

Reviews

Racial Cleansing in Arkansas, 1883-1924: Politics, Land, Labor, and Criminality. By Guy Lancaster. (London: Lexington Books, 2014. Pp. v + 142, bibliography, index. \$76, hardcover)

This compact, well-researched volume has moments of great drama and deep tragedy. It recounts in Arkansas a story ably told nationally by the sociologist James Loewen in his important study *Sundown Towns:*

A Hidden Dimension of American Racism (2005) and in his extraordinary website at <http://sundown.afro.illinois.edu/sundowntowns.php>. The “sundown” terminology refers to locales in which African Americans were required, by custom, police power, and terror if not by law, to be out of town by sunset.

As Guy Lancaster explains in his introduction to *Racial Cleansing in Arkansas*, he prefers a title suggesting a process fraught with human agency, complex causation, and uneven results rather than one naming only the result of removals of African American populations with the term sundown town. He opts for “racial cleansing” specifically to signal affinities to the process of “ethnic cleansing” in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, though it was less characterized by deliberate action of the government in the Arkansas case. Such a title affords opportunities for especially useful discus-



sion of how ideas about collective guilt animated violence.

The framing gives Lancaster the opportunity to explore a variety of cases in which pogroms directed against black residents and traveling workers proceeded but did not result in the fashioning of a “sundown town,” either because not all of the victimized population left or because some returned. Lancaster’s work also prefers written sources—published local and county histories are especially well-mined—to the oral testimonies so central to Loewen’s work. However, in the main the two authors produce studies that complement each other across differences in approach. Both challenge the assumption that all-white and almost all-white towns simply acted to stay that way, showing that active processes of removal often created homogeneity. Indeed, Lancaster shows that these were sometimes quite protracted processes.

Arkansas in the period considered by Lancaster is an especially apt place to study racial cleansing. The existing literature on sundown towns rightly points out that they were more prevalent outside the South and that the plantation South counties with a great need for African American labor were unlikely to attempt expulsions and exclusions. Arkansas conforms to that pattern with the areas having lesser proportions of African Americans most likely to attempt racial cleansing. On the other hand, the terrible white-on-black riot in and around Elaine, Arkansas, in 1919 saw wholesale massacre but little desire to create an all-white town.

Arkansas in the late nineteenth century saw tremendous political contention and realignment as Reconstruction’s end did not extinguish Republican, Greenback, fusionist, labor, and populist challenges to Democratic rule. In his second chapter, Lancaster shows

how their achieving power or even influence in politics could lead to attacks on black populations, who were often caught in factional battles between parties and even within the Republican party.

The last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth also saw profound economic changes in Arkansas. *Racial Cleansing in Arkansas* charts these transformations around railroad building and also accounts for growth in new forms of extraction in mining and timbering, expansion of rice cultivation, and manufacturing growth, especially in staves and barrels. New land opened to settlement and production, and populations moved to pursue new opportunities. Lancaster's third chapter, on land, labor, and racial cleansing, demonstrates how direct action whites-only policies and aggressions could be tied to securing jobs and land.

His fourth chapter, on charges of African American criminality as bases for removals of black populations, is especially good in describing overlapping motivations in which alleged law-breaking by one African American translated into a desire for collective punishment of blacks and for white purity. Such was especially the case when material and political gain also were on offer. Riots—those in Harrison, Arkansas, in 1905 and 1909 are especially well-described—at times followed a precipitating event linked to an alleged crime, but often the violence took less sweeping forms based in extralegal threats by whitecappers. To his great credit, Lancaster also adds a fifth chapter on incidents of racial cleansing whose causes were especially “multivalent” (115) or remain unknown. In one especially haunting example, Salem, Arkansas, was apparently cleared of its black population around 1907 after disinterring of African American graves warned of further violence.

Racial Cleansing in Arkansas tells tragic stories with an analytical care that helps us to learn from them. The banality of some of the evil is at times perfectly captured, as for exam-

ple in a *Fort Smith Times* report on the 1904 Bonanza Race War: “many humorous stories are being told as to how badly frightened [African American] people were Saturday night” (68). At other junctures, Lancaster suggests troubling connections between a boosterist Southern progressivism and racial cleansing, with an all-white population being stressed in a city's attempts to attract settlers and investors.

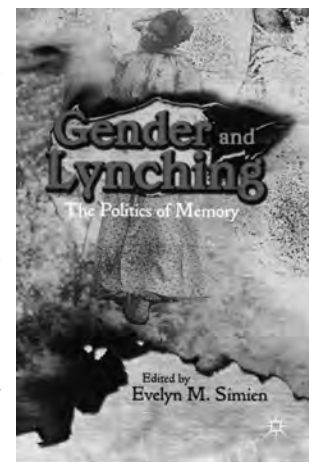
I wished at time for a placing of the events described in the context of Indian removals, so much a part of the period leading up to the stories told in *Racial Cleansing in Arkansas*. However, this is a painful story well-told and well-worth remembering.

--David Roediger



***Gender and Lynching: The Politics of Memory.* By Evelyn M. Simien. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Pp. ix-viii + 131, notes, index. \$27, paperback)**

Gender and Lynching explores a rarely considered perspective of racialized violence by focusing on women. To be clear, the authors in this edited collection do not merely focus on women as victims of lynching. Rather, their objectives are twofold in that they approach this study by utilizing musical, theatrical, literary, photographic, and artistic representations of women against gatherings that included racially mixed audiences. They further highlight the mo-



ments at which black and white women were able to form coalitions against lynching and other forms of racial violence. This collection of essays also considers the activism of individual African American women, members of the predominantly white Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The authors have adeptly centralized the unique experience of black women's victimization and anti-lynching activism by expanding conventional interpretations to consider the implications of "racial-sexual violence in the South, where at least 150 women were lynched between 1880 and 1965." Most of these cases, approximately 130 of them, occurred before 1930 (p. 2).

Post-Reconstruction era scholarship has typically portrayed lynching as a distinctively southern practice perpetrated upon African American men. The scholars in this collection argue against such a limited understanding because it has essentially ignored or marginalized African American women's experiences. Black women labored not only under the burden of their race, but also their gender and stereotypes about their sexuality. Indeed, most often, accounts of black women's lynchings were scripted in very racialized and sexualized terms. But like the lynching of black men, the murder of black women served to reinforce racial stereotypes and was "ideologically sanctioned to enforce white supremacy" (p. 2).

The essays speak to the lynching of such black women as Laura Nelson and Mary Turner. Nelson and her son were lynched in Okemah, Oklahoma in May 1911 after she had confessed to shooting a sheriff to protect him. Again, the authors highlight the sexualized nature of racial violence when perpetrated upon black women. Before she was lynched, Nelson was raped by several men. Turner, who was eight months pregnant, was murdered in Valdosta, Georgia in May 1918 after protesting the lynching of her husband Hayes and for daring as an African

American woman to act on her right to press charges against those responsible.

The number of black women lynching victims was small to be sure. However, it was clearly an experience that black men, women, and their communities shared. The scholarship on this topic and the "rape/lynch myth" unfortunately has long situated and privileged black men as its only victims. In order to flesh out the entire story of this horrendous social practice, more appropriately titled "domestic terrorism," the authors assert that it is absolutely critical to position black women at the center of lynching's historical narrative in order to fully relay a more complicated, nuanced, and representative chronicle of this social tragedy.

Gender and Lynching's six chapters employ interdisciplinary research that firmly centers African American women "as victims and martyrs, characters in works of art and literature, as well as activists and change agents (p. 8). In chapter one, Julie Buckner Armstrong examines artists' efforts to remember Mary Turner in the "The Mary Turner Project." In chapter two, scholar Koritha Mitchell explores African American women's lynching drama which was initiated by Angelina Weld Grimke's 1916 three-act play *Rachel* in which she used "motherhood" as a trope to connect all women to the suffering of black women who had lost sons to racial violence. In chapter three, Barbara McCaskill considers abolition literature and the ways in which black women writers of the nineteenth century spoke to violence. Likewise, in chapter four Jennifer D. Williams examines the literature published in the 1920s at the height of mob violence and locates therein a black feminist discourse against lynching. Fumiko Sakashita explores the politics of sexuality in chapter five, using Billie Holiday's live performance of "Strange Fruit" and the means by which it afforded the audience a "vicarious experience" of lynching even as it reinforced stereotypes that all of its victims were male. And finally, in chapter six Anne Rice mines a special issue of the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine which

covered the 1917 East St. Louis race riot and includes a photo essay by W.E.B. DuBois and white suffragist and antilynching crusader Martha Gruening. Lynching photography had long been used to justify racial violence and to support white supremacy. By using antilynching photography in the *Crisis*, DuBois and Gruening created a counterspectacle to highlight white depravity (p. 140). The issue further complicated the lynching narrative by “foregrounding women as victims, survivors, and militants” while considering African American female investigators who understood the riot as the destabilization of black families, an occurrence that engendered exploration, resistance, and response through a gendered lens (p. 10). This chapter also considers the contributions of white female investigators in the aftermath of lynchings, who because of their race were almost always able safely to procure information that was later used to denounce racial injustice.

The multidisciplinary approach of the essays in *Gender and Lynching* pose many questions about how racial violence inflicted on black bodies has been traditionally recorded, recalled, and privileged as a male experience. They challenge scholars to reconsider and recast this narrative in ways that harness and centralize the gendered and sexualized and otherwise complicated purview of black women as lynching victims. The authors in this edited collection have produced a work that should be in the library of any scholar writing about racial violence in America.

--Cherisse Jones-Branch



Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women: Race and Beauty in the Twentieth-Century South. By Blain Roberts. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina

Press, 2014. Pp ix-xii + 277, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95, cloth)

Blain Roberts opens her monograph with a vignette from fugitive Hannah Crafts’s autobiographical novel, *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*. The parable of the blackening face powder is a metaphor for the themes and argument of *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women*. Just as the Crafts vignette entangled the artifice of race and beauty, the Roberts study engages racialized beauty among Southern black and white women in the twentieth century.



Roberts interrogates the meaning of beauty in a region in which it was defined by the racial other. In the South, beauty both supported and challenged white supremacy. In other words, as Roberts argues, beauty was about power. Her study examines how white and black women negotiated beauty as part of Southern womanhood. The daily, public and private beauty practices and rituals of Southern women reveal how they understood the role of beauty in the rise of Jim Crow segregation and exclusion and in the struggle to dismantle it. The tensions of Southern beauty included race; the nexus between a conservative and rural region and the larger nation; how modernization, consumerism, and modernity shaped regional identity; and constructions of gender and femininity.

Roberts makes several cogent arguments. She suggests that Southern women’s bodies represented the racial modern. She challenges assumptions about the traditions of Southern women’s beauty practices. Finally, she expands our historical and cultural definition of beauty

to include cosmetics, beauty and body contests, and hairdressing.

