

Reviews

***Testimony.* By Robbie Robertson. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2016. Pp. 500, b/w and color photographs, acknowledgments, \$18.00, paperback)**

Any reader interested in The Band, Bob Dylan, or the general popular music/cultural scene of the 1960s and 1970s will enjoy this superbly written memoir. Robertson is best known as the guitarist and chief songwriter for The Band, which first came to universal attention for backing Dylan in 1965-1966 and intermittently thereafter. They would go on to collaborate with him in the “Basement Tapes” sessions at the rented “Big Pink” house and elsewhere in and around Woodstock, New York. The Band’s roots, though, go much deeper as The Hawks, the backing band for native Arkansan rockabilly singer Ronnie Hawkins. The band’s drummer, Levon Helm, was born in Elaine, Arkansas and grew up near Marvell, which is posited on the Delta. Robertson opens his memoir with reminiscences of traveling by train as a fifteen-year-old from his home in Canada to Arkansas, where he would spend much time in the late 1950s and early 1960s around the Hawks’ home base of Fayetteville and in the Delta region. The experience was formative for him. The Delta in particular was “the center of music in the universe,” he writes. “How could Johnny Cash, B.B. King, Jimmy Reed, Elvis Presley, Muddy Waters, Bo Diddley, Sonny Boy



Williamson, Robert Johnson, and on and on, all come from this particular place?” (p. 12).

Robertson’s enduring love for Helm lies at the center of the memoir, and he does not refer to their decades-long rift over songwriting credits, though reportedly they made amends shortly before Helm’s death in 2012. Raised in and around Toronto, his visit with Helm to Marvell was eye-opening regarding the narrow racial attitudes of rural southern whites circa 1960, though he shows affection for Helm’s family’s openness and love for food and music. A visit with Helm to Helena, Arkansas, he writes, inspired his song “Yazoo Street Scandal,” which Helm would sing and eventually appeared on *The Basement Tapes*. Time spent in and around Arkansas inspired “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down,” which Helm also sang, though Robertson writes that the song is also the result of some library research. One of his most memorable experiences in Arkansas (which he also recounts in the film *The Last Waltz*) was his encounter with the great bluesman Sonny Boy Williamson II in Helena. He and others in the band jammed with Williamson for a while, and Robertson noticed that Williamson from time to time spit into a can. Robertson assumed at first that he was dipping snuff, but he came to realize that it was blood. Robertson says they planned to record together, but Williamson would die a few months later.

A large portion of the book recounts The Hawks’ backing Dylan on tours during his turn from acoustic folk to electric rock. Audiences in North America and in Europe were largely furious at this turn, as boos and catcalls (including the epithet of “Judas!”) were wearying for Dylan and band, but Dylan remained stoic and persistent. Robertson writes that he quickly learned to play guitar without looking at his fingers so he could dodge flying objects thrown

from the audience, but like Dylan, he was aware that the music was changing pop music and culture. After touring with Dylan, the Hawks, by then known as The Band, moved to upstate New York, near Dylan's residence, and began recording the songs that would be known as *The Basement Tapes*, which were intended originally as demos for possible sale to other singers. Among the most famous of bootlegged records, a selection of the recordings was released in 1975, and a complete box set was released in 2014.

As The Band began to record on its own, Robertson's songwriting became more central, leading to *Music from Big Pink* (1968) and *The Band* (1969), critically praised albums that inspired a wide array of musicians. Although The Band was comprised of four Canadians and an Arkansan, they almost singlehandedly invented Americana. The memoir underscores the reality that although Robertson wrote most of the songs, he was not necessarily the band's leader. Limited as a vocalist, he sang backup for the leads of Helm, Richard Manuel, and Richard Danko. The band was centered on the interplay of the musicians in producing songs and not, as was the dominant style of the time, on jamming and hot soloing. Vocal duties were mobile, but so was the instrumentation, as Helm would on occasion switch to mandolin while Manuel played drums, Danko played fiddle while Robertson took up the bass, and so on. Playing live was at times a challenge for the group. Robertson writes that he was so nervous about playing their first concert at San Francisco's Winterland Arena in 1969 that he submitted to hypnosis, an operation that propped him up well enough to get him through the concert. The group toured widely throughout most of the 1970s, but drug use, of heroin in particular, Robertson writes, eventually led to its dissolution, though the band did continue in various guises in the years after Robertson left the band in 1978.

While the book is chocked full of entertaining stories, Robertson's play-by-play breakdown

of details on the full band's swansong Winterland concert, filmed as *The Last Waltz* and directed by Martin Scorsese, is relatively tedious. More interesting because less known are details about Robertson's childhood on an Indian Reservation in Canada. Robertson portrays his mother, who was of Cayuga and Mohawk descent, as loving and openminded to his raucous friends and other band members. When he was a boy, Robertson's mother informed him that his father was Jewish and that some of his father's brothers were members of the Canadian underworld—his uncle Murray was a "Canadian Meyer Lansky" (p. 128). Robertson befriended his uncles and flirted with involvement with their operations, but he quickly discovered that he was more cut out for a life of music than one of crime.

