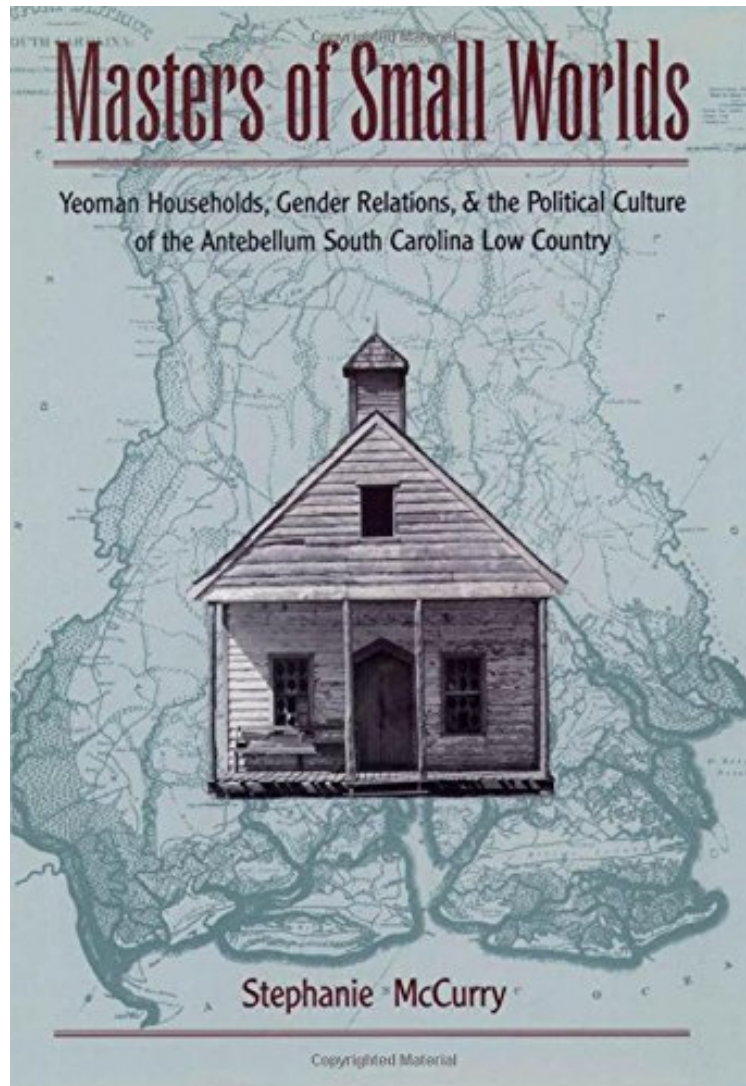


[FREE] Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country

Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country

Stephanie McCurry

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Stephanie McCurry : Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the

Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Highly RecommendBy Timothy L. FreundI am neither a scholar nor a historian. I consider this to be one of the best Civil war books I have read . I thought Prof. McCurry's discussion of the planter's conversion of the yeoman to agree to succession and then the war was incredible insightful. Many of the same components of their conversion are still used today by people in power.Prof. McCurry also skillfully knits the role of the local church, preachers, the militia, and the role of women in the community together to explain how the planters used each one for their benefit and purpose. Prof. McCurry more than adequately identifies her sources for her conclusions through her footnotes and has made them easy to read and understand.I highly recommend this wonderful book!