The structure of the text begins with an overview of the geographical region and the centrality of racial segregation as an organizing category. The first chapter follows the transformation of a narrative of beauty accoutrements as immoral to one of approval that combined white supremacy and an iconography of antebellum Southern womanhood. The white Southern response to bobbed hair and makeup was the emergence of the bathing beauty and the healthy look of suntanning. In the second chapter Roberts examines the beauty products, practices, rituals, and spaces of black Southern women as consumers and as professional beauticians. She identifies the African American beauty shop as a site of recuperation, political activism, and as a source of economic autonomy for African American women. Chapter Three engages the role of white feminine beauty in advertising the region's agricultural products, including babies. The prevalence of commodity royalty, such as the Cotton Carnival and the Maid of Cotton pageant in Memphis from 1931 and the Queen of the Smoke Flower and Golden Weed sponsored by the Wilson Tobacco Board of Wilson, North Carolina, contributed to the construction of the beauty contest as a powerful symbol of Southern white culture.

Chapter Four of the study examines beauty contests among African American women, especially at historically black colleges and universities, and at local contests such as the Cotton Makers Jubilee and its Spirit of Cotton Queen, also located at Memphis. Roberts suggests that black colleges made African American women's bodies representative of political and aesthetic blackness.

Chapter Five chronicles the significance of Southern beauty at the intersection of the post-World War Two Civil Rights Movement and massive regional white resistance. The success of contestants from the former Confederacy at the Miss America Pageant was spectacular in

the aftermath of World War Two and the emergence of the Cold War. Significantly, the pageant was nationally televised from 1954, the same year as the *Brown* decision. Roberts notes the paradox of the Southern Miss America, who combined regional idiom and national identity. The counter-narrative of the symbolic power of the white Southern beauty queen was the Civil Rights work of African American beauticians. Their shops and clientele provided private space for community organizing and economic and professional independence from white Southern threats against local black political activity. But despite the long tradition of beauty practices and the community service of black beauticians, the women of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) rivaled the politics of respectability with a practical and Black Power aesthetic that relied on denim and natural or unpressed hair. By the late 1960s, the natural, made famous by the "Angela Davis look," had expanded the cultural constructions of black American beauty.

The year 1968 became symbolic of the era defined by the Civil Rights Movement, the anti-war movement, the student movement, and the women's movement. Organized by New York Radical Women, members of women's liberation converged on the Miss America Pageant in September. In a gathering outside the Convention Hall, site of the Pageant, the women tossed beauty accoutrements in a "freedom trash can" and crowned a ram as a reference to the history of agricultural evaluation.

In the period after the tumult of the 1960s, beauty continued as a site of power and tension in the South. The rise of Mary Kay Ash and her company, Beauty by Mary Kay, began in 1963 at Dallas, Texas. Roberts suggests the symbolism of the Mary Kay story was its continuity with the past in the post-Civil Rights South.

Roberts's study is a valuable addition to Southern historiography. She provides another way in which to examine how race and power worked in the South through the category of beauty. The text is an important contribution

to women's and black women's history, the history of glamour, twentieth-century modernity, and Southern history.

--Fon L. Gordon



Fear and What Follows: The Violent Education of a Christian Racist, A Memoir. By Tim Parrish. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2012. Pp. 245, epilogue, acknowledgments. \$28.00, hardcover)

Tim Parrish's memoir *Fear and What Follows: The Violent Education of a Christian Racist* is supposed to convey the anxieties of a person's conflicting emotions that stem from lifelong submersion in the oxymoronic, hateful, Christian society of the racist American South. Yet all that is provided are 261 pages of teenage angst that tell more about succumbing to peer pressure than about the violent teachings of the author's Southern Baptist Church.

The title and the dust cover suggest that this "riveting [and] unflinching account" is undoubtedly a one-sitting cover-to-cover read. But it is not. Unfortunately, *Fear and What Follows* is somewhat boring and only lightly touches upon what the reader thinks it will cover in depth.

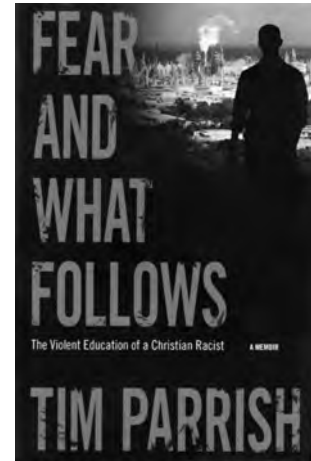
Tim Parrish (the character, not the author—and he is a character despite the label of "memoir"; the author says in the foreword that he has dramatized the events and changed the names for creative purposes) is confused about his church's teachings (and the like-minded teachings of his parents) from an early age. As he matures into adolescence, his confusion transitions to irritability with what seem to him false teachings and the blatant disregard of Jesus Christ's commandment to love thy neighbor. If

the reader expects the memoir to go any further into the disconnect between what the church says and what it is supposed to say, he will be sorely disappointed. Once Tim hits high school, the only God conflict he has is the struggle to find the words to pray and his im-

mense guilt about being increasingly mean to black kids, increasingly belligerent, and increasingly awkward (as many teenagers are); and these really have not as much to do with Christianity as they do with being a decent human being.

The title of the book is misleading, but the disappointment does not end there. Halfway into the memoir the reader will realize that this is not about the life of a Christian racist, but instead about one stage in the life a teenager—a stage that includes a brother in Vietnam, a mother with lupus, a narrow-minded father, and several bullies . . . white bullies. Only when Tim begins running with a rebellious crowd that enjoys pot and fighting a little too much does the topic of violent racism really enter the plot, and it is not even Tim's violence. Instead, it is Tim's witnessing of the violence in which he is too conflicted to participate. This "violent education" is only marked by two actual incidences—both of which are unsuccessful—and a whole heap of violent thoughts. Perhaps the violent thoughts are enough to make the reader cringe, but they are not exactly enough to do what is expected of a violent, Christian racist's memoir.

The plot of this novel/memoir is one of extreme highs and dreadfully descriptive and uneventful lows marked by unpredictable and somewhat sloppy diction. The narrator's awkward personality is matched only by his awk-



ward use of slurs and curse words. It is understandable for the characters to use the n-word, “bitch,” “shit,” “ass,” and a whole slew of other nasty unmentionables in their dialogue. After all, they are a cast of troubled teens trying to look hardened and tough, but the narrator’s tendency to inject an ill-placed “mother-f***er” into what is otherwise a post-adolescent and enlightened voice only disrupts the flow of the text. When cleverly used, such language can be quite effective, funny even, but in this case it seems out of place.

If the reader is expecting the minutes of KKK meetings or even the callousness of utter racism followed by a redeeming revelation, this is not the book for him. But to say that there is no lesson to be learned from *Fear and What Follows* would be false. Parrish accurately pens the racial tension of the South, and the few pages that are devoted to the hypocrisy that pours from the pulpits of so many Southern churches are, sadly, basically true. However, the memoir is less about violent, racist Christianity and more about one confused boy who wanted to be cool and would not let his conscience be his guide. Parrish the author may be selling the character short, instead of being a violent and unapologetic racist (he knows throughout the novel that racism is disgusting and wrong), he is just an insecure and impressionable kid who too desperately craves acceptance.

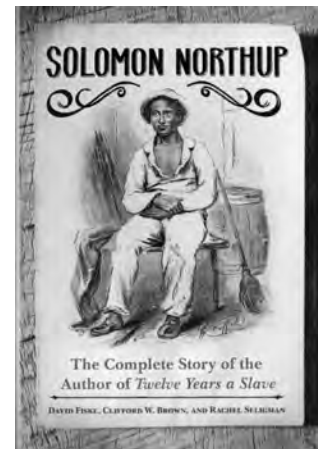
--Danell Hetrick



***Solomon Northup: The Complete Story of the Author of Twelve Years a Slave.* By David Fiske, Clifford W. Brown and Rachel Seligman. (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013, Pp. ix-xii + 125, appendices, notes, bibliographical note, index. \$48, hardcover)**

In this academic case study, David Fiske, Clifford W. Brown, and Rachel Seligman offer an invaluable profile of Solomon Northrup, whose narrative *Twelve Years a Slave* records his life as a free African American man kidnapped and forced into slavery. While his account remained relatively obscure during the better part of the twentieth century, this attentive research project has brought it once again into the focus of the academic community and, with the release of its film adaptation, the attention of the public. This exhaustive dossier works to verify each passage of the narrative and includes historical documentation to support its claims.

The text is divided into chapters chronicling the original narrative with supplemental information and documentation validating the account. The book begins with a foreword by Carol Linzy Adams Sally, the great-great granddaughter of Solomon Northrup. Building upon the 1968 edition of the narrative published by the Louisiana State Press, which includes Northrup’s original text and the research of Sue Eakin and Joseph Logsdon, the authors successfully extend the compelling body of evidence. Illustrations and records such as censuses, free citizen certifications, slave ship manifestos, lawsuit documentation, and letters concerning the latter life of Northrup are thoroughly utilized throughout the work, documenting each portion of the story. His travel record is verified using the writings of Charles Dickens, who traveled to Washington, D.C., and Virginia a year after the kidnapping of Northrup and described the sights in the collection “American Notes.” Historical maps of locations in New York,



Washington, D.C., and Red River Valley, Louisiana, are included and outline the pilgrimage of Northrup. Its bibliography section is adequate, and the vast amount of footnotes develops the text further as an anthropological study touching multiple fields of work.

While each section of the text offers a degree of verification, the final chapters provide the most thorough documentation, adding considerable clarity and depth to a story some doubted at the time of its publication. The political atmosphere of New York is analyzed as it influenced the delayed rescue attempts made by Henry B. Northrup. Governor Seward's original reluctance to authorize the search and the later Governor William C. Bouck's influence during the time of Clem Ray's journey to Saratoga Springs demonstrate the complex social and political web in which free, affluent citizens such as Henry B. Northrup were forced to negotiate. This same Northrup receives a thorough character sketch encompassing his family heritage, Quaker background, and motives for delivering Solomon Northrup out of bondage. Lucid details are provided concerning the tedious work he was compelled to accomplish in order to begin the legal process of freeing Solomon. His journeys, procurement of affidavits, and understanding of the secrecy required to accomplish this feat are each discussed and properly examined.

Upon his return to a life of freedom, Northrup enlisted the help of David Wilson to edit his narrative, an accomplishment completed within a matter of months. The seventh chapter of the text includes invaluable details concerning his debut to fame immediately following his release. His associations with Frederick Douglass at antislavery rallies, extensive lecture tours, substantial book sales, and failed stage adaptations of his narrative are each chronicled with supporting documentation. The question of the authenticity of the text is also considered. An article from the *Syracuse Evening Journal* demonstrates the popular view that Wilson wrote the work after asking

Northrup a series of questions concerning the text. The question concerning Wilson's influence upon the account is settled with the resolution that he influenced its style, not its contents.

