slaves became more common and Native populations declined, the latter became more valuable as slave catchers and collectors of deerskins and ginseng. She emphasizes that deerskins were an important input to European leather industry, unlike beaver pelts which were used in luxury goods. Ginseng was traded to China and else where in Asia. Not incidentally, the deerskin trade served as an outlet for cheap European goods. The new Cherokee "putting out system" destroyed the traditional subsistence economy, made war and hunting year round activities, and transformed gender roles. By mid eighteenth century agriculture was exclusively women's work, subsidiary to commercial activities. European traders used alcohol to intensify the

deerskin trade. Rules holding Cherokees collectively responsible for individual debts made it all but impossible for any individual or family to withdraw from the trade. As Dunaway documents quite clearly, these changes were not accidental by-products of trade, but consciously and vigorously pursued policies. These changes entailed massive changes in Cherokee culture and equally dramatic degradation of the environment. By mid 1700 deer were becoming scarce, and ginseng almost extinct.

The next chapter tells the story of the first Europeans who “resettled” and “repopulated” the region. Dunaway uses these terms, to emphasize that European settlers were moving into lands that had once belonged to others. She notes that over 50% of resettled lands had never been under federal control, and that often roads were built to attract resettlers. By the early nineteenth century overlapping and conflicting land titles and the attempts by speculators to hold land off the market for higher prices slowed resettlement. By the late 1830’s pressures for land acquisition—and the discovery of gold in Appalachian Georgia—culminated in the final removal of Indians to the west.

The next chapter describes the formation of an agrarian semiproletariat, a group of landless people forced into wage labor, or various forms of coerced labor in combination with wage labor, subsistence farming, gathering, and handicraft production. These arrangements reinforced low wages, especially for women, because such workers produced some or all of their own subsistence needs outside the capitalist economy,

Dunaway demonstrates that fewer than 40% of all farms were run on family labor, whereas over 50% use coerced labor of some form. By 1860 landless operators—tenants, sharecroppers, cottage tenants, and squatters—cultivated 40% of the land. About 20% of farm workers were not free legally: Cherokee squatters, slaves, and indentured persons. The Cherokees who had remained had no legal standing, hence their situation was always precarious. About 30% of the labor force were slaves, and 15% indentured. Women were an invisible source of labor whose work was systematically devalued.

In chapter 5, Dunaway notes that subsistence is “the human work and natural resources required to produce the items that are ‘physically indispensable’ to human maintenance from day to day and to family reproduction from generation to generation” (p. 124). Thus, barter and coerced labor are not necessarily indicators of subsistence. To the contrary, concentration of land ownership

made subsistence farming impossible for most. Only about 10% farmer owners were self-sufficient.

The next chapter examines non agricultural production in the region, mostly of raw materials for export. Industrialization was capitalized at less than 50% the rate of the rest of the country, and was concentrated in raw materials production. Elites argued that local workers were insufficiently disciplined, and so sought to import European workers. This, too, helped keep wages low.

The subsequent chapter traces the commodity chains connecting Appalachia with the rest of the world. Southern Appalachia experienced economic growth typical of peripheral areas: commercial enterprises focused on export of raw or near raw materials and siphoned labor and capital from investment in manufacturing. Local middlemen, whose income and loyalties were to external markets, took large profits from this trade.

These economic connections with world economy necessarily entailed noneconomic articulations with it: control resistance, but sufficiently decentralized to be easily manipulated by core capitalists. Independent Cherokee villages were transformed into a centralized polity, only to be disbanded, then removed "for their own good."

Farms were laid out to maximize landlord control of tenants, sharecroppers, and slaves. Debt peonage was an effective form of labor control. Pay or shares was often given in kind or vouchers which were deeply discounted by merchants. Manufacturing and mining was characterized by company towns, creating de facto debt peonage for nominally free wage laborers. The civil rights of workers were severely restricted. A worker fleeing debt to an employer would be returned by the sheriff and forced to work off the debt.

The environment was also degraded. Land first had to be depopulated, then repopulated but with land now treated as a commodity. Absentee speculators pursued quick profits, not sustainable yields. Clearcutting of timber was common. By 1775, bears, panthers, wildcats, buffalo, and wolves were gone. Tanneries, salt and iron works clear cut forests for fuel. By 1860 some areas of eastern Tennessee had been cut twice. Copper smelting released sulfur, poisoning adjacent regions. Early gold miners used hydraulic techniques which scarred the land. The point is that these changes—to Native Americans, to the stratification structure, to land, labor, culture, and the environment—were consequences of connections to the world-system, not indicators

of isolation.

The final chapter explores the consequences of these changes. After 1840 peripheralization intensified, and development of infrastructure lessened. The region fell behind the rest of the country in wealth and literacy, and did become increasingly isolated from the rest of the country. The position of landholders in Southern Appalachia strengthened, even while it waned in the rest of the country. From 1810 to 1860 the degree of inequality in the United States was relatively stable, whereas it widened considerably in Southern Appalachia. By 1860 a Southern Appalachian household was twice as likely as households elsewhere in the country to be poor.

By 1860, Southern Appalachia had only two thirds as many workers in manufacturing as the country as a whole. Most of the medium sized manufacturing and extractive firms were absentee owned. Thus, the wealth they generated was pumped out of the region. Dunaway concludes (p. 322): "In short, economic cycles in the world system, not the logic of internal development, were the driving force and the determinant of the direction and pace of regional development on the first western frontier of the antebellum United States."

While *The First American Frontier* is primarily about Euro-American resettlers, Dunaway analyzes how external, global forces shaped their lives. She examines the relations of Native peoples to Euroamerican interlopers with equal skill. This is solid sociological analysis: theoretically driven research embedded in carefully collected and analyzed data in constant dialog with, and revision of, theoretical issues. I recommend it strongly to all students of the relations between Native peoples and Euroamerican newcomers.

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The Miami Indians of Indiana: A Persistent People 1654-1994.
By Stewart Rafert. Indiana Historical Society. 358 pages.

This book provides a narrative overview of the Indiana Miami from the mid-seventeenth century to the present day. It is the first major summary of Miami history since Bert Anson's 1970 book, *The Miami People*.