49 of 55 people found the following review helpful. A great book challenging popular views of yeomen.By Debra MillerMasters of Small Worlds views the relationship between yeomen and planters from a new perspective. Selecting the Low Country of South Carolina for her study, Stephanie McCurry uncovers documents revealing the presence of a much-ignored yeoman class and contrasts their political and social motivations with that of the economically dominant planter aristocracy.McCurry, an Associate Professor of History in the University of California, San Diego and winner of two awards for Masters of Small Worlds, claims that yeomen were not seeking an egalitarian society, but one of republican democracy. McCurry argues that not only were these yeomen masters of their own domain, but they were instrumental in the South Carolinian secession of 1860, acting "in defense of their own identity, as masters of small worlds" (page 304).In order to support her claim, McCurry first identifies her study group. The yeomen of South Carolina, a previously ignored and invisible group according to the author, emerge as a cohesive and numerically significant class from census documents and court records. McCurry selected the South Carolina Low Country as her study area because of its unique geography that placed yeomen next to planters. This side-by-side arrangement necessitated yeoman-planter interaction.McCurry's argument focuses on the patriarchal structure of plantations and yeomen families. The author cites numerous comparative examples, contrasting the planter and yeomen social relationships and successfully illustrates that white males with absolute authority ran the estates of both. The similarity of structure allowed elite manipulation of the yeomen toward planter-oriented political stances. For example, McCurry states that yeomen identified with the planters enough to feel that a threat to the established social order was a threat to their own mastery and manhood. Ultimately, this identification led yeomen to perceive abolition and unionist sentiment as a threat and enlist in the secessionist cause.While documenting the similarities between planters and yeomen, McCurry also notes the similarities between involuntary servitude and marriage. The author equates the lack of rights and loss of identity for women with slavery, and thus strengthens her argument that the yeomen male was a master in his own domicile.Although arguing that planters and yeomen shared similar social motivations, McCurry stresses that the two classes were unequal socially. To support this claim, the author cites examples of planter wives who snubbed yeomen or wrote of their animosity towards them. Interestingly, women, rather than men, provide clear examples of class inequality. McCurry suggests that men were forced to interact and maintain good relationships with their neighbors, regardless of class, due to business and political dealings. However, women were not so encumbered, and, according to McCurry, rarely interacted.McCurry also addresses the role that evangelism played in the social and political structure of South Carolina. According to McCurry, although the churches initially were a yeomen institution, the ministers adopted the elitist doctrine of planters and helped create a yeoman following for paternalism, republicanism, and the continuance of servitude. Ultimately, the pulpit was used to rally church members to the cause of secession, which the ministers assured the congregation God supported.While presenting her arguments, McCurry provides many enlightening insights into the yeomen's world, not the least is the often elusive definition of 'yeoman'. While McCurry notes and even partly adopts traditional definitions, she also uncovers a self-descriptive definition provided by yeoman narratives: a "self-working farmer." This definition clearly states what other historians have missed. Rather than tie a class to the number of slaves or the value of assets, the fact that a farmer did not have enough slaves and owned sufficient land to require "self-work" made him a yeoman. By taking into account variables such as land and slaves, this elegant definition is far superior to popular definitions that must be qualified to account for many exceptions. For instance, McCurry classifies families that had up to nine slaves as yeoman because the majority of the slaves were women and children. Many definitions would place these families outside of the yeoman class, as they limit yeomen slave ownership to less than five slaves. However, the productivity of the bondsmen would not be taken into account.McCurry supports Bertram Wyatt-Brown's claim that private space did not exist for southerners. While describing the yeomen, McCurry states that the division of private and public spaces had no meaning. However, McCurry supports this conclusion differently than Wyatt-Brown. McCurry notes that the difference between northern and southern social structures was great, and that the Cult of Domesticity did not penetrate to South Carolina. Because of this, private and public spaces were not considered separate in the South. Of course, this conclusion dovetails with Wyatt-Brown's code of honor and peer influence and suggests an explanation of this phenomenon.McCurry also notes that a common practice of planters was an annual party that yeomanry attended. According to the author, the purpose of the event was to show off art and architecture to the "hordes" of yeomen and poor whites. While this fact is not significant by itself and, in fact, the author used it to show the inequality of planter

and yeomen, it also illustrates that yeomen were not only witnessed planter culture, but were deliberately exposed to it. Coupling this information with the claim that yeomen viewed themselves as potential entrants into the planter class, we can see that architectural emulation is a logical path for the yeomen to take. The information that McCurry presents allows for a greater understanding of the yeomen families that were so important to the South. The yeomen of South Carolina share much with other southern yeomen. Thus, McCurry's findings suggest similar motivations for other southerners. For example, the geographic proximity of yeomen to planters in South Carolina is similar to the proximity of yeomen to planters in North Alabama, where valleys and mountains divide holdings of the two classes rather than swamps and rivers. Additionally, the affects of evangelism and its influence on yeomanry and planters in South Carolina equally apply to other parts of the South. Another similarity exists between the South Carolina that McCurry studied and Alabama. Both states had an elite group controlling government by limited representation. In South Carolina, representation of the yeomen class was unequally assigned and the public denied the right to directly express their political positions. Similarly, Alabamians had limited electoral powers, as indirect representation was common. While McCurry's study of the Low Country of South Carolina appears to be a flawless and comprehensive study, its usefulness in studying yeomen outside of South Carolina may be limited. Although many similarities exist in the social order of the study and in other parts of the South, South Carolina has a reputation for non-conformity. Therefore, other studies must be cautious about applying McCurry's findings to other areas. McCurry presents readers with many enlightening views of yeomanry. Boldly challenging the popular opinion that yeomen subscribed to an egalitarian/Jacksonian social order, her argument for a republican democracy is convincing. While her findings may not apply universally to all yeomen, McCurry offers many alternative viewpoints to consider when studying cultural patterns of the South. Additionally, the author finds many surprising parallels between planter and yeomen social structures. These revelations, together with her successful argument make *Masters of Small Worlds* a valuable and interesting addition to any study of yeomen as well as planters in the Old South. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. View of the farmer By Kindle Customer People from the coastal area of South Carolina are hard working farmers. The planter society forms the basis for the yeoman farmer and each support each others needs.