The subsequent arrests of Alexander Merrill and Joseph Russell are substantiated through additional sources. An account by a local minister, supported by a local newspaper article from that time, chronicles the arrest of Merrill while another describes the less dramatic capture of Russell. Tracing the initial hearing, indictment, postponement, trial, the Supreme Court ruling, and the decision made by the Court of Appeals, the text paints a picture of a society in which such fugitives are released after a short, seven-month imprisonment. As the work concludes, it was Solomon Northrup who ultimately paid the price for this atrocity. Following his years of celebrity, he developed financial problems compounded, as the work demonstrates, by Congress's rejection of a petition for his compensation, a personal loan made to him, two mortgages taken out on his property, and the failure of the stage adaptation of his narrative. The trail of documentation ends with the final public record concerning Northrup in which he experienced a traumatic night of violence and hostility while speaking in Canada. The work concludes with speculation as to his final years and the conjecture that he joined the Underground Railroad. His disposition, experience, close proximity to a known participant as demonstrated by deed records, and a letter contained in Harvard's Siebert Letters collection mentioning him as a participant in the Underground Railroad are catalogued as persuasive evidence. Ultimately, the work concludes that the manner in which he spent his final years is unknown.

While it could have easily been condensed with the omission of a short summary of the work and a longer summary subsequently given alongside the supplemental information, the text is an exemplary collection of research concerning Solomon Northrup and the social circles

in which he maneuvered before, during, and after his enslavement. Utilizing exhaustive evidence, the scholars add considerable breadth to a story already chronicling the life of a slave and, in broader strokes, the atmosphere of the United States during this historical passage. By equipping the original text with details taken from a multitude of sources, the work vividly distills the American zeitgeist during the mid-nineteenth century and its relationship to the “peculiar institution” of slavery. It is a valuable addition for any scholar, academic library, or student interested in this aspect of American history.

--Michael Pitts



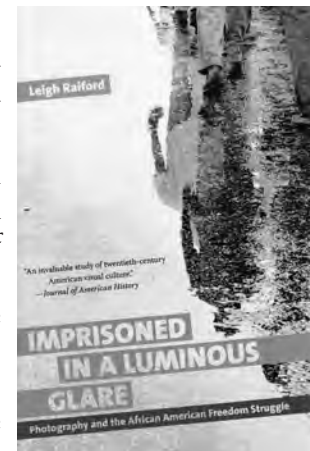
***Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle.* By Leigh Raiford. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011. Pp. 238, notes, bibliography, index. \$25.16, paperback)**

The three chapters in *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* trace photography’s distinct relationship to twentieth century African American civil rights movements, and a conclusion contextualizes the symbolic, aesthetic and theoretical legacy of the photographic imagery of those movements within contemporary African American art and culture. Raiford vividly resurrects a history of acts of resistance through photography, including the organization, training, and deployment of photographers; the ways in which activists conceived of and sought to control and communicate ideas through photographic media; photography as a means to organize and generate revenue to support civil resistance; and the

organization of the production and distribution of photographically based works—from newspapers and pamphlets, to posters and calendars. Raiford’s text is one of a few books published in the last couple of years, including the essay collection *Picturing Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (2012), that instead of studying the representation of African Americans and the African American experience in photography, examine how African Americans themselves produced photographs as a critical, political, historical, and self-reflective practice. Though the core of Raiford’s text spans the twentieth century, Raiford’s attention to the “dialectical relationships between mass media and mass movements” (p. 4) makes her study more than a chronological account.

The first chapter, “No Relation to the Facts about Lynching,” examines the contexts in which early twentieth century black and white audiences encountered the modern media technology of lynching photography; the use of these images in anti-lynching print activism to critique the racist beliefs about African Americans perpetuated in the mainstream press and to counter those beliefs with an expose of white supremacist ideology; and how lynching photographs shaped and impacted racial identities. Activists re-deployed these photographic “souvenirs” in new compositions that documented victims and called attention to the culture of lynching. Situating viewership within the intersection of race, gender, class, and geography, Raiford argues and explains how lynching photographs interpellated viewers differently.

Raiford turns to the Civil Rights era in the



second chapter, “Come Let Us Build a New World Together.” The primary focus is the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), whose public image was initially directed by executive secretary James Forman, and most well known for work of its first official photographer, Danny Lyon. The SNCC drew inspiration from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference’s “Project C”—a targeted, Birmingham-based media campaign of “confrontation.” Raiford presents a fascinating discussion of the meaning of photography as a weapon within the organization, and the group’s photographers’ evolving conception of their role as artist/photographers and as “movement” photographers. More illustrations (especially of SNCC posters) would have enhanced the chapter’s analysis of how, within a broader expanding media environment, the SNCC sought to counter dominant representations of black protest and to construct a different image of African Americans. Raiford’s attention to the SNCC’s use of vernacular photographic forms and their work to speak to audiences within the black community expands our understanding of the media project of the Civil Rights era. As recent events in Ferguson, Missouri have once again brought the image and the meaning of black protest to national attention, Raiford’s study reads as even more compelling.

In the final chapter, “Attacked By First Sight,” the Oakland-based Black Panther Party’s use of photography in their project of self-representation as “cultural self-defense” instigated a debate about the meaning of power of the state and the power of the individual, while also revealing the contradictions between the group’s image, its work and its ideology. In the case of the Panthers, the national media responded with their own image of the Black Panther Party, revealing how the Party both disrupted and enlivened fantasies about notions of black identity and black culture. Works like the iconic poster of Huey Newton may have captivated the world, but Raiford demonstrates how in the pages of newspaper *The Black Pan-*

ther, which featured photographs by various photographers and collages by Minister of Culture Emory Douglas, the group struggled with the meaning of the visibility they sought and the image they projected.

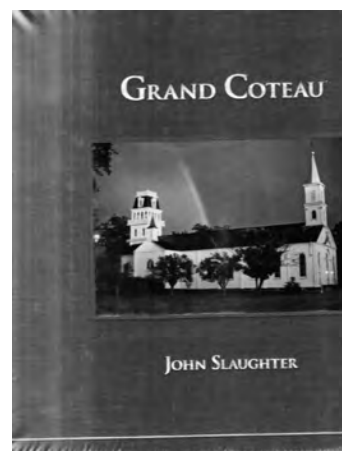
A persistent theme throughout the book is a mainstream photographic media as an entity that needed to be monitored, scrutinized, and disputed, and the simultaneous embrace of photography as a medium intrinsic to identity formation and the negotiation of the meaning of black identity and historical memory. Raiford traces this idea as a dialog not only between movements but also within these movements.

--Makeda Best



***Grand Coteau.* By John Slaughter. (Lafayette, LA: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2012. Pp. vi-xv + 156. \$49.50, hardcover)**

“On an early spring morning in Grand Coteau, the land lies draped in folds of fog that obscure low-lying areas. Acres of green lawn accent the center of town,” writes Patrice Melnick in her introduction to John Slaughter’s new photographic book *Grand Coteau* (pp. viii). The imagery created by Slaughter, of the quaint town of Grand Coteau (French for “Big Ridge”) located in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, spans thirty five years (1977-2012). Combining historical and biographical text by Louisiana writer Patrice Melnick and personal narratives by Slaughter to ac-



company the images, *Grand Coteau* creates an intimate essay of haunting atmospheric landscapes, environmental portraits of the towns unique residents, historical landmarks, religious structures, and rustic architecture.

The photographs in the book are in both black and white and color (which is the majority), while the subject of the book focuses on the unique relationship between the landscape and residents of Grand Coteau by weaving together images of lush green gardens, peeling paint and faded signs on the towns architectural spaces, colorful azaleas that signal the arrival of spring in Louisiana, the everyday affairs of the towns residents, and the occasional pet. He also includes photographs of Louisiana's infamous weather experience: the rare snowfall event, flood waters expected on any given rain day in Louisiana, or the devastation after a hurricane. All of these photographs are anchored together by the town's Catholic churches, schools, religious icons and the nuns and priests who reside within their walls. Many of his images feel timeless and reverent, although some of the images can be expected and ubiquitous, particularly the images of live oak trees or cemeteries shrouded in mist. These images are few and not heavy handed and within the narrative of the book are necessary to tell the story of Grand Coteau as not only a southern town, but a town in the heart of Acadiana. Melnick's words that accompany the images transform the viewer's experience by creating a narrative that lends to Slaughter's book the feeling that one has been invited to peer into a personal family album while being told the family stories by Melnick.

Slaughter and his wife, Hilary, moved to Grand Coteau in 1976 when she accepted a position as a Spanish teacher at the Academy of the Sacred Heart School, an all-girls catholic school founded in 1821. In 1983, he and his wife opened The Kitchen Soup and eventually sold it to Nancy Brewer, who in 2011 was the one to suggest to Slaughter that he publish a book on his photography of Grand Coteau. With this encouragement Slaughter began sift-

ing through 35 years of photographs. "The criteria for inclusion, was based on aesthetic quality, historical significance, subject importance and social value. Revealing the life of a small town all arranged chronologically," writes Slaughter (pp. vii, 134).

Flipping through these chronological images, there is the sense that throughout thirty-five years of living in Grand Coteau, Slaughter was never without his camera. Slaughter's talent as a photographer lay in his master study of color, exploring the rich textures found in Grand Coteau, and his keen observation of light. On page 32, the color photograph of *Olivier Store A La Charles, 1980*, with the lines of paint and light bleeding into one another, creates a feeling of a Rothko painting. The same photograph has a wonderful use of complimentary colors, with the bright green banana leaf and its horizontal lines leading the eye to the horizontal red paint, unified by the repetition of the plant's violet hued shadows, which help to create a contrast with the gold cast of the natural light. The use of complimentary colors can be found in the image *The Red House* (p. 110) with a wonderful tension created by blues and oranges and reds and greens. This tension is echoed in the splitting of the image in half, visually, through the use of direct natural lighting, creating high contrast on either side of a small tree that acts as an implied vertical line to dissect the image, creating a dark side and a light side. On the highlighted side of the frame there are repetitions of shapes and lines creating a unique rhythm while the shadow side of the frame acts as a resting spot for the eye.

Slaughter's earlier portraits feel contemporary to the trend of today's portrait photographers. In the photograph from 1979, on page 20, of Frances Barriere, Slaughter captured her cleaning fish that were caught by her husband, Wilfred "Beck" Barriere. She sits in a yellow plaid dress, framed by a fading yellow door frame; in her left hand she holds up a predominantly yellow-colored fish; the knife in her right hand acts as a directional queue, pointing the

viewer to the small yellow spot. Various hues of red are placed throughout the composition acting as semi circle surrounding Barriere, bringing the viewer from side to side of the frame and almost acting like a reflection of the large grin found on Barriere's face.