This memoir is filled with impressive name-drops, some predictable but others unlikely. While a young teenager, Robertson chatted with an amiable Buddy Holly after a concert, and years later he was friendly with a then-unknown Jimi Hendrix. He befriended the Beatles, especially George Harrison, and Harrison's friend Eric Clapton, who was so impressed with The Band that he wished to join the group. As a natural raconteur, Robertson's encounters with non-musicians such as Marlon Brando, Andy Warhol, Salvador Dali, Michelangelo Antonioni, Jack Nicholson, Henry Miller, and Yul Brynner (whose son Rock would work with the band), among many others do not seem self-aggrandizing merely but small pictures of an era that many readers will appreciate. As with many of his best songs, Robertson is concerned here with storytelling, and anyone interested in the subject matter will find enjoyment in the first-person account of a centrally relevant insider on an important era in North American popular music.

--Bryan L. Moore

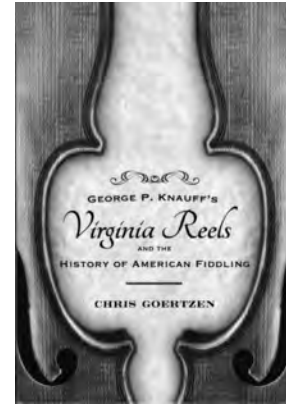


George P. Knauff's Virginia Reels and the History of American Fiddling. By Chris Goertzen. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017. Pp. xiii + 233, notes, illustrations, epilogue, appendices, bibliography, and index, \$65.00, printed casebinding)

Scholarship on fiddling in the United States has tended to emphasize how tunes are transmitted through an oral/aural tradition by musicians who play mainly by ear and have limited knowledge of written notation. Collectors and compilers have focused on putting undocumented tunes into print and finding new versions of older tunes. This orientation to putting into print the tunes that may otherwise be forgotten is admirable, and scholars and musicians are fortunate to have excellent resources that have preserved a wide and diverse corpus of instrumental music. It is difficult to assess what percentage of existing tunes have been recorded, but it is likely that the majority of tunes that remain actively played within local, regional, and national repertoires are now preserved in print or other media. With the waning impetus for saving musical expression from its demise, folklorists and ethnomusicologists are providing more attention to the place of written music within North America's fiddling traditions. Researchers are also discovering that musical literacy was more common in the United States than what others had assumed, and they are also recognizing the importance of exploring how written tunebooks and printed sheet music have influenced the music. Chris Goertzen's new book is a model study of how an early tunebook has influenced a folk music tradition.

Over three decades ago, Goertzen became interested in printed versions of tunes that George P. Knauff had compiled by 1839. Titled *Virginia Reels*, this publication consisted of thirty-five fiddle tunes that Knauff had arranged

for piano when this German immigrant was running a music business and working as a music teacher in Farmville, Virginia. Goertzen gained an in-depth understanding of this publication from the acclaimed fiddler and scholar Alan Jabbour, and



they co-published an important article on Knauff's compilation in a 1987 edition of *American Music*. In *George P. Knauff's Virginia Reels and the History of American Fiddling*, Goertzen shares how he has followed up on this original research with a fascinating reconstruction of salient elements of Knauff's biography and an insightful discussion of ways that the 19th-century tunebook has influenced American fiddling. Goertzen shows both source and cognate versions of tunes that remain active parts of contemporary fiddlers' repertoires, and he also shows how a significant portion of Knauff's collection have fallen out of favor and are rarely, if ever, played in the 21st century. Yet a number of tunes such as "Mississippi Sawyer," "Forked Deer," "Speed the Plough," "Money Musk," and "George Booker" remain core to the repertory of fiddlers who play the major festivals at Galax and Clifftop and other Appalachian festivals today, and Goertzen explores implications of how early printed versions of these tunes have influenced the history of music. Using a creative array of research and analytical techniques, he compares musical form and style from the earlier versions with contemporary recordings of the same tunes. The major conclusions relate to ways that musicians coalesce musical aesthetic values and ways that newer styles of playing—especially the Texas contest style—both preserve elements of early musical systems but also create newer artistic sensibilities.

Some of the most compelling chapters are

found in the early sections when Goertzen pieces together a biographical sketch of Knauff using a paucity of sources. Goertzen is careful to qualify his claims, but it is likely that Knauff was born in Marburg, Germany in 1800 and arrived in Baltimore by 1826. Goertzen provides an interesting historical context for German migration into Virginia during this time period, and he picks up the paper trail of Knauff's life by documenting how he married Ann S. C. Bondurant on November 21, 1832. This marriage moved him into the planter class, and Knauff became a property owner near Richmond. Knauff apparently led an interesting life. He worked as a piano teacher at a finishing school in Richmond, and he also opened the Farmville Fancy Store in the first floor of his home. The business likely began as higher-end retailer but advertisements show that he had shifted largely from domestic to musical merchandise by 1834. Knauff supplemented his income by teaching piano lessons, and the musical instruction was designed to bolster the sale pianos that he stocked in the store. Advertising copy showed that he was willing to deliver pianos up to forty miles away and that he offered his own services in tuning and repairing the instruments. This business's focus on the piano is important as Knauff compiled the tunes for performance on piano—rather than fiddle. As Goertzen demonstrates, it is important to recognize how the tunes were written for keyboards but that they were also picked up by players of other instruments. The Knauff family grew with the birth of two children, but Ann Knauff died after only four years of marriage. Knauff soon suffered a series of other misfortunes, including the loss of the store in a fire, and he made an unsuccessful attempt to open a factory for building pianos. He eventually began teaching at the Buckingham Female Collegiate Institute, but this work, and the institution, itself, was short-lived. It was near this time that he published *The Virginia Reels*, and his motives apparently were largely financial. The work consists of four pamphlets, and they re-

main a remarkable example of early sheet music publication. Biographical details are sketchy, but Knauff was able to work as a teacher and operate other businesses before dying in 1855. His two children became teachers, and his son, John Wellington Knauff relocated to Arkansas where he also bought land and became a farmer. Goertzen compiled the biography by meeting with their descendants and piecing together details from a sparse paper trail.

