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The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Education (review)

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The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Education. Edited by Clarence L. Mohr. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. , pp. \$45.00 (cloth). ISBN 978-0-8078-3491-6. \$24.95 (paper). ISBN 978-0-8078-7201-7.

In introductory European history courses, most students learn that Denis Diderot was an Enlightenment figure who was chief editor of *Encyclopédie*. Diderot's work was the first publication aimed at encompassing all human knowledge. The technological revolution of the twenty-first century may have minimized such lofty eighteenth-century aspirations, but encyclopedias still serve an important function in the world of knowledge-gathering. *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* represents an important point of convergence of information about the South. The 2011 edition is a thoroughly updated version of the original 1989 publication of *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, initially conceptualized to provide an intellectual and cultural understanding of the South. Much has changed in the ensuing twenty-two-year time period. And, as C. Vann Woodward notes in his review of the original *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, the endeavor represents a "lively interest in the South, and its seemingly inexhaustibility as a field of study" (p. xv-xvi). William Faulkner's remark, "tell about the South," also serves as inspiration.

In *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, twenty-four individual shorter volumes have replaced one single hardback publication. These volumes build on the subject categories of the original publication, but have been adapted to recent developments in southern studies. In this review of volume seventeen, education in the South is the subject. Truthfully, encyclopedia reading might at first appear to be a tedious task, but after careful appraisal, a reader will realize that the volume is filled with interesting, detailed, and well-written entries. In addition, volume seventeen includes editor Clarence L. Mohr's general introduction—a thirty-page chapter detailing the history of education in the South.

The introduction comes as a welcome surprise to an anticipated difficulty in writing a review of the 135 separate entries. Mohr provides a [End Page 147] context for the entries and a narrative for the story of southern education from colonial times to the present. One hundred and twenty-five individual authors contributed to the volume. These entries emphasize depth over breadth. Several southern colleges and universities, such as the University of Alabama, Clemson University, the College of William and Mary, the University of Texas, Tuskegee University, the University of Georgia, Georgia Institute of Technology, and Hampden-Sydney College, constitute individual entries. Important educators, such as Benjamin Mays, Frederick Barnard, Nannie Helen Burroughs, and Edgar Odell Lovett, as well as important events and educational organizations, are also included as entries.

The list of entries, however, is not exhaustive. For example, Georgia State University does not warrant a separate entry, but is described as part of a section titled "Urban and Metropolitan Colleges and Universities (Post-1945)." The index is comprehensive, so a reader in search of quick, basic factual information is better served by examining it. At the end of each entry, most contributing authors provide a bibliography of important books, articles, and/or websites on the topic. Thus readers are provided with thorough descriptions of particular topics, as well as sources for further investigation.

In general, encyclopedia entries do not present major scholarly arguments, and by virtue of size and space limitations each author must be selective in providing information. The significance of this volume resides in its gathering and categorization of information about education in the South. Educational historian Lawrence Cremin notes in his many tomes that education encompassed more than formal schooling. Entries are limited to institutions, individuals, organizations, and events related to formal education. Although Mohr writes about homeschooling in the introductory chapter, other educative influences—such as family, cultural institutions, and rural life—are not included as separate entries, but likely would be found in one of the other twenty-three volumes that constitute the entirety

of *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Thus, the understanding of education in volume seventeen is confined largely to formal educational influences.

Strikingly, the prose is extremely readable, and the writing style remarkably cohesive. Such readability suggests clear instructions to authors and exceedingly careful editing. It must have been an enormous task to review the writing of 125 individual authors. *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Education* will appeal to laypersons, as well as to specialists in education and history. The purpose of the volume is to serve **[End Page 148]** as a springboard for further inquiry. Individuals interested in the South and in Alabama history, in particular, will find the volume explanatory and engaging. Historians and faculty in colleges of education will not use the volume to develop new research or new analyses, but will employ it as Diderot originally intended—as an accumulation of human knowledge.

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