As a resident and photographer in Louisiana, I immediately connected with Slaughter's images, particularly those with the unique plants and flowers that make-up southern Louisiana, the predominate Catholic over tones of living in Louisiana, the faded porches attached to small framed homes with peeling paint, or the image of a young girl wading through water to walk to school after a typical rainy day. The people he captured feel familiar, and the entire time I paged through the book, I felt like I was walking alongside Slaughter. These postcard-like snapshots read as a personal intimate album, preserving the unique soul of this small Acadian town and are a wonderful testament to the people and town Slaughter has documented since 1977.

--Edna Lanieri



***New Orleans Memories: One Writer's City.* By Carolyn Kolb. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013. Pp. 247, index. \$25, hardcover)**

New Orleans Memories: One Writer's City is a collection of forty-one of author Carolyn Kolb's "Chronicles of Recent History" columns originally published in *New Orleans Magazine* that have been revised and updated for publication in book form. Kolb is a born and bred New Orleanian. Although she moved to Bogalusa (about eighty miles north of New Orleans) at age four, she often spent time there while growing up and returned as a young adult,

receiving her first college degree from Newcomb College of Tulane University (which, she explains more than once over the course of the book, was the women's college associated with Tulane) and her Master's in History and Doctorate in Urban Studies/Urban History from the University of New Orleans. As an adult, she has continued to live and work in New Orleans where, besides writing for *New Orleans Magazine*, *Louisiana Life*, and the *Times-Picayune*, she has also served as the director of the New Orleans Jazz Museum and taught Louisiana History as an adjunct instructor at Tulane University. Given her personal and academic background, it is no wonder that her subject of choice is the city she clearly loves.

The setup of the book is fairly straightforward. The essays are divided by topic into four roughly equal sections—Food, Mardi Gras, Literature, and Music—and bracketed by a brief introduction at the beginning and a bibliography at the end. One interesting thing that Kolb does is have a topical bibliography at the end of each section containing recommended books, videos, recordings, and/or websites rather than a comprehensive one at the end of the book. None of the essays are particularly lengthy, with the vast majority topping out at around three to four pages. Additionally, each essay contains at least one photograph (and occasionally two) either taken by the author herself or obtained from a reliable source such as the Louisiana Division/City Archives located in the New Orleans Public Library.

There are many positive things to be said about this book. The author's perspective is that of a native writing about a diverse array of local topics that she finds interesting rather than a researcher writing from an outsider's point of view, which has the effect of all the essays feeling much more personal than strictly academic. This does not, however, mean that the research put into each essay is less than excellent. Given Kolb's strong history background, it is no surprise that where research was done, it was generally thorough. Additionally, where appro-

priate, she includes relevant and interesting material gleaned from local people who are familiar with the topic being examined. For example, the essay “Hubig’s Pies” contains quotes from a member of the family that owns the Hubig’s bakery, and many of the essays in the Mardi Gras section include reminiscences from men and women involved in the krewes or other aspects of the celebration. The short length of the essays is a positive in more than one way. First, with each essay being quite short, it forces the writer to be clear, concise, and focused on the topic at hand because there simply is no room for rambling or tangents. Second, the brevity of the essays makes this work a book that can be read for as long as the reader desires. An entire section can easily be finished in one sitting, or one might simply read an essay or two at a time. Because of the non-linear nature of the book, it is a volume that can be put down and then picked up a day, a week, or a month later and the thread would not have been lost.

The only somewhat negative aspect of this work is that there are times when it becomes very clear that these essays are written by a native for other natives. While the personal nature of the essays often functions as a positive, there are times when it becomes the opposite. On occasion, interesting and informative becomes a study in “remember when?” which can serve to make readers who have not lived their entire lives in or near New Orleans feel not like consumers of information, but like outsiders who can only observe rather than feel included. This seems to happen most often in the Food section of the book. For example, in the essay “Off the Menu,” she writes: “What about those yummy, soggy chicken tacos that Popeyes used to sell? That was a special dish. Now, granted, Popeyes’s main offering—their variety of fried chicken—is not exactly like the version once available at Jim’s Fried Chicken on Carrollton Avenue. Remember how Jim’s always packed it with a dill pickle slice on top?” (pp. 24-25). Many readers, in fact, would not remember that as they are not from New Orleans. Another way

this book leans towards being geared to natives is when Kolb sometimes fails to give dates, likely assuming that her readers know what dates she means by the names she uses. In an essay in the Mardi Gras section “Gallier Hall,” she mentions this or that happening during the tenure of former mayors, but gives no indication what years those men held office. A native might easily remember when Moon Landrieu was in office, but again, a non-native likely would not.

Other than these two minor negatives, overall this book is well done. While it might not be a first choice for someone who is conducting strictly academic research, it is a good addition to the bookshelf of anyone who is interested in knowing more about New Orleans history, culture, traditions, and people written by someone who is familiar with all of them.

--Courtney Moore Clements



***New Orleans con Sabor Latino: The History and Passion of Latino Cooking.* By Zella Palmer Cuadra. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013. Pp. 129, works cited, index. \$35, hardcover)**

As Chef Adolfo Garcia points out in the foreword, New Orleans is a “gumbo of [a] city” (p. xii). As a port town, it boasts of a long and rich confluence of cultures. Indeed, this gumbo is unique enough that most outsiders could, if pressed, produce a fairly unified conception of New Orleans culture—Cajun, creole, jazz, red beans and rice, crawfish, Mardi Gras. But what of New Orleans’s component parts?

Most people are at least somewhat familiar with the French Acadian or “Cajun” influence on Louisiana culture; far fewer recognize the profound impact of Latino migration, which

began in the nineteenth century on the heels of revolution in Mexico, Cuba, and Haiti, and has continued through post-Katrina reconstruction. These migrants' influence on the culture of New Orleans and its culinary history in particular cannot be overstated; certain signature ingredients, including slow-cooked onions and garlic, bell peppers, pork sausage, Tabasco sauce, and various seasonings, are distinctly Hispanic (p. 5).

Zella Palmer Cuadra sets out to give voice to the Latino community in New Orleans. The stories of her thirteen informants are intended to "reveal a rich history that for too long has been overlooked" (p. xiv). To that end, her sample set includes individuals from Spain, Colombia, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Cuba, El Salvador, and Honduras. Moreover, her introduction provides historical context as well as a brief but critical review of the literature.



This cookbook-cum-oral history is not arranged by mealtime or neighborhood or any other convention one might expect from a regional recipe book of this ilk. Rather, the book flows as a reverie from narrative to narrative—the personal stories and foodways of Cuadra's informants. Cuadra thus insists on the primacy of people over place and preparation. The recipes then act as the garnish, accentuating the humanity of the work and offering readers a palatable point of contact with a

historically marginalized Latino community.

Mike Martin, who grew up in New Orleans under Spanish parents, recalls carrying a whole fish to school along with a piece of bread, for "even though [they] were poor [they] always had plenty of food, and they never wasted anything" (p. 11). His story features a recipe for Corvina Roja con Salsa Roja Isleña, Baked Redfish with Isleños Tomato Gravy, and Arroz con Leche (Rice Pudding) for dessert. Edgar M. Sierra Jimenez, a waiter in the French Quarter, reflects on the cultural diversity he has observed in kitchens and markets across the city since immigrating from Colombia at the age of fifteen. As he shares his recipe for Latin-style Bananas Foster; he confesses, "I can't see myself living in Seattle. Not saying Seattle is bad, but I just like being connected to the past and my country" (p. 18). Nancy Gonsalves of Mexico outlines her technique for New Orleans-style tamales, which she relates with a note of sadness, are a far cry from what she grew up eating. "I don't think my customers are ready for my tamales from my country. They like New Orleans-style tamales" (p. 52).

Of course, man cannot live on nostalgia alone. While many of Cuadra's interviews are charming recollections, others report on the status quo. One highlights the unlikely friendship of an older, well-heeled socialite and a young, hoodie-sporting community organizer. Both are Dominican, but both now call New Orleans home. Margarita Bergen could not imagine life without parties: "It is not unusual for me to go to two or three parties in one night. Everyday I get invitations from the gay and straight communities, and that is why I could never leave New Orleans" (p.85). Rafael Delgadillo shares a more sobering account. In 2011, he was shot in the head during an attempted carjacking. He survived the attack and took it as a sign to continue his campaign to curb violence in New Orleans. Along with Anna Frachou, another young interviewee featured in the book, Delgadillo is employed by Puentes New Orleans, Inc., an organization working to

make the city more accessible to the Latino community. *Puentes* means bridges.

For those seeking a conventional cookbook to pull down for everyday inspiration rather than cultural and spiritual edification, Cuadra offers a *lagniappe* (something extra): an appendix of additional recipes from the author herself, arranged, yes, into appetizers, entrees, and desserts.

Thanks to the talents of photographer Natalie Root, the volume is also a feast for the eyes with styled food, portraiture, and candid shots in equal measure. The variety of composition and color adds a *cinéma-vérité* quality to the work that pairs well with its documentarian text.

Cuadra echoes Chef Garcia's sentiment, maintaining that "each culture that came to New Orleans or Louisiana gave the best of its cuisine to the city and is a reflection of the American fabric of many cultures contributing to one pot of gumbo" (p. 7). She rightly points out that few scholars or writers have given as much thought to Spanish heritage in New Orleans as they have to French heritage. Her multivocal approach sets the tone and surely paves the way for future research, not only of the cultural landscape of New Orleans, but of other Delta crossroads.

--Monica Mylonas



***Bourbon Street: A History.* By Richard Campanella. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2014. Pp. ix-xvi + 312, notes, index. \$35, hardcover)**

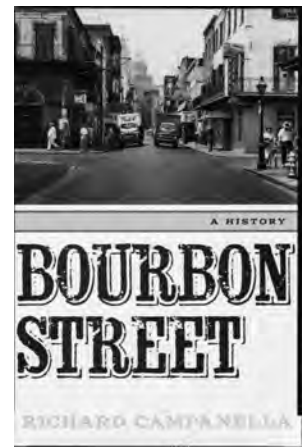
I was never the same after my first trip to Bourbon Street. My guess is Richard Campanella was not either. His book is the first full-scale academic treatment of the famed New

Orleans street. *Bourbon Street: A History* will likely stand for a long time as the definitive account of one of the most colorful and notorious places in America.

Campanella begins with the founding of New Orleans in the late 1600s by French explorers, who saw the city's potential as a military stronghold. As anyone who followed the disaster of Hurricane Katrina knows, the oldest parts of New Orleans were the ones the storm least affected. The French Quarter—and Bourbon Street in particular—has withstood natural disasters, fires, and efforts by religious and civic groups to make it more wholesome. Campanella argues that Bourbon has evolved slowly and organically over time, changing with the tastes of the public, but also remaining surprisingly stable and recognizable.

