

Local Baptists, Local Politics: Churches and Communities in the Middle and Uplands South

by Clifford A. Grammich, Jr.

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***Local Baptists, Local Politics: Churches and Communities in the Middle and Uplands South* by Clifford A. Grammich, Jr. (review)**

Richard B. Drake

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

worker then made. Producers recounted the physical toll of making handicrafts and other "hidden costs" they were forced to bear: hauling materials and storing chairs in cramped mountain houses. Further dispelling the aura of handicraft, the Women's Bureau found few women were carrying on handwork traditions. Rather, they had been trained at settlement schools or other "benevolent institutions," or learned from neighbors who were already busy at piecework jobs. While for some, handicrafts provided a

measure of personal satisfaction or pride, "All...saw their craft skills as a means to earn money." Becker condemns handicrafts enterprises for hiding the realities of mountain life, for turning handicraft producers into benign, faceless grandmothers. Unfortunately, her own book, relying heavily as it does on governmental and institutional records, also fails to bring those women to life. Though Becker states that craftspeople "negotiated" their role in the processes described, we find curiously little of such negotiation. Why did quilters and weavers acquiesce to these conditions, especially in a region where other embattled workers struck back in a hundred ways? Her book leaves this question open. Becker concludes that the Women's Bureau's report forced the Guild and others with rosy, expressionist outlooks on handicrafts to see "their own members and mountain producers in the context of industrial society." The survey's account of meager wages and joyless endeavor challenged, she writes, the crafts ideal. But if this were so, why did the same solution to Appalachian poverty surface in the 1960s, when scores more crafts cooperatives cropped up through the mountains? If so, why today have local leaders in Hindman, Kentucky, sought and received \$8 million in state money to open a crafts training center? Becker assumes that decades of failure and a government study could swamp the romantic hope of mountaineers' quilting and whittling their way out of penury. Efforts like the new crafts center at Hindman prove that she's wrong. But in this error, her book is entirely timely. -Julie Ardery Clifford A. Grammich, Jr. *Local Baptists, Local Politics: Churches and Communities in the Middle and Uplands South*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999. 232 pages, index and bibliography. While this is a most intriguing book, it remains an exploratory volume rather than providing any "last" or final word. The concern for these six Baptist sub-denominations began when Grammich served 55 as a researcher covering the United Baptists and Old Regular Baptists for the religious census, *Churches and Church Membership in the United States 1990*, published by Glenmary. An earlier version of this book was Grammich's doctoral dissertation in political science at the University of Chicago. The result here is a fascinating book that attempts answers to many questions. In some respects, what we have here is a most sophisticated study. Yet in some respects it is surprisingly superficial. At first blush, any study of the role of Baptist in Southern life and politics appears to be concerned with how religious power translates into decisive local action. But the "local Baptists" Grammich follows are six small sub-denominations mostly in Appalachian Kentucky and Tennessee, the type of churches that Jeff Titon, Howard Dorgan and Deborah McCauley have brought to our attention. Yet in the one Kentucky county that Grammich enters in any great detail, in Magoffin County, the United Baptist Church is a major denomination. Concerning the several fields that this book deals with, first and foremost is the matter of the impact of small rural fundamentalist churches upon the Christian Right. After an impressive review of the studies on the nature of fundamentalism and its recent rise, Grammich concludes that while his six Baptist groups have continuing impact on local politics, they do not have a major influence on national issues. Grammich integrates well the studies emanating from the Fundamentalist Project at the University of Chicago under the direction of Martin Marty and Scott Appleby. And he is in line with the studies of Samuel S. Hill and Ted G. Jelen concerning what they see as a crisis of southern churches, both of whom take a pessimistic view about how effective traditional churches will be in dealing with resisting modernization. At the same time, he gives little hope to...

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Clifford A. Gramlich, Jr. *Local Baptists, Local Politics: Churches and Communities in the Middle and Upstate South*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999. 232 pages, index and bibliography.

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