What can be written about the Civil War or the Reconstruction period in the United States that has not yet been researched or analyzed? According to OCLC, there are nearly 300 books about Reconstruction in North Carolina alone! Gregory Downs, assistant professor of history at the City College of New York, has published an altogether timely, unique, and well-researched study of North Carolina politics from the end of the Civil War until the early twentieth century. Down’s book is based on his doctoral thesis from the University of Pennsylvania. It is his first scholarly work of history; his short story collection, *Spit Bath*, won the Flannery O’Connor Award for Short Fiction in 2006.

The book contains seven chapters plus an introduction and a coda. During Reconstruction, North Carolinians pleaded desperately for food, money, and protection from both the state and federal governments, creating a politics of dependence that Downs calls *patronalism*. Downs traces the interplay of Confederate ideals, slavery and freedom, religion, gender, White Supremacy, and money during the period as he chronicles citizens’ written appeals to politicians. Downs presents these appeals as part of the growing vernacular of politics that developed in the South after the Civil War, a style of politics that revolved around personalizing distant politicians and sustaining the illusion that these politicians were heroes, advocates, even friends (p. 1). Downs defines this Reconstruction as the reconstruction of authority, where people’s expectations of the new and developing government were rooted in their dependence upon it (p. 11). He argues that the people began to expect the government to fulfill their needs. Downs draws from an extraordinary wealth of primary source materials, particularly letters and newspapers, as well as political cartoons, to demonstrate the nature of popular politics of the time. The author’s extensive notes, bibliography, and index, as well as illustrations and photographs, provide an impressive authority to his thesis.

Downs’s purpose in writing *Declarations of Dependence* appears to be to reframe Southern politics. His thesis is rooted in the idea that people depend upon government to help them meet basic human needs. He cites fundamental American concepts such as autonomy and independence as constructs, easily forgotten in times of emergency and in moments of crisis from floods to recessions to the chaos of Reconstruction North Carolina (p. 219). Downs uses the letters and pleas of poor or discriminated Americans living in the post-Civil War era to support this analysis. This book is an outstanding work of great detail that will likely influence social and political historians and students for years to come. It is recommended for academic and large public libraries.

Audra Eagle Yun
Wake Forest University