Modern Bourbon Street did not emerge until the 1940s, but Campanella shows that the street has long had a reputation for loud music, drunkenness, sex, and fighting. From its earliest days, New Orleans served—and still does—as a gateway between the southern United States and the Caribbean. The cultural exchange that has taken place in New Orleans has had much to do with its rich and permissive culture. Campanella shows, however, that until the late 1800s, Bourbon Street maintained a reputation for being working class and "decent" (p. 82). The street's red light reputation was not inevitable, though New Orleans's worst excesses eventually gravitated toward Bourbon Street.

The Civil War left Bourbon Street virtually untouched. And in the 1890s, trolley lines, electrification, telephones, and trains made it much easier for people to travel to the city and enjoy modern conveniences once there. It was also the decade in



which Jim Crow laws became entrenched in the South. Before the 1890s, the French Quarter enjoyed relatively fluid race relations and racial geography. But as the nineteenth century closed, the white South was creating more segregated living and working places. Bourbon Street was no different.

In the 1910s and 1920s, modern tourism came to New Orleans. Yet, even as Bourbon remained a wet place in the supposedly dry United States of the 1920s, the street had not achieved an international reputation. It was not until after World War II that Bourbon Street as we know it came into existence. Unlike today, however, all the action was indoors in clubs, not outside.

Amid the postwar economic boom, New Orleans flourished. However, Bourbon Street had to walk a careful line between promoting leisure and encouraging depravity. In the early 1960s, District Attorney Jim Garrison (he of JFK assassination conspiracies) cracked down on vice in the city. Bourbon Street survived the opportunistic Garrison. But when hippies descended on Bourbon in the late '60s and early '70s, Campanella believes it was a low-point for the city. Flower children, the author wryly notes, "had no money to spend and took all day not spending it" (p. 245). Trash went uncollected and urban spaces decayed.

In the 1980s, Bourbon Street underwent yet another revival. The place became a year-around, outdoor carnival, complete with ever-present rock music, "Big Ass Beers," Hand Grenades, flashing coeds, and overly lit, tacky souvenir shops. Love it or hate it, the Bourbon Street we know today has not changed much in the past generation, nor has its political culture. As one head of the Merchants Association put it, he spent five years "just fighting, fighting, fighting" (p. 249).

Campanella concludes his book with an insightful discussion of the Bourbon Street authenticity issue. His analysis will be familiar to anyone who has heard the rants of Davis McAlary (based on the real-life New Orleans

musician Davis Rogan) from the all-too-short-lived HBO series *Treme*. New Orleans "purists" have often hated Bourbon Street as much as religious zealots, not for its sinfulness, but its crass commercialism and lack of "authenticity." But Campanella wisely notes that the search for authenticity on Bourbon is a fool's errand. Streets and cities are constantly being made and remade, and judgments as to authenticity are relativistic. Bourbon Street is as authentically New Orleans as Jackson Square, Frenchman Street, or Audubon Park.

Despite many changes and reinventions, Bourbon Street has maintained a surprising amount of continuity. Campanella illustrates this well in the photographs he includes that compare historical locations with more recent ones. Many of the buildings and street scenes have changed remarkably little. Whatever its faults, Bourbon Street is the heart of a landscape that has largely remained true to its historical roots.

Bourbon Street: A History is a well-informed and richly detailed account. Campanella writes with the passion of a true native, and his book contains many nice turns of phrase. At times, though, his prose is as over-the-top as a Bourbon Street barker. On one page, he writes of how "sin merchants would turn likely lads into lascivious Lotharios and further legitimize their lecherous line of work" (p. 98). Later, he recounts a "campy cavalcade of crooked carnies," who "had earned the strip a new cadre of critics" (p. 217).

Campanella's book is packed with strippers, thieves, and Mafioso, but I was surprised at how little attention the author gave to the Katrina disaster. Perhaps he, like so many natives, has suffered from Katrina fatigue and wants to move on. Also, because Bourbon Street was one of the most resilient parts of the city—opening immediately after the disaster and serving as a symbol of the city's efforts to rebuild—there is not much of a story to tell, at least not in comparison to other devastated areas.

Campanella's book is at times as R-rated as

its subject, but it is a scholarly work, well documented, and informed. Anyone interested in the history of one of this country's most famous and important streets should read it.

--Colin Edward Woodward



***Strangers on Their Native Soil: Opposition to the United States' Governance in Louisiana's Orleans Territory, 1803-1809.* By Julien Vernet. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013. Pp. v-vi + 163, notes, bibliography. \$60, hardback)**

Scholars have long been interested in Louisiana's transition from a diverse ethnic and racial borderland into an American state. As the title to his book implies, Julien Vernet takes up this topic by examining resistance to United States governance in Orleans Territory, the portion of the Louisiana Purchase below the thirty-third parallel that included the highly important entrepôt of New Orleans. The chief issues that worried residents of Orleans Territory about American governance were economic, according to the author. Residents worried about recognition of their land claims, their ability to import slaves and whether a government conducted in English could fairly represent their interests. These were not entirely new concerns for Louisianans as the region had a long history of shifting imperial authorities and economic policies. Their worries were compounded under American jurisdiction because residents believed that the new Territorial government, along with the Jefferson, administration intended to restrict their political rights. Their fears were realized with the passage of *An Act for the Organization of Orleans Territory and the Louisiana District* in 1804, legislation

that ignored the Northwest Ordinance precedent that permitted a territory to choose a representative assembly once it reached 5,000 inhabitants. Under the 1804 Act, the President appointed the territorial governor and the Governor chose a Legislative Council. According to the author, "Orleans Territory was a colony in Jefferson's new 'empire of liberty'" (p. 53).

Vernet begins his narrative by helping his readers understand the area's political past. He outlines the colonial origins of Orleans Territory under the French and Spanish, noting the area's strong history of protests against policies residents believed were opposed to their economic and political interests. Both Territorial Governor William C. C. Claiborne and President Thomas Jefferson believed that Louisiana's Creole residents, many of whom were French Catholics, were not ready for the type of popular government that the Anglo-Protestant majority in America practiced. Both leaders advocated for the controversial 1804 Act. Most members of Congress agreed with them and the measure was approved.

The opposition that emerged in Orleans Territory in response evolved in three stages. The first stage produced the *Remonstrance*, a petition to Congress that, among other issues, protested the prohibition of the slave trade and the lack of representative government. During the second stage, opposition leaders like Daniel Clark and Edward Livingston enjoyed influence in the new Territorial Legislature, now permitted under a revised Act in 1805. Ultimately, the opposition imploded from within during the final stage, as various opposition leaders discredited themselves with their connections to the Aaron Burr Conspiracy or to unpopular local



controversies. Moreover, Governor William C. Claiborne and President Jefferson weakened the opposition with concessions to some of their concerns. Among these concessions were the virtual reopening of the domestic slave trade and the adoption of a hybrid legal code that accommodated residents' familiarity with French and Spanish civil law. Vernet emphasizes the point that, even with these accommodations, the President continued to control Territorial government through his appointment of the Governor who, in turn, exercised veto power over the Territorial Legislature. In the end, the opposition to U.S. governance in Orleans Territory serves as a stark reminder of the problems that came with western expansion. Louisiana reaffirmed the colonial status of western territories. It also reminded Americans that slavery in the territories would continue to be an issue.

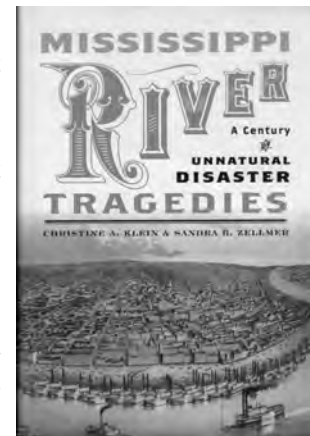
Strangers on Their Native Soil does not ask new questions, but it is a well-organized and informative work, especially in regard to the major political issues and leaders involved in Louisiana's complicated territorial politics. This is not surprising as the author's primary source base consists largely of government papers and correspondence, territorial newspapers and the private correspondence of various political leaders. Students of Louisiana history, the Louisiana Purchase and western expansion, in general, will appreciate the book's tightly constructed political narrative and the details Vernet provides. These strengths aside, those who seek a more in-depth discussion of Louisiana's cultural milieu and its relationship to politics may need to look to older works. The significance of Claiborne's acceptance of Louisiana's hybrid legal system under the *Digest of Civil Laws Now in Force in the Territory of Orleans* is not well developed. Accommodating the legal customs of diverse populations in the west was also an issue that would continue to be a concern.

-Sara Brooks Sundberg

***Mississippi River Tragedies: A Century of Unnatural Disaster.* By Christine A. Klein and Sandra B. Zellmer. (New York: New York University Press, Spring 2014. Pp. xi-xxi + 203, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.04, hardcover)**

This ambitious book explores the history and legal consequences of flooding in the Mississippi River basin since the early twentieth century, contending that, through levee-building, floodwall-construction, and federal flood insurance supplements, "humans have demonstrated an uncanny ability to exacerbate the damage created by natural hazards" (p. 11). In their chronological survey, Klein and Zellmer highlight seven major floods in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as well as the effects of Hurricane Katrina on the city of New Orleans in 2005. Their work shifts deftly between descriptions of the disasters themselves and the resulting fallout—usually in the form of Congressional dictums—in dealing with the flooded regions. What results is a work that combines legal, political, economic and cultural history with issues of race and class.

The floods themselves are the focal point of this book, but the authors add a much-needed human element by including fascinating stories of individuals dealing with deluges. One tale involves legal wrangling between Arkansas and Tennessee over Centennial Island, formed overnight by an avulsion of the Mississippi River, and the manner in which bootlegger and cold-blooded killer Andy Crum took advantage



of this legal no-man's-land before being lynched through vigilante justice. Other accounts describe how African-American men served as a "human dike" to hold back water (often at gunpoint) during some floods when Jim Crow ruled the south and even how a man named James Scott faced imprisonment for flooding Quincy, Illinois, so that he could continue a clandestine extramarital affair.

Peppering their analyses with these fascinating human interest stories, the authors support their arguments by focusing on the shift in flood control and flood relief efforts from local to national control in the twentieth century. In so doing, they highlight the extent to which the Flood Control Act of 1928, in particular, represented a "paradigm shift in the division of labor among federal, state, and local governments" (p. 78). This transfer of power from local to federal authority, including the martial Army Corps of Engineers' efforts in "fighting Mother Nature" (p. 103), reflected larger national concerns over the growth of the national government and a loss of local initiative. As the federal government led efforts to straighten, dam, and build up unnatural barriers to the flow of the Mississippi River and its tributaries, they also promoted settlement in areas that once served as important floodplain safety-valves. These human intrusions, although completed with "the best of intentions," the authors contend, "have set the stage for unnatural disaster" (p. 12). What resulted is an area where, at least legally, "natural" and "unnatural" are malleable and oft-debated terms. Is a river flooding over the protection of a levee attributable to a natural or man-made disaster? And who is responsible—pragmatically, who should pay—for the destruction caused by such an "act of God?"