Goertzen is a meticulous and creative researcher and an engaging writer. His book is a model for integrating social history into the study of musical history. His blending of the personal and social history of Knauff into the history of old-time fiddling provides a model for subsequent studies of contemporary musical traditions. The historical context is fascinating, but Goertzen's book takes an intriguing turn when he leaps from the middle of the 19th century into the 21st century. Following intricate but accessible musical analysis of the tunes, he then explores how the music has now remained vital within contemporary fiddle circles. The final chapters recap but also develop Goertzen's early conclusions on contest fiddling in the American South. Integrating the insights gleaned from the study of history adds to our understanding of the formation of today's old-time and bluegrass fiddle traditions and clearly demonstrates why it is important to also consider the place of written musical sources within the aural tradition of instrumental music.

--Gregory Hansen



Among the Mensans and Other Poems. By Corey Mesler. (Oak Ridge, TN: Iris Press, 2017. Pp. 102. Paperback, \$10.00)

Corey Mesler's recent collection, *Among*

the Mensans, contains eighty-seven poems, each of which is strikingly unique. To be sure, several of the poems share common themes and subjects. For instance, there are six with the word “river” in their titles, three with “dog,” and one with “peach” and another “peaches.” There are multiple poems here about memory, love, desire, and loss. As well as having certain content in common, a number have like forms. Fully a third of the poems are short, twelve lines or less, with the shortest being a mere four lines long. And often the lines themselves are extremely brief, sometimes consisting of only one or two words. But there are few resemblances among the poems beyond these general, surface ones. What distinguishes the collection is the originality and individual sheen of each text.

Perhaps the most conspicuously novel of the many novel poems in the book is “Joseph” (p. 38), a narrative which imagines what the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus, must have actually felt and thought. Mesler’s Joseph is a very human one, a man whose reaction to his unique plight resembles the reaction many an average man in his situation might have. When Joseph first learns of Mary’s pregnancy, “he was / proud.” But then “When his wife admitted / the child was not his / Joseph went on a / bender.” What man would not be so shocked and distraught, upon learning that the child his wife was carrying was not his own, that he would not be tempted to drink himself into oblivion? The fact that Mesler uses the word “bender,” common contemporary slang, for the drinking binge into which Joseph spirals is a nice, effective touch—one that facilitates the reader’s identification with him.

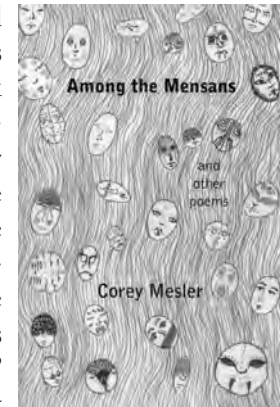
Even better at marking Joseph in the poem as an actual flesh-and-blood man rather than some set-apart holy figure is what happens next. A month into Mary’s pregnancy, Joseph “began / sleeping on a cot in a / separate room,” a quite believable response. And while he is sleeping, the narrator tells us, he dreams of “a dancing girl / with mahogany breasts and legs / like perdition.” The idea that the son of God’s

earthly father could have such lurid visions is intended to shock the reader into the realization of just how human a real-life Joseph would have been. That “his glowing / bride,” unlike Joseph himself, “was talking to the angels” understandably left

him “flesh-lonely,” causing him to lapse into a psychological state of cynical depravity. The brilliance of Mesler’s poem lies in its scandalous surprise, in rendering a revered player in a well-known Biblical story wholly human.

In “The Agoraphobic Writer,” an essay in the recently published *Southern Writers on Writing* (University Press of Mississippi, 2018), Mesler confesses to suffering from the anxiety disorder of the title. He argues that though his condition has cost him much it has also provided him with the necessary solitude in which to write. In fact, he concludes that his impulse to withdraw from the world into his private imagination, the predominant form which his agoraphobia has taken, is central to his identity as a person and a writer. He closes his essay with a quote from the poet Robert Bly: “The fundamental world of poetry is the inward world. We approach it through solitude.” Mesler wholly endorses Bly’s sentiment. “I live in that fundamental world” (p. 27), he declares. Several poems in *Among the Mensans* confirm, in one way or another, this position, the most prominent being “Peach” (p. 28), a short nine-line lyric near the beginning of the book.

The poem opens with the narrator recalling a woman who once brought him a peach, a classic image for female sexuality and allure. Even after many years, he asserts, he still constantly thinks about her, even though she is no longer physically present in his life. Most significantly, he fully realizes why he lost her. “She / wanted more than a man / with a peach in his heart,”



he knows. But that is all she got from him, all he finally is: an emotional agoraphobic, a man who ultimately experiences and manifests love only in his solitary heart. In fact, he suggests in the poem's closing lines that the woman's ultimate value to him was, and continues to be, a source of intense feeling that yields poems. "I wanted only to bleed and / to tell others, my fruitfulness," the narrator asserts. That "fruitfulness" is his art. That is to say, though the narrator acknowledges the merit of an experience he had outside the confines of his isolated self, in the end he transmutes that experience into a quite different one, one that he considers to be of higher value, an experience of what Bly calls the "inward world." This world is the solitary world of the poetic imagination from which the narrator can generate the only link—his poems—that he is capable of and desires to establish with the outside world.

