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***Cracker Messiah: Governor Sidney J. Catts of Florida* by Wayne
Flynt**

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seven years fifty miles east of Gulf Hammock. Mr. Newell is a careful observer and has recorded a segment of Florida life with accuracy and respect and humor. We hope there is more to come.

Patricia Waterman

Cracker Messiah: Governor Sidney J. Catts of Florida. By Wayne Flynt. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977. xiv, 359 pp. Illustrations \$20.00.)



Sidney J. Catts

In 1911, Sidney Johnston Catts, a forty-eight-year-old Alabama Baptist preacher, accepted a call to a small Baptist church in DeFuniak Springs, Florida. He resigned three years later and began to sell insurance. Two years later, in 1916, he was elected governor of Florida. How can the meteoric rise of Catts in Florida politics be accounted for? There is so much controversy, so much contradiction, so much rhetoric, and often so little substance that the task is difficult. The records of the Catts' administration were destroyed, and Professor Flynt has had to range far and wide for his evidence, much of it in prejudiced sources. The book was required reading for someone. Students of Florida history are fortunate that he undertook it.

How much of the explanation lies in what Catts brought with him; how much in what he found in Florida? How did the two come together? Catts was no ignorant country bumpkin. He came from a small but successful planter family who survived the rigors of Reconstruction in good financial position. He had all the college education he wished, a year at what is now Auburn University, a year at Howard College, and a law degree from Cumberland University, Lebanon, Tennessee, in 1882. He remained an avid reader throughout his life, particularly the classics, history and languages. He practiced law and assisted in the management of the family estate until 1886 when he was converted and became a Baptist preacher. Though relatively successful he did not rise in the ranks of his calling and became dissatisfied with it. He was without a pastorate in 1911 when he accepted the call in Florida. He had shown a concern for the unfortunate and the young that was sincere. He really feared the power of the Roman Catholic Church as did many other Protestants in the region. He also was an ardent prohibitionist. His short temper and a willingness to champion unpopular causes often got him into difficulty.

In rural and small town Florida he found a neglected and sleeping electorate which he galvanized into action. They were awaiting just such a catalyst. In the fishing villages there was deep resentment of state efforts to regulate the shellfish industry. Farmers and small tradesmen felt hopeless in the face of forces they could not control, railroads that charged too much, banks that were not interested in their needs at any price, and new people moving into Florida who seemed a threat to their way of life. He found also a nativism coupled with deepseated anti-Catholicism that could be used to arouse them and stir them to action.

The Catts platform was mildly progressive and not all that different from the other Democrats. His campaign was a highly emotional attack on Catholicism, ardent support of state prohibition,

and rousing nativism. It would not have been enough to win except that the State Democratic Executive Committee sought to defuse the violent anti-Catholicism and succeeded only in making it appear it was intended to exclude Catts and his followers. When it appeared that he had won the nomination and was then reduced to second place in a recount, he charged that the party's old guard had counted him out. He ran independently as a candidate of the Prohibition Party and won conclusively which might be accepted as vindication for him.

The Democratic leadership would not forgive him for refusing to accept the results of the primary and for his campaign tactics. Both houses of the legislature and the elected cabinet with which he had to work opposed him. His administration was by no means a failure but he came out of it frustrated and cynical. He ran for the U. S. Senate in 1920 and for the governorship in 1924 and 1928, still a major factor in state politics. True to his principles in 1928 he opposed the nomination of Alfred E. Smith by the Democrats because he was wet and Catholic.

The book is the story of a man and a time coming together, a story told with judgment and insight.

Charlton W. Tebeau

The Transformation of Southern Politics. By Jack Bass and Walter DeVries. (New York: Basic Books, 1976. 527 pp. Illustrations, \$15.95 hardcover, \$5.95 paperback.)

Although almost every book on Southern politics faces the burden of comparison to V. O. Key's 1949 classic, *Southern Politics*, Jack Bass and Walter DeVries admit their conscious attempt to replicate Key. In their introduction the authors state: "Our book was written in the belief that the changes in the South since Key completed his classic work were such that only a similar approach, using his basic methodology of extensive interviewing in all eleven states, could present a comprehensive political portrait of the region as it enters the last quarter of the twentieth century." For the most part, the authors succeeded in achieving their goal.

The book begins with three introductory chapters. The chapters are useful in summarizing the major developments in Southern politics in recent years, but Bass and DeVries barely mention the school desegregation movement and the protest movement led by CORE, SNCC, SCLC and the NAACP which was so instrumental in shaping Southern politics. Chapter two discusses the emergence of two party politics in the South, but ignores a large body of scholarly literature on partisan change in the region. Instead, the authors rest their arguments on the commentaries of party activists and journalists. Finally, the chapter on black politics is overly saturated with the comments of Andrew Young, one of the 360 persons interviewed for the book, while other Southern black politicians are overlooked. Too much emphasis is also placed on the number of blacks holding office in the South, and not enough on the consequences of this development.

The three introductory chapters are followed by eleven chapters, one on each of the states of the Confederacy. Bass and DeVries discuss Florida politics in chapter six. The authors dwell on the distinctiveness of Florida in comparison with other Southern states, because of its rapid population growth and high percentage of non-natives. Much of the chapter is devoted to the governmental reform that has helped Florida stand out from its Southern counterparts. Bass and DeVries give high praise to Florida for pioneering the sunshine laws, financial disclosure by