There are few faults to be found in this diligently-researched and well-written book. At times, extensive legalese and drawn-out descriptions of legal precedents bog down otherwise tight prose. But even in these instances, the authors—both of whom are professors of law and who have spent a great deal of time on and

around these rivers—usually manage to describe issues like eminent domain and regulatory takings in an accessible manner without distracting from the overall readability of the text.

The book's conclusion is particularly insightful and valuable. In it, the authors argue that flood control and relief efforts have, in large part, exacerbated problems created by the uncontrollable nature of moving water. "Three lessons stand out," they contend: "1) Rivers will flood; 2) levees will fail; and 3) unwise floodplain development will happen if we let it" (p. 187). Following this definitive list, the authors propose legal reforms that would benefit flood control and relief efforts, clearly demonstrating the usefulness of their work not only as a record of the past, but as a primer for better understanding present and future applications of the law to the Mississippi River Basin. As a result, *Mississippi River Tragedies* appeals to scholars interested in environmental or legal history as well as casual readers seeking a chronological survey of flood relief and flood control efforts in this region. Klein and Zellmer are to be commended for connecting past and present in such a clear and accessible manner and for adding to current debates on flood relief and control.

--Adam J. Criblez



***The Tilted World.* By Tom Franklin and Beth Ann Fennelly. (New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2014. Pp. 336. \$14.99, paperback)**

Tom Franklin and Beth Ann Fennelly's new novel, *The Tilted World*, opens in the spring of 1927 in the rain-soaked, muddy countryside outside a little Mississippi River town named Hobnob. That time and setting alone is enough to set the heart racing, as readers know

1927's massive and disastrous Great Flood of the lower Mississippi River delta must be imminent. The novel also opens with characters in a tense confrontation. Two revenuers, guns drawn, have a suspected moonshiner tied to a chair on his front porch, grilling him to learn the whereabouts of his still. But the moonshiner's sharp-shooting wife, Dixie Clay, has arrived unseen, rifle in hand. Imminent gunfire joins imminent flooding to raise tension to the right pitch in this well-plotted story about moonshine, murder, betrayal, natural disaster, and true love.

In novels like *Hell at the Breech* and *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter*, Franklin has repeatedly created sharply drawn characters and tense plots bringing crime-fighters and criminals into bloody conflict. Here Franklin creates similarly complex characters. He gives readers Ted Ingersoll—an orphan reared by nuns, a twenty-something bachelor, a crack shot, a decorated veteran of World War I, a blues-playing guitarist, and a roving undercover revenue agent who catches perps and moves on. He has “always felt” he was merely “passing through” life—never “grounded,” never “permanent.” But that is about to change.

Poet Beth Ann Fennelly, Franklin's wife, has co-authored the novel, adding a tender element.



Noted not only for her poetry but also for her nonfiction work *Great with Child: Letters to a Young Mother*, Fennelly is responsible for material depicting young Dixie Clay's fierce and tender love both of her lost baby and of the foster baby she takes in.

Dixie Clay's foster baby, Willy, comes to her from Ingersoll. On his way into Hobnob, Ingersoll finds him at a crossroads store where the baby's parents have been shot dead. Touched by Willy's plight and remembering his own abandoned childhood, Ingersoll cannot bring him-

self to leave Willy at an orphanage, so he inquires until he finds Dixie Clay, who doesn't hesitate to take the baby.

All this happens as the novel opens, raising questions about how soon Ingersoll and Dixie Clay will fall in love, how her murderous husband will react, what Ingersoll will do when he discovers Dixie Clay's involvement in the moonshine operation, and how all will fare in the imminent flood, its arrival foreshadowed by the knowledge that saboteurs hired by New Orleans are hiding across the river in the Arkansas Delta, ready to blow the levee.

These two writers, who live in Oxford, Mississippi, have enriched their gripping tale by connecting two of its elements to William Faulkner's story set in the same 1927 Great Flood.

When the levee at Hobnob blows and raging waters blast through the town and gush into the countryside, sweeping away businesses, homes, barns, Franklin and Fennelly create an episode like one Faulkner created in “Old Man,” a story he interwove with the companion story “Wild Palms” in *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*.

In Faulkner's story, a woman has climbed a tree to escape the Great Flood. A man in a skiff rescues her. They go downstream, get grub from a larger boat heading upstream, and spend the night on an Indian mound. When Dixie Clay sees the wall of water gushing toward her, she dashes up a low ridge and climbs its tallest tree. Ingersoll rescues her in a small boat. They head downstream, get grub from a larger boat heading upstream, and spend the night on an Indian mound.

In the differences they intertwine with these similarities, Franklin and Fennelly enter a conversation with Faulkner. Faulkner's man is a convict, released from prison to help rescue flood victims. The woman he rescues repulses him, particularly because she is eight months pregnant. He repeatedly tries to turn himself in so he can return to the all-male world of the prison. By the end of the story, he has reached

his goal, with ten years added to his sentence. His final words are, “Women, shit.”

Franklin and Fennelly’s Ingersoll is opposite. He is not a convict but a lawman. He is not repulsed by the woman but loves her deeply, and he loves the baby too. He is finished with his former roving life, twice declaring, “I’m done with that life now,” even trading his revenue’s badge and his WWI medal for the food he gets from the passing boat. Saving Dixie Clay and the baby makes Ingersoll feel he “has something at stake at last.”

Thus while Faulkner creates a male character who fears the woman he encounters and the new life she could bring him, preferring the safety of solitary masculinity and the changeless continuity and inevitable aging and decline of his all-male prison existence, Franklin and Fennelly create a male character who embraces the woman he encounters and the promise of new life he finds in her and in the child.

In a second similarity to *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*, Dixie Clay resembles Charlotte Rittenmeyer in “Wild Palms,” the companion story to “Old Man.” Both Dixie Clay and Charlotte are already married when they fall in love with the male protagonists, both of whom are bachelors. In both cases the women flee their homes, Dixie Clay when the flood washes it away, Charlotte when she elopes with Harry.

Again, the differences contribute to Franklin and Fennelly’s conversation with Faulkner. Charlotte abandons her children and, when she becomes pregnant, convinces Harry, a medical intern, to perform an abortion. She is as intent as the convict in “Old Man” at achieving a changeless continuity, wanting a life that is “all honeymoon, always, Forever and ever,” a static life with no room for children and the change they represent. On the other hand, when Dixie Clay’s cruel husband gives her foster baby to the flapper he is currently seeing, Dixie Clay can think of nothing but reclaiming Willy even after Ingersoll rescues her and they admit their love for each other.

In these differences in character, Franklin

and Fennelly challenge Faulkner’s vision in both of his stories. The young writers critique the stasis sought by Faulkner’s characters. They suggest that life is like the river that dominates both tales—constantly moving, always advancing, ever changing—and like the Delta it continually re-silts and renews in its floods. They acknowledge that, like the river, life sometimes brings catastrophes, but they also suggest that, like a flood, life’s catastrophes can also bring new fertility, new growth, a new future if characters embrace change rather than fearing and fleeing it—and embrace those who bring change, those who are different, those who are opposite, those who are the Other.

When Dixie Clay abandons her mourning for Jacob, replacing it with her tender love of Willy, and when Ingersoll trades his past honors (the medal) and position (his badge) for his “stake” in the future, Franklin and Fennelly say to Faulkner that sometimes the past can be past, even dead. They embrace the American Dream, life free of history and constantly open to new beginnings.

--Terrell L. Tebbetts

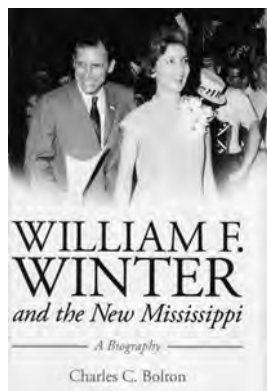


***William F. Winter and the New Mississippi: A Biography.* By Charles C. Bolton. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013. Pp 248, epilogue, acknowledgments, notes, list of oral history interviews, index, \$35, hardcover)**

Charles Bolton’s recent work, *William F. Winter and the New Mississippi: A Biography*, is more than a biography about Mississippi’s long-time statesman and one-term governor (1980–1984); it is about the change that took place within William Winter as an individual

and within Mississippi as a socio-political entity over the course of the mid-20th century. Though this book is ostensibly about William Winter, the evolution that occurred in Winter's understanding of the relationship between white racism, segregation, Massive Resistance, and Mississippi's continued backwardness can be inferred to have also occurred among white Mississippians during the same time period. Throughout his life, Winter had been mostly ahead of the curve in terms of racial moderation, but Bolton does not shy away from discussing Winter's support for segregation both as a politician desirous of remaining in office and as an individual who truly believed that changing the racial hierarchy in Mississippi needed to be approached gradually and not mandated by the Supreme Court. Indeed, Bolton poses a question that is the central focus of this book: how are we, as historians, as Americans, and as individuals to judge a person and the society they lived in after decades of contentious yet remarkable transformations.

It is apparent from this biography that William F. Winter was a good and decent public servant in the truest sense of the word. This is perhaps best exemplified by his working with the state legislature over several years to abolish the position of state tax collector, which he was currently occupying and which allowed him to become very wealthy due to the fact that the state tax collector's office got to keep ten percent of all taxes it collected. As governor, Winter worked to end the corruption and cronyism endemic in Mississippi government and promoted a massive reorganization to the state's educational system as a way of helping the state advance economically and socially. However, even though Winter was a racial moderate before it was politically feasible, as a young state legislator he sup-



ported segregation and some of the milder forms of Massive Resistance. He hid his racial moderation in order to win elections. In fact, Winter came to the conclusion that he needed to speak out more forcefully against white racial extremism only after hearing about the cheers and jokes made by a number of hard-line white extremists after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Yet, the murder of Medgar Evers a few months prior did not elicit in him a similar response. These incidents make Winter a frustrating individual to study or read about, yet he is probably more typical of the type of white Mississippians who lived in the state in the mid-20th century. As Bolton points out, the majority of white Mississippians did not participate in Massive Resistance and evolved slowly (probably too slowly in the eyes of most modern historians) on the issue of race.