One of the longer poems in *Among the Mensans*, the next to the last one in the book, contains themes opposite to those in "Peach," thus confirming the diversity of Mesler's work. Rather than celebrate the solitary self and value what the poetic imagination can do to the past over the past itself, "Last Night I Was a Child Again in Raleigh" (p. 101) expresses a longing for the past as it actually was and treasures lived experiences that transcend solitude. The narrator fondly recalls details from his youth. He remembers playing *Monopoly* with his sister, dogs that roamed his neighborhood in the days before leash laws, childhood friends, and the summer heat that "was like / a separate personality." "Let it / be true that I am a child again / in Raleigh," he asserts with desperate yearning toward the end of the poem. He wishes to repeat experiences in the past that extended to a world far beyond a strictly inward one.

Just how much the narrator wishes to actually return to the past rather than use it only as fodder for his present art, though of course the poem itself constitutes such a use, can be seen in his longing to be reunited with his father so he can persuade him to stop smoking and thus

reverse his father's fate, save his life. The narrator recalls his father "regal in his recliner, / an ashtray full of cigarettes / near him." The narrator's profoundest desire is to go back in time and "say / Father, stop now, stop please." But he realizes this is obviously impossible. The past cannot be repeated. The narrator is left, in the last lines of the poem, remembering yet another encounter with the world outside the self, that of the Raleigh sun, the "finest sun anyone had ever seen, / never to be seen again." "Last Night I Was a Child Again in Raleigh" is a beautifully straightforward and poignant expression of both the joy and pain of recalling past experiences that were anything but agoraphobic.

The range of subjects and themes in *Among the Mensans*, just how eclectic the collection truly is, is evidenced in the fact that it even contains two poems featuring the 1930s film star Carole Lombard. The more inventive of the two is the first and the longest, "Since I Died" (p. 29). Here the narrator imagines having a conversation with a resurrected Lombard, who died in a plane crash in 1942. The poem contains several impishly funny and enigmatic lines, giving the entire performance a light touch, which contrasts sharply with the serious mood of poems like "Joseph," "Peach," and "Last Night I Was a Child Again in Raleigh." The narrator envisions first encountering Lombard as she "stepped / out of the shower." He is so overwhelmed by her appearance that he has to pick up "my tattoo and / my false tooth," cockeyed images that register his star struck shock. The screwball language continues: "I'm gonna love you like / the cat loves mustard," he confidently addresses her. Lombard's response is equally devilish and off the wall. "'C'mere' she said / taking my pistolero, / 'You're every man I've / ever wanted, since I / died, my bucko, since I died.'" The narrator's fantasy of being desired by the starlet, even if only in his imagination, even if only years after her demise, has been fulfilled. On one level the poem is about the power of the poetic imagination to spin wild fantasies and accomplish impossible

desires, but on another, more immediate and primary level, it is simply a lot of fun, and attests to its author's playful inventiveness.

Toward the end of "The Agoraphobic Writer," Mesler notes just how much satisfaction he derives from the recognition that publication of his work brings. "Sometimes I even get a fan email," he adds. "This is the big stamp of approval; this is the golden ticket to the chocolate factory" (p. 27), he concludes. Though obviously not an email, this review of his latest book is intended as a fan letter of sorts. As I have suggested throughout, Mesler gives us, in *Among the Mensans*, a fine collection of poems, one that fully displays his virtuosity and broad reach as a literary artist. May he consider this review an unequivocal "stamp of approval," a fully paid "golden ticket" of admission "to the chocolate factory."

--Michael Spikes



***Eon: Poems.* By T.R. Hummer. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2018. Pp. 89. \$19.95, paper)**

T.R. Hummer's *Eon* (2018) concludes a three-book series that is preceded by *Ephemeron* (2011) and *Skandalon* (2014). With its subjects of God, the cosmos, ecstasy, confusion, and consequence, the series echoes the strange and otherworldly studies of the human condition that we might find in other triptychs, like Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1504) or Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*. *Ephemeron* begins with an annunciation: the surprising conception of Hummer's daughter when he is fifty confirms the "holy chemistry of existence." After ecstasy, as with the other kinds of raptures, we know what follows: apocalypse. So it is with his sec-

ond book in the series, *Skandalon*, which traverses the labyrinthine midlife bewilderment of marriage. *Eon*, the final collection of poems in the series, takes a hard look at the inevitable conclusion: mortality and the hereafter. The collection opens with a question posed by the post-modern writer William Gass: "If death itself were to die, would it have a ghost, and would the ghost of death visit the dead in the guise of someone alive, if only to fright them from any temptation to return?" It's a complicated proposition that begs a surreal answer. Who is ghosting whom and which state is preferable after all—life or the afterlife? Notably, Hummer also released a book this year, titled *After the Afterlife*.

