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Sharing the Prize: The Economics of the Civil Rights Revolution in the American South by Gavin Wright (review)

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Journal of Interdisciplinary History, Volume 44, Number 3, Winter 2014,
pp. 414-415 (Article)

Published by The MIT Press



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practiced in the Birmingham region by Enoch Powell and others. When the postwar religious revival began to wane during the 1980s and 1990s, and young people began to regard older congregations as unwelcoming, West Indian immigrant families continued to find their way into historically white churches, as well as predominantly black congregations (the Catholic Church could count on Irish and later Polish immigrants to attend its services).

Jones grapples with the difficult problem of assessing the importance of institutions in decline. He provides evidence to sustain Brown's argument that the influx of women into the workforce in the 1960s meant that the churches were no longer as useful to them as they had been in the 1950s, but his database is not really suited for a systematic treatment of that topic. In *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, McLeod identified multiple social currents that were working against the churches, making a definitive explanation of the decrease in church membership difficult to produce. Congregational members quoted in Jones appear to echo McLeod's finding, complaining about a general loss of interest among the young without being able to identify a single cause. Jones shows that the crisis of the churches in the 1980s and 1990s was more a British generational crisis than a local manifestation of a global process of secularization.

Notwithstanding his focus on congregations, which is finer-grained than histories that concentrate solely on public debates about religion or the history of denominational bureaucracies, Jones ignores two important ways in which British youths entered the world of Christianity—religious education in state schools and via the BBC. Historians of religion have generally ignored the effects of Britain's 1944 Education Act—particularly the introduction of compulsory Christian religious education and daily worship in state schools. The upshot was that more young people said daily prayers modeled on the Book of Common Prayer, and sang Christian hymns, during the 1950s than at any other time in the entire history of England. For a time, the BBC's Sunday evening hymn program, *Songs of Praise*, became the most widely watched television program in Britain, and it was popular elsewhere in the world as well.

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Sharing the Prize: The Economics of the Civil Rights Revolution in the American South. By Gavin Wright (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2013) 368 pp. \$35.00

The Civil Rights Movement has been criticized on the one hand as a governmental initiative that did not go far enough and on the other hand as a governmental initiative that failed because it went too far. Drawing on the growing, largely quantitative literature in economics

and other social sciences examining the effects of Civil Rights era programs and policies, Wright builds a compelling case for the middle ground. Notwithstanding a “Revolution” that dramatically improved the economic conditions of African Americans, racial inequality persists. *Sharing the Prize* also highlights why economics needs economic history: The story is far richer and more complete than mainstream empirical micro-economists would tell.

The title points to two key ideas that frame Wright’s argument. First, the Civil Rights revolution benefited not only African Americans but also whites. Second, the gains of the Civil Rights revolution were concentrated in the South, just as the racial inequality and injustice had been before. The often-overlooked substantial net migration of African Americans *into* the South during recent decades may well be the best summary measure of how much progress has been made in the region. The evidence that Civil Rights-era policies did not harm whites, relative to a counterfactual situation with no Civil Rights movement at all, is far less strong than the evidence that African-American health, schooling, occupational opportunities, and voting outcomes improved, in some cases dramatically. But there is no evidence that whites were harmed; a convincing study of the effects of these policies on whites has simply proven difficult to produce. Whites might have done *even better* in the absence of the revolution, but Wright at least shows that an expanded labor market for blacks was not inconsistent with rapid economic growth in the South and improving circumstances for the majority of whites.

Wright argues that by the time whites, particularly those in the business community, showed their support for the movement, it was already well underway. Only belatedly did they come to realize that it would benefit them. They *believed* that integrating lunch counters and textile factories would reduce their profits. They were unaware that customers would adapt or that African-American workers were actually more productive than their typical white counterparts because segregation prevented them from learning about whites’ preferences and blacks’ abilities. These circumstances do not necessarily contradict the standard view in economics that businesses will make changes on their own if those changes are in their interest, though businesses may not always *know* what will increase profits.

Although there are moments when the book seems too optimistic in its interpretation of the revolution’s successes, those moments are followed by evidence and convincing argument. Continued racial inequality is among our nation’s most vexing problems, and Wright by no means argues that the work is either finished or irreversible. *Sharing the Prize* tells the important story of the progress made on this front, reminding us in the process that government can accomplish a great deal under the right circumstances.

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