Yet, it is this feeling of frustration and the ambiguous nature of life that Charles Bolton wants historians to confront. Bolton is very clear in stating that being an open racial moderate or advocating a progressive legislative platform in Mississippi between *Brown vs. Board of Education* and the end of the Johnson administration would have been political suicide. Implicit in Bolton's biography are questions about the extent to which it was possible for white Southern politicians to lead their constituents in developing a society and government that sought to address a system of racial hierarchy that had been developing since the Colonial Era. Other questions are also raised about how historians are to deal with an individual who was, at one point, a segregationist, but who later changed his mind. What are historians to make of a state that seemed so far behind in addressing the civil rights movement and the historical inequalities created by the system of slavery and Jim Crow?

In the end, Bolton wants the reader to understand that both Winter's and white Mississippians' attitudes about race were and still are in the process of evolving. Winters did an excellent job throughout the majority of his po-

litical life in walking the tightrope of racial moderation. In doing so, he helped open up Mississippi society and politics for moderates like himself and helped make some definite improvements to the life of his state and to the nation as a whole. So, can such a man be considered a hero? Is it possible for a man who often chose what was politically prudent, rather than what was morally right, to be held up as an example of the good that came out of the civil rights movement? In some ways, Charles Bolton's book reminds me of Eric Foner's *This Fiery Trial*. Foner, of course, dealt with a decidedly more famous figure in Abraham Lincoln, but the focus on the evolution of thought about race and America is similar. Both authors remind us that the study of history is, fundamentally, the study of change, its causes, and its effects. As such, Bolton's biography adds some much needed subtlety into the historiography of why white Southerners reacted the way that they did to the Civil Rights movement. He also seemingly asks historians to realistically ask themselves how quickly major attitudinal and social changes can and should occur in society. *William F. Winter and the New Mississippi: A Biography* is just that, a biography of a man, of a state, how both changed, and the hows and the whys of that change.

--Adam Carson



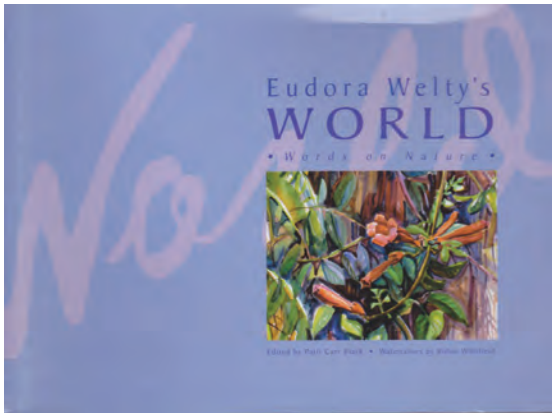
***Eudora Welty's World: Words on Nature.* Ed. by Patti Carr Black. Illus. by Robin Whitfield. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013. Pp. 92. \$30, cloth)**

In his 1978 essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," William Rueckert coined the term *ecocriticism*; however, an ecological approach to literature wasn't

formally incorporated into the academy until the 1990s. Increasingly, literary scholars are exploring the relationship between the environment and literature, examining how the natural world is represented in texts, and considering these factors in the context of what many view as an age of ecological crisis. Black's lovely book coincides nicely with these recent critical trends, though her approach here is not academic or esoteric, but artistic and pithy. The quiet simplicity of her book removes us from contemporary discussions about global warming, deforestation, coastal land loss, and other calamities, and encourages us to look backwards to Welty and consider and appreciate how she imagines the natural world in her fiction.

Black has drawn widely from Welty's body of work, highlighting the vivid descriptions Welty provides of the natural world and placing them into eight categories and sections of the book: trees; flowers; birds; creatures; the seasons; time of day; the sky; and places. Each page presents a brief passage from Welty's writing, and has little vignettes adorned and punctuated by artist Robin Whitfield's subtle yet beautiful watercolors. As an example, one page in "Trees" features this passage from Welty's "The Wide Net": "The willow trees leaned overhead under muscadine vines, and their trailing leaves hung like waterfalls in the morning air. The thing that seemed like silence must have been the endless cry of all the crickets and locusts in the world, rising and falling." In each of these passages, Welty draws on vivid details, sensory images, and metaphoric language as her tools to depict the natural world and her characters' interactions with it. Appropriately, Black's artistic collaborator works in an outdoor studio, and Whitfield says nature is "the driving force" of her painting.

Welty's fiction is informed by a keen observation of the world around her, a quality also found in her photographs of white and black southerners in Mississippi during the Great Depression. As Black points out, Welty "was deeply attuned to the natural world." Welty



herself affirms this connection in her autobiography *One Writer's Beginnings*: “the outside world is the vital component of my inner life. . . . My imagination takes its strength and guides its direction from what I see and hear and learn and feel and remember of my living world,” a quote Black uses as an epigraph (76).

Because Welty is a southern writer, critics may be likely to examine how she depicts people’s relationship with the land, or consider the sense of place she creates in her work. However, this book encourages us to pay attention to the smaller, nuanced details that work together to contribute to her places: the cypress tree that dots the landscape of *Delta Wedding* or the snakes and moths that inhabit “Moon Lake.” The final section focuses that lens wider, featuring passages that describe larger places like Natchez Trace, the Mississippi River, and the Delta, settings for many of Welty’s stories and novels.

Black has made substantial contributions to the culture of Welty’s hometown of Jackson, and Mississippi in general, spending most of her career as Director of the Old Capitol Museum of Mississippi History. She founded Jackson’s New Stage Theater in 1965, which still thrives today. She is the writer and editor of numerous books that focus on the art, culture, and folk life of Mississippi, including compilations of Welty’s photographs and the work of Mississippi artist Walter Anderson. This book comes from her own Edge Press, which she founded in the 1990s. Black developed friendships with both

Anderson and Welty in their lifetimes, and this book is the culmination of an idea she and Welty had discussed, a project that took her about fifteen years to ultimately complete.

Black offers her book “for lovers of nature and lovers of language,” and it would also appeal to lovers of art and, of course, Welty’s work. Though it is small and not oversized—a choice that reflects its simple format and approach—it would make a perfect coffee table book for visitors to pick up and flip through. It is also a quite suitable choice for a reader to enjoy on a spring morning outside, while appreciating the birds chirping and the bloom of the magnolia tree.

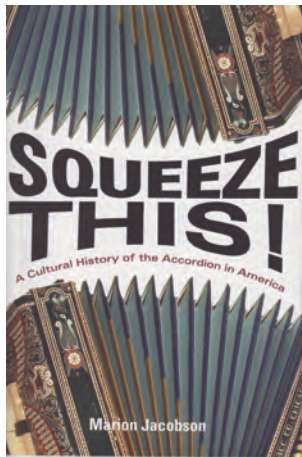
Though Black’s treatment of Welty’s work is more aesthetic than analytical, her introduction references not only Welty’s “imaginative” but “provocative use of words.” Though it is appropriate for the more casual reader, this book also indicates to the academic reader the possibilities for examining Welty’s work within the lens of environmental criticism. Taken out of context, these vignettes are to be admired for Welty’s use of language. However, they might provoke some readers familiar with the texts they are drawn from to consider how Welty’s depiction of the natural world acts symbolically or enriches that text’s themes.

-Casey Kayser



***Squeeze This!: A Cultural History of The Accordion in America.* By Marion Jacobsen. (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012. Pp. 288. \$29.95, cloth)**

The accordion is the subject matter of many jokes. Many musicians view it as a novelty unworthy of serious study. I believe that the accordion, particularly the piano accordion, is



a perfect metaphor for the American experience in the twentieth century. Marion Jacobsen, author of *Squeeze This!: A Cultural History of the Accordion in America*, aptly states: “While some writers have highlighted the nostalgic yearnings associated with accordion playing in immigrant communities, the ‘standardization’ of the accordion could be seen to reflect a different and opposing idea: the ‘assimilationist’ aspirations of white ethnic Americans observed during the first decades of the twentieth century” (p. 49). The piano accordion is deserving of serious academic and cultural study, and Marion Jacobsen’s book is a good start.

As a child growing up in the sixties, I saw the accordion as synonymous with Lawrence Welk and his all-white orchestra, complete with elegant dancers in ball gowns. It was sanitized, old fogey music. This internal image of the accordion changed in the 1990s when I was inexplicably drawn to a 1930s-era piano accordion at a flea market. As I checked out this old instrument, I could hear a multitude of ethnic tunes playing in my head like Klezmer, Tejano, Irish and more. As Walter Kuehr, owner of The Big Squeeze accordion shop, put it: “With only one instrument you can travel the world” (p. 1).

The tale of the piano accordion begins in San Francisco, California with the Deiro brothers who claim to be the original players of that style accordion (as opposed to buttons used on earlier folk instruments). The first piano accordion appeared on stage in 1908 in vaudeville. Its portability and versatility made it a perfect instrument for a traveling musician. It was a virtual one man band. The accordion was used mainly for light musical entertainment and

dances. Popularity soared and soon it seemed that the piano accordion was a mainstream instrument.

In chapter two the reader learns about the struggle of many to move the accordion forward as a serious musical instrument worthy of performing classical music along with other symphonic instruments like the violin or clarinet. The movement gave rise to the opening of accordion conservatories and accordion studies at many universities. With this movement came a growing divide separating ethnic/folk music and “legitimate” classical music accordion players. Piano accordion players attempted to identify themselves as “legitimate” musicians, fighting for respect among classically trained musicians. The rise of accordion studios and schools (chapter three) continued to engrain a culture of its own that refused to bend. It was big business. The sales of accordion method books and publications exploded.

The mainstream accordion culture desperately wanted to be accepted in classical circles, and regretfully rejected and often even shunned button boxes and ethnic folk music. This isolationism and refusal to embrace a larger audience, I believe, was responsible for the fall of the accordion in American Pop culture.

Ironically, the saviors of the accordion in popular culture were actually crossover artists who got their start in ethnic dance halls. Finnish, German, Czech, and Norwegian pockets, especially in the upper midwest, fueled the polka craze starting in the late 1940s and crossed over into popular radio music. Also in Manhattan, Italian John Brugnoli came up with an idea of “Italian cabaret” that turned into music called “Valtero” which remained popular into the late 1960s.

In the final chapters of this book, Jacobsen informs us of the rebirth and reinvention of the accordion as a musical instrument and as a cultural icon. Old school piano accordion groups, as well as all kinds of button box groups with old style world music, still exist, but the 1980s brought about the reinvention of the accordion

as musicians took to the instrument in new and personal ways. With groups like “They Might Be Giants” or “Weird Al Yankovic,” the accordion became commonplace in the Rock and Roll world. “The musicians . . . project new musical selves, selves that find commonalities across different genres, from conjunto to rock” (p. 172).

Accordion culture continues to evolve and flourish as it works its way into the core of the musical psyche of American pop culture. This book is comprehensive in breadth with extensive notes and citations provided for the serious scholar. The numerous illustrations and photographs also make this book an easy and entertaining read. Whether you are an amateur accordion enthusiast or a serious scholar, this book would be an excellent addition to your library.