The Poetry Foundation describes his work as "at once ironic, playful, and deadly serious." His humor can carry a current of electricity that shocks and pleases simultaneously. In *Skandalon*, for instance, a daemon and angel inspect and discuss human love in all its forms, and then they eventually try it out for themselves by copulating in a field on all fours. In *Eon*, a more difficult kind of love "arrives like a hurricane blown through a subway tunnel" (p. 82). God is omnipresent in these poems, but only as a residue, as if the numinous appears only in black-light. In the poem "Evidence," his ribald humor slips in for just a moment when we see "a luminous residue / of God's semen" (p. 21), but often the difficult mystery of the hereafter and "the simple truth" of human pain subsumes it.



Driving the collection is a vague yet overwhelming sense of terrible wrongdoing. Like detectives in a noir novel or a game of *Clue*, we search and search for the weapon, the motive, the evidence. *Eon* opens with a "Scene": do-

mestic lovemaking. Exhausted, the woman's late-night desire rips the man from the ghostly realms of dreams like Orpheus returning from the dead. *Eon*'s dead act something like actors in a Civil War battle reenactment: they gossip and plan and watch the drama of the living. Part of the mystery is the question of the crime. Has one been committed? It's not just unsolvable; one cannot locate it. "Circumstantial" declares, "We have to work backward from the fact of the body, / which is absent. We have to solve for a spotless X" (p. 25). Perhaps more than anything, this collection studies the feeling of being disconnected and disembodied. When a person is on the threshold to an astral plane, they are only partly present.

Desire requires embodiment, and this collection aches with a certain disassociation with the body. Hummer's poem "To imagine you," begins, "To imagine you in my arms, I must imagine arms, / and to imagine arms I must have arms again" (p. 61). If we will suffer and die—and we will—then what is left, after all? It's *you*, and this body, and the oceanic feeling that exists in-between. "*You* is a destination," Hummer says, "*You in my arms / is a cosmos*" (p. 81). This hard-earned sense of oneness feels authentic. So does the way it finally re-grounds the speaker. In a landscape surrounded by jackals and dirt where time rewinds precipitously and the speaker is beset with *unlearning*, *unmaking*, *unshattering*, *unmapping*, and *unvanishing*, it feels right to arrive at the brief luck and plain beauty of the couple.

Eon is bookended with poems memorializing Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) and Philip Levine (1928-2015). And in between? Epitaphs for poets, philosophers, family members, the children of Sandy Hook, a tabby cat, a retriever, a collie, mythical figures, and the poet himself. The effect of such a mix creates an experience that is something like walking through a country graveyard: oddly quaint, slightly unnerving, yet still profound if you can absorb the staggering accumulation of all that has been lost.

It might be argued that Dante's final jour-

ney through Paradise is the least interesting part of *The Divine Comedy*. Is it because the tension necessarily slackens? When one is secure in the firmament, well what then? Hummer says:

Death drives a Cadillac in the rock and roll metaphysic,
and in the Appalachian canon owns a mountain railway
...In the new music, there will be no going anywhere.
If in the course of eternity everything averages out,
you'll just stay put because really there is no nowhere. (p. 35)

To appreciate Dante's encounter with Beatrice, the reader must suffer with him through the vast miles of Hell that he walked to get to her. This is true too if the reader will fully appreciate the "new music" in *Eon*; it's best read as the hard-earned finish to *Ephemeron* and *Skandalon*.

--H.K. Hummel



***Swimming on Hwy N*. By Mary Troy (Springfield, MO: Moon City Press, 2016. Pp. 256. \$14.95, paperback)**

Mary Troy's novel *Swimming on Hwy N* is a highly entertaining novel on various levels. It is a family drama, an adventure story, and a social critique all at the same time, and it happens to be all the three without compromising the effectiveness of any one of them. The novel follows one Madeline Dame, a thrice married woman who "loved all her husbands in her own way" (p. 5), joined by her sister and mother, and some random strangers who immediately become an intricate part of the family, on a road trip to the US-Canadian border west of the

Mississippi.

At sixty years of age, Madeline is living alone in Bourbon, Missouri, after the death of her third husband, swimming in a child's wading pool on Highway N, wanting "her meat and bones [to blend] with the dirt of the Ozarks" (p. 1), relaxing. Her quiet life suddenly gets ripples with the arrival of her deranged sister, Angie, now named Misery, and later her mother Wanda, whom Madeline has not spoken to for decades. With the arrival of an army deserter and his girlfriend, whom Madeline's new love interest, Randy (a draft dodger himself), brings to her for shelter before they leave for Canada, the story gets the real meat. They all leave for the North in an old VW bus, and the fun begins, surprises adding up as new characters join the adventure, mostly in the form of bounty hunters. The story ends with a bizarre family reunion of "Kneedleseeders," with shots fired and deaths, whereupon Madeline comes to a realization: "It was not toughness but fate that made any of us keep going, one foot in front of the other, day after day, even if each step was laden, each day more useless and humiliating than the one before" (p. 249).

The novel has what John Gardner would call a "picaresque narrative." Instead of relying on an "energetic plot," the novel follows a set of characters, depicting the "foibles and absurdities of each" (to use Gardner's words again). Troy expertly exploits the possibilities the genre. Once Madeline is introduced to the reader, the story seems to just happen. One thing leads to another and then another, and as readers we don't ever stop and question the intent of the author; we accept the reality of the characters very comfortably and we move along as they go. Thus the novel has a very natural

flow and a captivating aura even though there's hardly any big "what happens next" or "what if" element in it.

