A Case of Black and White: Northern Volunteers and the Southern Freedom Summers, 1964-1965 by Mary Aickin Rothschild
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school attended mostly by Mexican-American pupils. The constant energy which characterized his politics was part of his school teaching, too: he persuaded some of the parents of his pupils to join a parent-teacher association; he organized volley ball, baseball, horseshoes, musical events; and he planted flowers and shrubs at the school. He must have appeared a young whirlwind to his students. As Dugger reports it, Johnson left at the end of that one year and “Once he was gone most of the activities he had organized just melted away because nobody else had the energy, or cared enough, to keep them going” (p. 118).

This is a book worth reading.

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The Mississippi Summer Project of 1964 was a crucial turning point of the 1960s, for it ended a period of liberal idealism and interracial activism within the civil rights movement and began a trend toward radicalism and racial separatism among disillusioned activists. White “volunteers” went to Mississippi that summer to help black civil rights workers who were threatened by southern white repression and northern white indifference, and they succeeded in arousing sufficient northern concern to alleviate racist violence. They also unwittingly interfered with the effort to sustain the black movement, however, because that movement required grassroots leadership and a sense of self-sufficiency among blacks that white students could not provide and often undermined. Indeed, it was only during the course of the summer that white volunteers (and many of their black coworkers) discovered how difficult it would be to eliminate racial oppression without creating new forms of racial dependency. Mary Aickin Rothschild’s sensitive awareness of this dilemma forms the heart of her fascinating study of the approximately fourteen hundred volunteers who participated in the “Freedom Summers” of 1964 and 1965.

Rothschild focuses on those who came in 1964, for their experiences provide the clearest examples of the poignant dilemmas produced by the first massive infusion of whites into the southern black struggle. These volunteers quickly found that they were unprepared for the situation they encountered in Mississippi. They became increasingly aware of the extent of fear among black residents and re-
sentiment among veteran black civil rights workers. White volunteers also began to recognize how their privileged status as white people affected their relations with black coworkers and residents, despite sincere efforts to deny or eliminate racial distinctions. Most volunteers worked conscientiously and bravely, but they belatedly discovered the limited nature of their accomplishments. Historical perspective allows Rothschild to conclude that “the volunteers were primarily naive and had no idea what they were really committing themselves to. They had been raised in a society so infused with institutional racism that it suffused their—and everyone else’s—lives” (p. x).

The most original and interesting sections of Rothschild’s book describe the learning processes that occurred among the volunteers as they tried to understand the tensions between themselves and the veteran black civil rights workers. In 1964 most of the black activists in Mississippi were associated with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which stressed grassroots leadership and brash challenges to institutionalized authority. Some of the volunteers who were able to adjust to SNCC’s radicalism later assumed leading roles in the white antiwar and New Left movements, but the gradual recognition that the movement’s goals extended beyond modest civil rights reforms produced frustrations as well as insights, as revealed in Rothschild’s engrossing chapter on a volunteer who was overwhelmed in 1965 by white racist forces in Chickasaw County, Mississippi.

Rothschild’s chapter on women volunteers is particularly effective. Revealing how women developed a new consciousness of themselves as a result of the special problems they faced, her interviews convey the pain white women felt as they encountered sexual exploitation and found their work limited by sexual stereotyping and hostility from black female coworkers. Rothschild notes that for black men, “sex became the metaphor for racial tension, hostility, and aggression” (p. 137), and her handling of this sensitive topic is judicious, though based on impressionistic use of quite limited evidence. She concludes that the sexual tensions within the southern movement, though not understood at the time, later “made it possible for former volunteers in the North to develop a feminist ideology and political analysis” (p. 187).

The major weakness of Rothschild’s study is its narrow focus. By concentrating almost entirely on the volunteers’ perceptions of their experiences, she provides readers with only a partial view of the southern projects and of their historical significance. Although she made extensive use of interviews with white volunteers, she did not adequately supplement these accounts with other kinds of sources, such as the records of movement organizations, interviews with black coworkers and residents, or even the extensive secondary literature regarding the southern black struggle. Rothschild has nonetheless provided us with a careful and insightful account of the impact of the Freedom
Summers on the volunteers. Her work will aid other historians, including John Dittmer and Anne Romaine, who are currently engaged in research regarding these important events.

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"The southern city is different because the South is different" (p. 3). This, in its most succinct form, is the thesis of David R. Goldfield's latest book. It is the motif around which his work is so closely organized that it appears to consist wholly of variations on the theme, the notes and rhythms of which the reader recognizes again and again in the different temporal and topical movements of the composition. All of this is not by way of complaint or criticism, but rather to emphasize how tightly interwoven are all the elements of this book and how sharply focused is the author's vision.

Three circumstances, Goldfield asserts, made the South—and, hence, southern cities—different: its concentration on staple-crop agriculture, its biracial population, and its colonial economic status. Southern cities were shaped by the demands and limitations of the region's agricultural economy; they shared its biracialism; and they suffered even more than the rural areas from its colonial status. They can, thus, be best understood, Goldfield argues, by viewing them from a regional—and, hence, largely rural—perspective rather than from an urban—and national—perspective.

This framework of perception, analysis, and interpretation is carefully and fully displayed in a brief introduction and developed and elaborated in four chronologically delineated chapters. The first deals with the colonial period. It is, understandably, less than a third of the length of each of the others and is really more of a preparation for, rather than a beginning of, the discussion of urban life in the South. The second covers the antebellum era and is entitled "Urbanization Without Cities"—surely a misnomer when one recalls that in 1850 two of the five largest U. S. cities and six of the fifteen largest were located in the slave (or "biracial") area of the country. (It should be noted, however, that Goldfield excludes all of the border slave states except Kentucky and Virginia from his "South.") It is in this chapter that he really begins to flesh out his view of southern urban life as essentially rural, biracial, and colonial. The third chapter nominally covers the years 1861-1920—a strangely artificial combining of wildly