--Carol Widder



***Louis Jordan: Son of Arkansas, Father of R&B.* By Stephen Koch. (Charleston, SC: The History Press, March 18, 2014. Pp. 151, bibliography, index, \$19.99, paperback)**

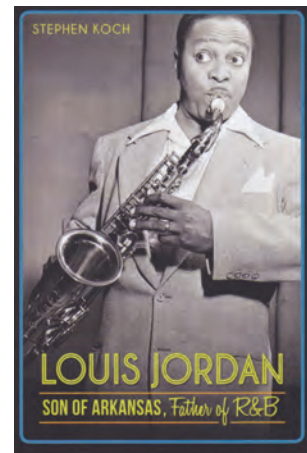
The new biography *Louis Jordan: Son of Arkansas, Father of R&B*, is an attempt to shine light on a shadowy yet key player in the development of 20th century American popular music. The author wastes little time in making it clear that Louis Jordan (who lived from 1908 to 1975) was once far from the shadows. Indeed, he was the biggest of the World War II-era recording stars, logging more than fifty top ten hits during the 1940s. He broke concert attendance records, starred in his own films and recorded with other huge names of the era like Bing Crosby, Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald;

ultimately providing inspiration to other influential musicians like Chuck Berry, Ray Charles and James Brown.

Author Stephen Koch thoroughly chronicles Jordan’s rise and unprecedented popularity with a skillful overall view of popular culture in addition to contemporary accounts: “A September 1944 *Billboard* article noted the solidifying popularity of Louis Jordan and the Tympany Five, as it revealed the winners of a first-annual fan poll of the U.S. armed forces: ‘Louis Jordan pulls the surprise vote of the season with two sides in the Top 13, the only artist aside from Bing [Crosby] to get more than one record in the fave list’” (p. 44)

In addition to poring through the historical record, Koch also gleaned information from in-depth interviews with Jordan’s widow, Martha, as well as well as remaining band members and former faculty of Little Rock’s Arkansas Baptist College, where Jordan was briefly enrolled as a young man. To help illustrate all of this, the book is filled with vintage publicity stills, album covers and Library of Congress images that amply display Jordan’s charisma. From the book come the words of a Jordan drummer from the 1970s, “You just kind of liked to look at him” (p. 131).

To its credit, *Louis Jordan: Son of Arkansas, Father of R&B* devotes equal space to Jordan’s time in the desert following his 1940s heyday—a period about which far less has been written up to now. As rock ‘n’ roll and R&B took center stage in the 1950s, Louis Jordan and his Tympany Five were increasingly pushed from the limelight. The irony that the “new sounds” taking precedence had been initially perfected by Jordan was not lost on him or his many acolytes, nor is it not lost on



Koch's readers now. In what may be the book's strongest and most enlightening section, the reader shares Jordan's frustration as the author compiles testimonial after testimonial from the likes of Berry, Charles, and especially Brown (as well as Little Richard, Bo Diddley, Sonny Rollins, B.B. King, Freddy King, et al.), all naming Louis Jordan as the man who taught them how to boogie.

But this strength may also be the tome's weakness, as all this documentation makes Jordan's disappearance from the limelight all the more mysterious. Theories are floated: "Never strictly a blues artist, and too pop for jazz and too jazz for pop, Louie was also too early to be considered an R&B or rock performer. Label-hopping, poor distribution and sometimes weak material marred his profile and record sales performance during the album era. Timing also saw Louie mostly sidestepping the American and European festival circuits, which saw the revival of many a performer's career, particularly in blues" (p. 140); and: "Could 'Louis Jordan' have been so successfully associated as the 'Global Favorite of eleven million GIs' that the name would need to be relegated to the same memory hole where rationing, victory gardens, recycling, passenger trains, and moves toward racial and gender equality were buried in postwar America?" (p. 91).

Ultimately the reader is left to conclude: perhaps the fading of Jordan's star remains unexplained because it is inexplicable. James Brown, who had perhaps the highest profile among Jordan's most vocal believers, puts it succinctly on the book's back cover: "He was everything!" Brown also simply says of Jordan's legacy, or lack thereof: "He was a good man and still hasn't gotten his due" (p. 119). Perhaps through the work of the author, there will be at least a modicum of remedy to this unfortunate oversight.

--Keith Merckx



Don't Start Me Talkin'. By Tom Williams. (Chicago: Curbside Splendor, 2014. Pp. 208. \$15.95, paperback)

The first thing that happens in Tom Williams's powerful novel is Silent Sam, the harmonica player, gets excited because he and Brother Ben, the protagonist of the novel, have been ranked as the number one blues act in a prestigious magazine. Williams has set us up for a nice underdog having his day story, but instead of playing that out, he does something very telling: he has Brother Ben teach the younger man a lesson. The two are walking down the street—it could be any major city, though it's in LA—and Brother Ben immediately tries to hail a cab. Three, four, five cabs all pass as the point is made: even though the two men may have a devoted following and a stellar ranking by critics, they are still black men in America, which means they can't even hail a cab in LA.

Aside from this lesson in humility, the



opening chapter is all about Ben and Sam getting "suited up." The persona of the bluesmen is all show—from their names to their mode of transportation, even the quality of instruments they play—everything about their appearance

is calculated to make them appear a certain way, as these Delta bluesmen. Brother Ben, in fact, drives a Volvo and lives in a condo when he goes by his real name, Wilton Mabry—who also doubles as the pair’s manager, a hard-dealing, cut-throat man who stands in stark contrast to the affable Brother Ben. But for the tour, he drives an oversized caddy, and the two wear costumes that would put the ’70s to shame. Ben plays pawnshop guitars. The two strew empty bottles of Old Crow around their dressing room even though they find the stuff repellent. Ben is on a health food kick, nowadays, and mostly drinks water or a diet soda, and avoids soul food like the plague.

And there we have the somewhat famous Brother Ben and Silent Sam, the last two true Delta Bluesmen—even though Silent Sam is from Detroit, originally. But let us not judge Ben and Sam—after all, they’re continuing a tradition of Delta Bluesmen exaggerating—or outright lying about—their histories, their deeds and misdeeds, even their inspirations. These characters have crafted an image—but it’s an image that’s simply built on the expectations of others. Of course someone as talented in the Delta Blues as Brother Ben would be illiterate, unintelligent, uncultured; that’s what everyone expects, even the experts who fill their articles and books with lies and misconceptions. This double-life is the price the pair pay for getting to perform authentic music. They wear scratchy clothes in man-made fabrics and avoid using big words so that the fans can maintain the illusion of legitimacy.

On the surface, the book is a rollicking road story about a mentor/mentee relationship. Ben is always one step ahead of everyone, and though it can be annoying to Sam to always be the “student,” he does respect the elder man. But just below the surface, Sam is obsessed with his role in the world—the duality of playing traditionally black music to pretty much exclusively white audiences, while also pretending to be a caricature of himself, bothers him a great deal. But is it any worse than other performers

who exploit other aspects of black culture—namely gangsta rap? This is a novel about having to pretend to be something you’re not in order not only to do something you love but also simply to have peace. It’s a novel about being black in America.

Brother Ben is wise, not in the half-drunk tones of magical otherness one might expect from the character Ben portrays, but in the hard-won lessons learned from navigating a hostile world, whether it be the music industry or simply America. Sam, likewise, is smarter than he lets on, but he lacks Ben’s caution. The two have an enjoyable dynamic which gives rise to a lot of humor in the book. Williams manages to balance some pretty heavy concerns with humor and adventure. It’s a rollicking fun read I’d recommend to anyone.

One of the other interesting conceits is the appearance and layout of the book. The cover resembles an album cover, as does the title. Chapter titles are also taken from Brother Ben songs which relate to major themes in each chapter. This is Williams’ second novel—after the excellent *The Mimic’s Own Voice*—and it’s one of the best novels I’ve read in a long time. I look forward to reading more of Williams.

--CL Bledsoe



***Bodies, of the Holocene.* By Christopher Cokinos. (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2013. Pp xi-xii + 112, acknowledgements. \$16.01, paperback)**

Christopher Cokinos begins this book of poetry with definitions, long descriptive dictionary entries for all the words we know—*bodies comma of the*—and yet for that least familiar titular word, *Holocene*, we are given

only the briefest explanation. Instead, he elucidates this idea over pages, bringing the Holocene to life for us in minutiae of trilobites and the dug up jaws of sharks. Throughout the book he denotes the origins of words and perhaps bids us do the same. And through these factious works he paints his whole.

The book is broken into four titled sections. The opening poem values rhythm and sound as much as meaning; most of his poems are not written in this style, but it is a strong and memorable beginning that is echoed a handful of times throughout the book. Probably the most important thread of the book is also revealed quite early. In just the first few pages we learn of “the woman I loved and then would leave” (p. 5). There is sex and love in this book, but the collection is neither erotic nor romantic. Overwhelmingly, Cokinos explores themes of separation, divorce, absence, memory, and regret.

A great many of these poems note the multitude of birds and plants, flowers and landscapes he encounters and recalls. From herons and bobcats to wildflowers and pollen, Cokinos evokes a world rich with detail. Indeed, a line of his own summarizes his content, “weapons, birds, stars, blossoms” (p. 41). There’s a very real natural setting against which his melancholy contemplations take place. And in this natural world, the narrative unfolds of a man who regrets the disintegration of his marriage.

In some of his poems, Cokinos reaches out and interacts with other artists and poets, placing himself in conversation with the works of Charles Burchfield, Sylvia Plath, John Adams, Yves Tanguy, N. C. Wyeth, Robinson Jeffers, Woody Shepard and more. And he situates himself, too, in specific times and places—his boyhood spent ducking under desks in case of nuclear fallout; his mother watching the televised O. J. Simpson trial. Some poems are long and narratives. Others stretch, filling only tiny spaces on each page, creating silence in the spaces, such as the long poem, “Tremble,” which scrawls fifteen pages.

Cokinos breathes life into memory, each like “interrupted coffee, liquid cooling” (p. 91). He explores the language of sciences, atomic and cellular, geographic and celestial. He looks often to the stars and constellations. He juxtaposes the exterior world in vital detail against the interior of his lonesome thoughts. Bodies are woven throughout the book, but, too, we return to the touchstone of the Holocene about three quarters of the way through the book. From beginning to end his work is about “being human” (p 104).

The woman who dominates these poems is always his wife, never his ex-wife, until finally she is named, Kathe. A few of the poems make mention of other lovers, whether encountered during or after the marriage. But toward the end of the book one of the poems makes note of “my lover who saved me that spring I left” (p. 102). Because of this passage as well as this poem’s final line I would have preferred to see this be the final poem in the book.

--J. Jobe