Troy uses dry wit and dark humor to an outstanding effect in the novel. It's true that her characters are dysfunctional family members, deserters, and bounty hunters, but almost all of them are very witty and capable of intellectual discourse, and this quality makes the novel a great read not just for those who enjoy simple adventure stories or TV dramas but also for those who like stories that touch upon serious philosophical and socio-political issues. Even more interestingly, and ironically, the highly eccentric Misery is the wittiest and most "rational" character. When Misery engages in a discussion on love, she says, "People bore their holes in their skull to develop a third eye. Enlightenment. It's been attempted since the beginning of time" (p. 103); meanwhile Madeline deflates Freud: "Here's the news flash. Freud was either stupid or very mean" (p. 71). Troy appears very strategic in the use of such "deranged" characters to delve into these discussions. The novel is truly a treasure trove of wry conversations and aphoristic statements.

What makes this novel even more refreshing to me is Troy's ability to seamlessly incorporate political rage into a family saga. Troy effectively critiques the idea of a "War on Terror" and questions the justification of war being waged by the United States on foreign soil. Initially Kenny epitomizes the white man's burden when he explains from Iraq to his girlfriend that "he'd met Iraqi families who were grateful to the U.S., loved the soldiers, believed their country was on the way to a fair and just government." But his girlfriend wants to ask, "What about us, when do we get a government that cares about fairness and justice?" (28). Later Kenny writes in an open letter to the *Indianapolis Star* after he deserts: "The fourteen months in Iraq have changed me, so I've lost the nouns to describe myself. Killer. Murderer. Coward. Fake. Those come to mind" (p. 29). He announces that he doesn't want to "take part in the ruination of a



country and a people or myself” (p. 29). This theme gets new energy when Kenny is encountered by a boy whose brother serves in Fallujah and who epitomizes bravery and everything patriotic for the boy. He not only confronts Kenny when he speaks against occupation but pursues him later as a bounty-hunter.

The novel is unapologetically Midwestern—in its setting, the overall ambience, and characterization—however, the novel does not necessarily re-inforce stereotypical Midwestern thought, politics, and ways of life. Instead it beautifully, and fantastically, creates a new world, reimagining the region as a hilariously adventurous landscape with equally hilarious people trapped in their own little worlds. In essence, in this novel Mary Troy has created a modern-day Mark Twain-y tall tale. No wonder: she comes from St. Louis and the book has been published in the Missouri Author Series.

--Khem Aryal

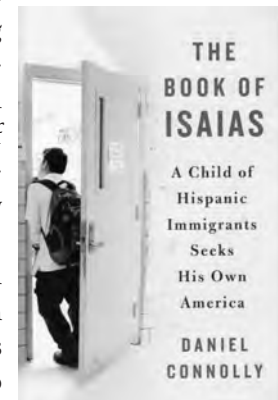


***The Book of Isaias: A Child of Hispanic Immigrants Seeks His Own America.* By Daniel Connolly. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016. Pp. 1-258, prologue, epilogue, acknowledgments, notes. \$26.99, hardcover)**

Immigration, both legal and otherwise, has been a hot button issue in recent years, especially following the 2016 presidential election. While the daily news is filled with sensational stories surrounding the politics of immigration, what is often lost in national debates of the issue are the everyday struggles of the over eleven million undocumented immigrants who live, work, and study in the United States. In *The Book of Isaias: A Child of Hispanic Immi-*

grants Seeks his Own America, Memphis-based journalist Daniel Connolly presents the personal stories of the children of immigrants, both undocumented and US citizens, attending Memphis's Kingsbury High School as they attempt to navigate the complex process of applying to college. While the text focuses on the story of Isaias Ramos, an academically gifted high school senior who is undocumented, it effectively profiles a number of Kingsbury students who face the unique challenges common to the children of immigrants struggling to succeed in the United States. Connolly argues that as one in four young people in this country is a child of immigrants, we should view this population “as a powerful pool of human potential” and thus separate their treatment from more controversial immigration policies and “the heat and grandstanding of Washington politics” (p. 238).

An award-winning journalist who has reported on immigration in the South for a number of news organizations, including the Associated Press in Little Rock and *The Commercial Appeal* in Memphis, Connolly dedicated over five years to researching and writing this work of investigative journalism. With the permission of Kingsbury High's administration, Connolly spent the 2012-2013 academic year as an “embedded” reporter in the school. This access allowed the author to



conduct in-depth interviews with students and their families, as well as with teachers, guidance counselors, and employees of the many non-profit and community organizations that serve Kingsbury students. Connolly shadowed students both in and out of school, even joining them on trips to local colleges and other extracurricular events. What is more, the author visited Isaias's hometown of

Santa Maria Asunción, Mexico in order to interview members of his extended family, while investigating the effects of immigration on those left behind. The resulting narrative presents highly personal, well-researched, and complex profiles of Isaias and a number of his fellow students.

The text is divided into a prologue, twelve individually titled chapters, and an epilogue. However, the work is primarily structured in a sort of countdown or timeline, centered around the date of Isaias and his classmates' graduation, as sections are divided by headings such as "September 2012: Eight months before graduation" (p. 56), and later "October 2014: One year and five months after graduation" (p. 222). The strength of this format is that it both mirrors the structure of the academic calendar, and recreates the pressure and anxiety typical of the college admissions process for the reader, as the headings lend a sense of immediacy to the text.

