

The New York Times

SE Book Review Desk; 7

HD **NONFICTION IN BRIEF**

BY By Richard Margolis

CY Copyright 1983 The New York Times Company. All Rights Reserved.

LP
THE ROOTS OF SOUTHERN POPULISM

Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890. By Steven Hahn. 340 pp. New York: Oxford University Press. \$29.95.

TD
Although its vintage years ended nearly a century ago, Populism persists today as a lively political impulse and continues to engage the energies of scholars. In "The Roots of Southern Populism," which in dissertation form three years ago won the Allan Nevins Prize of the Society of American Historians, Steven Hahn focuses on post-Civil War protests in Georgia's Upper Piedmont region, a "particularly fertile political ground" for Populist harvests.

Neither the war nor the Reconstruction that followed did much to improve the lot of Georgia's small farmers, most of whom were economically squeezed by plantation owners on the one hand and by Northern industrialists on the other. Familiar Populist grievances like falling agricultural prices and discriminatory freight rates were only part of the problem. Mr. Hahn reminds us that "the South in particular was relegated to junior partnership - if not colonial status - in a powerful industrializing society. Landlords, merchants and petty cultivators alike groaned under the yoke of subordination fastened by 'Wall Street' financiers." The upshot, to borrow the lament of a contemporary commentator, was "a growing feeling among our people of opposition to all accumulation of capital" - as good a definition of populism as one could wish for.

Mr. Hahn's style is sometimes marred by pedantry, but his thesis is clear, and his perceptions are humane. He is especially helpful in tracing the progress of biracial populism. "Trapped in a cycle of indebtedness and ultimate dispossession," he writes, white farmers "increasingly shared the fate of the region's blacks," thus opening the way to visions of a black- white coalition. The dream, if not the reality, has survived to the present.

<p> **Richard J. Margolis** is a columnist for The New Leader.

PD 23 October 1983

SN The New York Times

SC NYTF

ED Late City Final Edition

LA English

NS gbook : Books | nrw : Review | nsum : News Digest | gcat : Political/General News | gent : Arts/Entertainment | ncat : Content Types | nfact : Factiva Filters | niwe : IWE Filter

RE usa : United States | namz : North America

IPD Review

PUB New York Times Digital (Full Text)