
NEW TITLES

History
**TOBACCO CULTURE:
The Mentality of
the Great Tidewater
Planters on the
Eve of Revolution**

by T. H. Breen
Princeton, 1985
216 pp. \$19.95



Of late, scholars have become increasingly interested in the attitudes of colonial Americans. Breen, a Northwestern University historian, looks at Virginia's 18th-century elite: the Carters, the Lees, and other Tidewater tobacco planters. Why, he asks, did these men, so dependent on Britain for fashion and trade, become leading agitators for independence?

Tobacco growing was a year-round endeavor at which only a few "crop masters" truly succeeded; most planters had to struggle to live up to their ideal of financial, and thus moral, independence. All left commercial matters to British agents, who sold Virginia tobacco in the London market and brought back expensive clothing, cut crystal, and other luxuries that the Anglophile planters yearned for.

The planters' taste for fine goods and their crop's long growing season led to mounting debts. The agents usually extended credit, but economic depressions in Europe during the 1760s forced them to call in loans. The planters complained to no avail: "I dread very Much," wrote Robert Beverley to his agent in 1764, "from the Appearances of this Day that [the colony] will be condemned forever to a state of *Vassalage & Dependence*."

Under increasing financial stress even such resolute landowners as George Washington had to give up tobacco for wheat. By becoming mere "farmers," the members of the Tidewater gentry were able to survive. But the loss of personal autonomy and of a mode of life based on honor and shared assumptions embittered these men—and made radical political realignment thinkable.

RENAISSANCE ESSAYS

by Hugh Trevor-Roper
Univ. of Chicago, 1985
312 pp. \$22.50

Because he attracted such wide attention with his books on 20th-century history (e.g., *The Last Days of Hitler*), it is often forgotten that Trevor-Roper is first and foremost a specialist on the Renaissance. He is also one of those historians who range easily from political analysis (as in his treatment here of the origins of