The greatest strength of Connolly's writing is perhaps his ability to seamlessly interweave personal profiles and histories with anecdotes, and insightful, well-researched discussions of immigration history, policies, and relevant statistics, which allow the reader to place Isaias's story in the proper context. For example, in the prologue Connolly not only effectively provides the reader with the background of his project and an introduction to Isaias and his family's story of immigration, but also presents a history of how immigration has changed Memphis, most notably the area surrounding Kingsbury High School. The resulting narrative captures the attention of the reader, and makes a complex issue of national debate approachable.

Given the current national focus on the politics of immigration, Connolly's work is particularly timely and relevant. Rather than treating Kingsbury and its students as political fodder to support a particular agenda, the author focuses on telling their side of the story, while examining the many inconsistencies in US immigration policies. Connolly outlines the hypocrisy of a system that depends upon cheap

immigrant labor (both legal and otherwise), does relatively little to quell undocumented immigration, but then places artificial barriers in the way of these immigrants' children as they pursue higher education and other opportunities. For example, the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program began accepting applications in 2012, just as Isaias began his senior year. While it allowed him to receive documentation to legally work in the United States, he was still ineligible for most forms of financial aid and other scholarships. Moreover, public universities were unsure how to treat DACA applicants, often categorizing them as international or out-of-state students, charging them two to three times the rate of in-state tuition. In Tennessee, state law specifically denies in-state tuition to DACA, and other undocumented students. Another Kingsbury student, Jose Perez was a student leader in the school's JROTC program and dreamed of joining the Marines, but as a DACA recipient he was ineligible to enlist. Despite these cases, there are many success stories in Connolly's work, and many of the profiled students are US citizens. The author demonstrates that the challenges facing the children of immigrants in pursuing higher education are more diverse and complex than simply resolving the issue of immigration status, as these young people often contend with work and family obligations, doubts concerning the value of education, parents who cannot speak English and/or who are unfamiliar with the American educational system, not to mention financial difficulties. In this way, there are no simple solutions.

Despite the work's many strengths, I found the author's choice to use the real names of his informants troubling, especially as many of them were minors. As a university professor, perhaps I am accustomed to the rigors of academic studies, which typically would require the use of pseudonyms. However, in the current political climate it is a point of real concern. Additionally, the text would benefit from the inclusion of more profiles featuring female stu-

dents, and their unique challenges, although it is understandable that a male reporter may not have the same level of access to these students. Overall, Connolly's work is an insightful piece of investigative journalism, which reveals the everyday stories of a population often overlooked in national debates of immigration. It is of special interest to readers interested in delving into the effects of immigration on the urban centers of the South, and the Delta region in particular.

--Anne McGee



The Forgetting Tree: A Rememory.
 By Rae Paris (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017. Pp xi + 154, acknowledgments, prelude, postlude, thanks, note. \$18.99, paper)

Rae Paris's *The Forgetting Tree: A Rememory* chronicles her journey through the American South, across slave states and sites of lynchings and other human rights atrocities. But it is also her journey into her own past, her father's past, and her body's present illness. Paris navigates her historical and personal relationships with memory, narrative, and identity using an appropriately looping structure that circles back on itself much like the way memory, if not time itself, tends to do.

Paris begins by talking about a visit to Laura Plantation. Paris's visit horrifies and intrigues her, and she winds back the narrative to a visit years earlier to Nottoway Plantation where she was introduced to the revisionary nature of the South's remembrance of its own past:

On my tour of Nottaway, the guide didn't want to mention the word "slave" except to highlight the fact that several of the descen-

dants of people who had worked on the plantation (otherwise known as slaves) still worked at Nottoway. This was a selling point, evidence for the mythical benevolence of the Randolph family whose slaves were "probably well treated," a quote that appeared on Nottoway's website but has since been removed. (p. 7)

The horrors of the past are revised into something palatable, and new affronts are then erased from the cyber sphere. Paris's movement here between past and present is deft, and the way her personal experience invites the universal is evident.

Her memory here triggered one of my own: Four years ago, a trip to Louisiana, where unbeknownst to me I would later live. It was my first time in the South, I was in the early stages of pregnancy, and the trip was nothing if not a sensory overload. To get out of New Orleans, a city I now love but found less appealing in the throes of morning sickness, my husband and I rented a car and drove out to Oak Alley Plantation. You've seen this one. It's in countless films. Picture the turn into a long dirt drive lined with gorgeous old live oaks, perfectly arched over the drive which ends in a pristine white plantation house. Picturesque it is, but as we turned off the highway, I felt an acute sense of dread.

When I was a preteen, my parents took me to a concentration camp in Dachau, Germany. We toured the barracks, the gas chamber showers, saw the crematorium, and a long hallway of photos of the prisoners who looked starved, half-dead, already ghosts. It was an extraordinarily difficult day, and I was physically ill with horror for several days afterwards. This feeling is what I was expecting from Oak Alley. I had said to my husband, this is a difficult part of our