In this innovative study of the South Carolina Low Country, author Stephanie McCurry explores the place of the yeomanry in plantation society--the complex web of domestic and public relations within which they were enmeshed, and the contradictory politics of slave society by which that class of small farmers extracted the privileges of masterhood from the region's powerful planters. Insisting on the centrality of women as historical actors and gender as a category of analysis, this work shows how the fateful political choices made by the low-country yeomanry were rooted in the politics of the household, particularly in the customary relations of power male heads of independent households assumed over their dependents, whether slaves or free women and children. Such masterly prerogatives, practiced in the domestic sphere and redeemed in the public, explain the yeomanry's deep commitment to slavery and, ultimately, their ardent embrace of secession. By placing the yeomanry in the center of the drama, McCurry offers a significant reinterpretation of this volatile society on the road to Civil War. Through careful and creative use of a wide variety of archival sources, she brings vividly to life the small worlds of yeoman households, and the larger world of the South Carolina Low Country, the plantation South, and nineteenth-century America.

"Masters of Small Worlds...is of interest not only for the local matter of South Carolina, but as one test of whether 'race, class, and gender' can...make a history and not just a battlecry...McCurry offers an abundance of insight, information and anecdote. She is a gifted historian, engaging large questions."--The Times Literary Supplement "[A] well-researched and detailed study...Masters of Small Worlds is an extremely valuable work...[A] bold and convincing history...that will clearly be required reading for Southern historians, women's historians, and American social historians."--Southern Historian "The subtlety and texture of her interpretations offer a model for future studies of this class elsewhere in the antebellum South."--American Historical "Masters of Small Worlds is a strikingly original work, one which manages to say important new things about subjects that have attracted the attention of generations of scholars--the foundations of proslavery thought and the road to the Civil War. It is difficult to think of a work of American history that more successfully integrates the 'public' and 'private' realms of life, or that demonstrates more persuasively the centrality of gender as a category for understanding American political thought."--Eric Foner, Professor of History, Columbia University "[A] well-conceived, well-crafted volume that belongs on the shelf of every serious student of the American South. Those who read [the book] will be richly rewarded with a broader, deeper understanding of the world of southern yeomen."--The Alabama "Will surely enrich the debate over its role in the antebellum South for some time to come."--International Labor and Working Class History "This is an important, potentially pathbreaking book...[F]ascinating and provocative...[E]xciting, original, and intricate...No other historian has analyzed the links between public and private life so fully."--The North Carolina Historical "This is a bold thesis, and it is vigorously argued. There is much to admire in this book: the clarity of the writing, the depth of research in some sources, and the attempt to integrate gender into political history."--Journal of Social History "An engrossing, original, and nuanced account of the political culture of the state's Low Country yeomanry."--The Historian "McCurry

has written an imaginative and fascinating interpretation of antebellum politics in the South Carolina lowcountry...McCurry's arguments, asserted in bold and uncompromising prose, are unique, highly revisionary, and very much her own."--The Journal of Southern History"An important book that greatly enriches our understanding of households, religion, and political culture and their relationship to one another in the antebellum South. Stephanie McCurry's carefully researched and gracefully written volume is certain to win well-deserved praise from fellow historians in her field."--The Journal of American History"Masters of Small Worlds is social history at its best, opening up new conceptual ground through an exhaustive reading of archival sources."-- s in American HistoryAbout the AuthorStephanie McCurry is Associate Professor of History at the University of California, San Diego.