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## James W. Silver to Professor Fred Joyner, 7 September 1958

James W. (James Wesley) Silver (1907-1988)

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University, Mississippi  
September 7, 1958

Professor Fred Joyner  
History Department  
Miami University  
Oxford, Ohio

Dear Fred:

After having read almost all of a dozen books in an attempt to pick out "the best," I was more confused than enlightened. I am now sure, as Ben Wall has put it, that there is no "best."

In more or less desperation I wrote for suggestions to ten friends (I hope) of mine, whose judgment I highly respect. These are men not only of high scholarship but, I think, of complete integrity. They include three well known editors of scholarly journals. They represent both conservative and liberal opinion and something in between. All admitted their judgments subjective and, as nearly as I can remember, not one had read all the books.

Here are the results, as nearly as I can portray them:

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	OK	NO
Alden	1	1	1			2	1
Meade	1	2	3				
Stamp		2				1	3
Sellers		1				2	
Turner	4					2	
Wall			1		1	1	
Vandiver	1		1	1		3	1

The OK simply means that the individual did not list books in order but would not be displeased if book marked was voted the best. The NO's in regard to Stamp were emphatic. The most read books were by Alden, Stamp, Turner (but several had not read him), and Vandiver. Few had read Sellers and Wall, and not many Meade.

As you can see, this is really confusing. But my vote, in view of my own reading and this poll, is as follows:

1. Turner, Cable
2. Meade, Henry
3. Alden, South in Revolution *Vandiver, Joyner*

As a committee member, I would like to suggest that we consider the possibility of recommending to the Association that this "prize contest" be discontinued. If not, there certainly should be some "ground rules" set up. For instance, there should be statements about importance of writing, research, whether first volumes of multi-volumes worked should be considered, whether biographies of southerners who are really national figures (Wilson, Madison) should be considered.

Yours,

James W. Silver