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Book Review: The Governors of Alabama, by John Craig Stewart

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THE GOVERNORS OF ALABAMA by John Craig Stewart
Publishing Company, (\$12.95).

Over the past few years Alabama has begun to receive her just recognition in print and presses located in the state which have published important bibliographic works.

Now a number of presses, located in other states in the South, have begun to publish histories and travelogues of our state. One of these newer presses is Pelican Publishing Company of Gretna, Louisiana. The latest addition to their Pelican Governors Series is this one by John Craig Stewart, who has impressive credentials as a writer and Alabama historian.

Stewart has written several novels and many articles about Alabama. He is the co-author of "Know Alabama", first published in 1957 and used as a school text. He has been associated with the University of South Alabama since its founding, currently serving as director of the institution's Creative Writing Program.

Unfortunately, this book is not ideally suited for any particular audience. It may be read by the secondary school student seeking information for term papers, reports, and reviews. It is certainly not meant for the advanced student in either Alabama or Southern history, for whom it is too general in coverage to provide sufficient information.

There are several major flaws in the material presented. I had hoped that the old Dunning School concept of Reconstruction was now past. So many articles and books written over the past two decades have finally put this conception to rest among the majority of Southern historians. Yet Stewart still views Reconstruction as the trampling of the Constitutional rights of the Southern States, including Alabama, and his coverage of Alabama governors of the period 1849 to 1874 reflects this outmoded philosophy. For example, he categorizes

the administration of David P. Lewis (1972-1874) as "represents the last surge of irresponsible Reconstruction government in Alabama."

There are other flaws in Stewart's concept of Alabama history. He states that "Alabama stagnated during the 17-rule of the British" over that portion of West Florida that later became part of Alabama. He ignores the writing of Robert Thea of Auburn University (this year's president of the Alabama Historical Association), who more than a decade ago, began to publish in the "Alabama Historical Review" and the "Florida Historical Quarterly" that the British period was not a period of stagnation. Stewart also sees the Spanish period of occupation of this same area as unimportant and states that "the Spanish influence in Alabama was small." Here he evidently completely ignores the voluminous works of Jack D. L. Holmes of the University of Alabama in Birmingham. Holmes is the leading authority on the Gulf coast area and his conception of the influence of the Spanish is quite the opposite. One would have to accept the credentials of Holmes as a scholarly historian over that of Stewart, who is not a professional historian.

In checking the bibliography I also found that besides the omission of Rhea and Holmes, other important works were not cited. T. P. Abernathy's "The Formative Period in Alabama 1815-1828" is not cited, for example, yet it still is the standard work on this period of Alabama history.

In conclusion, I can not recommend this work. Alabama still must wait for a well-researched and written history of her governors.

