

headed the Dallas County, Alabama, chamber of commerce told an interviewer in 1952, "I'd say this is a nigger heaven. . . . The niggers know their place and seem to keep in their place. They're the friendly sort around here. If they are hungry, they will come and tell you, and there is not a person who wouldn't feed and clothe a nigger."

Sokol naturally devotes much space to the netherworld of Alabama and Mississippi, but he also reminds us that the upper South, from Virginia to Arkansas, produced politicians willing to exploit the racism of the white majority. He does not rely on some collective memory to remind us how widespread such thinking was, but presents his evidence—oral histories from libraries and universities across the South, books and articles on the civil rights era, and a paper trail of apparently thousands of records left from the period—so relentlessly that it almost appears as if he fears not being taken seriously. He means to let no skeptic get away unpersuaded.

A young white Southerner reading this book today may be tempted to think, "Those attitudes could not have been pinned on me," but Sokol produces several polls from the 1950s and '60s demonstrating that a vast, embarrassing majority of white Southerners certainly did harbor such thoughts. As late as 1968, a poll in North Carolina found that more than three-quarters of the state's whites believed that "whites work harder than Negroes" and 58 percent believed that "Negroes are happier than whites."

The history Sokol chronicles is not all bleak. He goes to pains to find the open-minded exceptions and the born-and-bred segregationists who slowly—or, in rare cases, abruptly—changed their minds. He makes clear that those people helped the civil rights movement accomplish as much as it did. There were the small bands of newspaper editors, educators, church leaders, and others who were simply blessed with inquiring minds and a sense of morality that finally weighed heavier on their consciences than the beliefs they had inherited.

But the whites who did the right thing do not

need to have their story told again. It is the others who deserve to be memorialized. These were not evil people, as evil is generally conceived. It was their very ordinariness that made their poison so toxic. If millions of people could pray in church every Sunday and live side by side with millions of other people they believed to be inferior beings, that can only mean that a great sickness was among them. The astonishing thing is that the sickness prevailed through so many generations without destroying the society.

Look closely and you can still find signs of a lingering fever—on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line.

—Roy Reed

Never Enough Numbers

THE GREAT APPEAL OF STATISTICS is that they tell stories. Consider these numbers from the latest *Historical Statistics of the United States*:

- From 1960 to 1995, the number of students attending Catholic schools (elementary and secondary) dropped more than 50 percent, from 5.25 million to 2.49 million. In those same years, membership in Catholic congregations increased 43 percent, from 42.1 million to 60.3 million.

- Since 1900, U.S. farmers have more than tripled wheat production per acre to 40 bushels in 1997, up from 12. For corn, the gains have been even larger—127 bushels per acre in 1997 versus 28 in 1900. But in the previous century, crop yields barely improved at all. In 1800, wheat yields were 15 bushels per acre and corn yields 25 bushels per acre.

- In 1890, the average U.S. tariff on all imports was almost 30 percent. On those imports on which tariffs were actually levied (some goods weren't subject to any tariffs), it was about 45 percent. These rates typified the 19th century. By 2000, the average tariff was 1.6 per-

HISTORICAL STATISTICS OF THE UNITED STATES: Millennial Edition.

Edited by Susan B. Carter, Scott Sigmund Gartner, Michael R. Haines, Alan L. Olmstead, Richard Sutch, and Gavin Wright. Cambridge Univ. Press. 4,489 pp. \$825 (\$990, beginning in Nov.)

cent, and, on dutiable items, 4.8 percent.

- From the end of the Civil War to 1900, Americans experienced persistent deflation. From 1865 to 1900, the overall drop in prices was 48 percent, or about 1.4 percent annually. The price of wheat dropped from \$2.16 a bushel to about 70 cents.

Now ponder the stories in those numbers.

Catholics have traditionally run the nation's largest sectarian school system; its decline suggests that, despite an apparent religious revival, the influence of religious schools is waning. The wheat and corn numbers indicate that technology (better seeds and more fertilizers, pesticides, and tractors) explains the 20th century's explo-

The new *Historical Statistics of the United States* is a five-volume monster, reflecting the wealth of data that have appeared since 1970.

sion of food production; previously, the expansion of farmland was the main cause. High tariffs in the 19th century contradict the notion that free trade aided America's early economic growth—

though it may aid economic growth now. Economists sometimes express fears about deflation, but modest deflation historically has not been crippling. The economy was four times larger in 1900 than in 1865.

This is the first edition of *Historical Statistics* since 1975. The Census Bureau, which had published the three earlier editions beginning in 1949, didn't receive sufficient congressional funding to continue doing so. In 1995, a group of scholars headed by economic historians (and wife and husband) Susan Carter and Richard Sutch of the University of California, Riverside, took up the job. In the end, 83 scholars contributed their tables and time in return for a copy of the finished product.

The new edition is a monster—five volumes, versus two for the 1975 edition. But that's understandable. By some estimates, more than four-fifths of the scholarly historical data series have appeared since 1970. New topics include poverty, American Indians, and the Confederacy. Many of

the statistics are eye opening. For example, from 1945 to 1995, the number of guns per capita nearly tripled, from 35 per 100 people to 92. But the share of homes with a gun decreased, from 49 percent in 1959 (the earliest year for which data are provided) to 40 percent in 1996. Apparently, guns are like TVs: People who have them have more of them.

Omissions? Well, yes. Public-opinion polling data are almost entirely absent. And there's nothing on sex (though statistics do exist). But the set's biggest defect is its price—\$825, rising to \$990 in November. Statistics fanatics will probably be able to find copies at many libraries. Universities and colleges likely will buy the online version for their faculties and students. Still, here are a couple of better ideas for the publisher: How about a one-volume abridged edition at \$75? Or a CD-ROM of the full set for \$250?

—Robert J. Samuelson

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

A House Divided

THOMAS MANN AND NORMAN ORNSTEIN, two of political Washington's most astute and prolific observers, have been involved with congressional reform efforts for decades. Now they have reached a point of utter dismay about Congress. *The Broken Branch* is a well-documented explanation of their frustration.

Mann, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, and Ornstein, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, have two chief complaints: Members of Congress no longer have a sense of loyalty to the institution and its constitutional responsibilities, and majority-party leaders violate all standards of openness, fairness, and decency to ram through their agendas, with the result being shoddy, ideology-driven policies. Moderates in both parties, who might bridge the

THE BROKEN BRANCH:

How Congress Is Failing America and How to Get It Back on Track.

By Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein.
Oxford Univ. Press.
272 pp. \$26