history, but we need to do it. We need to learn what we can about slavery and the immense suffering of the people who endured it, the depths of human darkness. Anyone who has been to Oak Alley, or most any other plantation tour, may be laughing here at my naiveté. Paris's experiences at Laura, Nottoway, and later Southfield, where she visits multiple times, could be a description of my visit as well. We were invited to sip mojitos on the porch while we awaited our tour time, in other words to step into the bodies of the former owners. When the time came for our tour of the house, we were told all about the family. The rich country white man, the "city girl" wife who loved New Orleans more than Oak Alley, the tragic rift this caused in their relationship. At one point, the tour guide showed us a portrait of one of the young daughters and told us of the tragedy of her losing a limb. My husband snorted a laugh at this point, and the tour turned to look at us. I knew exactly why he laughed, but most people didn't seem to grasp the irony; how many bodies did slavery maim? But still, I kept thinking, it's coming, they are waiting until we go out to the "slave cabins." But then the tour guide told the story of how the "master" got rich off of one of his slaves, Antoine, who if memory served, was brilliant at grafting pecan trees, and how he was kind and as a reward, gave the man his freedom in his mid-sixties. The tour guide celebrated this "mythical benevolence," even while telling us that the slave worked another twenty years to earn his wife's freedom, and was still working to free his son when he died. I began to lose heart. There was no tour of the reconstructed slave cabins. We had to go through them ourselves, reading plaques about how many people lived in the cabin, what they ate, how they cooked, etc. But by this time, I was too suspicious. The cabins had been rebuilt and I was sure that they, too, had been revised.

If you've never been to the South, this story will give you an idea of both the silence and the extreme anesthetizing that surrounds the past. Paris confronts this reality head on, as she tries

to imagine life for those who suffered under slavery, for those who lost their lives fighting for basic civil rights (like attending university), and most personally, for her parents who grew up in a segregated New Orleans before leaving for California.

Paris layers the cultural, historical, and personal in a hybrid text that includes photographs, poetry, and essay. The photographs add a sense of "proof," of something we can cling to as reality in the murky sea of memory—like the one of Kelly Ingram Park that acts as a postcard of Paris's route. Yet, even in this moment in the text, the reader is left to make that leap. To assume the uncaptioned photograph here is the park in Birmingham which she describes on the same page and which is smaller than she'd imagined: "It makes you think, not for the first time, about the intimacy of violence..." (p. 19). The photographs also document the very act of forgetting, such as how a black community called New Town was destroyed "to make room for things like a parking structure" (p. 43). One photograph here shows an overgrown road of houses fenced off, condemned, and is accompanied by a crude map of "New Town Alley," an attempt to remember what has been forgotten. Someone must do the work of remembering. Of knowing the past.

One of the strengths of this book is that it does not shy away from one of the central tensions of memoir: the trickiness of memory. While most literary nonfiction writes away from this, or around it, or with an insistence that this is how it happened, Paris confronts it head on. In one instance, early on in the book, she writes this beautiful phrase: "you remember walking through the exhibit at Manazar and seeing a pair of baby shoes underneath a glass case similar to the glass case you're walking past now, but there were so many items, you could be inventing those baby shoes" (p. 21). This memory-as-trickster extends to different experiences of her father she has, in relation to her brother and sister which Paris summarizes eloquently: "When you grow up in a big family it can be

easy to forget your story isn't the only story" (p. 79). These memories are only further compressed by grief, and Paris pivots from a cultural grief at our own legacy of violence and racism to a personal mourning for her father. This turn is as natural as the way our brain works, and justifies another turn to perhaps one of the most difficult parts of the book—the current manifestations of racism, from the slaying of Trayvon Martin to the (micro) aggressions of the university and, most disturbing (but I should note, unfortunately not at all surprising) to myself as a writing teacher, the writing workshop. In the title piece, "The Forgetting Tree," Paris writes for (and seemingly to) Trayvon Martin. In another elegant loop of the narrative structure, she takes Martin to Southfield Plantation where she has been, as has the reader, several times before. She plays the tour guide, showing him the atrocities of the slave trade: "Because your death won't let me sleep" (p. 59):

If I open my arms and wrap them around the trunk, let's pretend I can reach your cold hands. Let's pretend this sudden snow doesn't feel like sudden death. Let's make snow slaves and call them angels. (p. 60)

This piece depicts a haunting simultaneity to the past and the present, to the horrors we've yet to overcome. Before we read this section, we read Paris's description of writing the piece in a residency, of reading it to an audience in a "91% white" community (p. 58). Even the reading is fraught with challenges, an audience that misunderstands: "Did you know Trayvon? It sounded like you knew him (p. 40)." New affronts. New displays of our gaps of experience, of understanding, the invisibility of privilege.

This invisibility echoes back in Paris's "An Open Letter of Love to Black Students: #BlackLivesMatter," where she writes to the students who inhabit my community and perhaps yours, academia. Signed by over 1000 black professors, the letter speaks the experience of students: "We're writing to tell you we see you and we hear you" (p. 101). The letter speaks of new horrors, "dolls hanging by nooses," and tiresome

realities "of having to explain your experience in classroom, your language, your dress, your music, your skin—yourself . . ." (p. 101).

As a creative writing teacher, in a field that considers itself at the forefront of "diversity," the (micro) aggressions Paris and others point out are difficult truths we must do better to face. Even the most committed of us blunder. In workshop, well-meaning students, who are horrified to learn that their comments can be construed as racist, make comments about "grammar," in the black speech of characters. They use "voice," as an uncomfortable euphemism, they question the realism of a piece before we as a workshop stop to acknowledge that the reality and experience of a white woman and a black man living in Lafayette, Louisiana, are likely to diverge possibly at more points than they converge. But even as we blunder, we must remain committed to listening and learning to what Paris and our everyday lives are telling us. Our fear of blundering is not an excuse. I may blunder here, now, as I write this, but if I don't try, then I reinforce silence. Books like *The Forgetting Tree: A Rememory* help us learn without adding to the burden of "explaining your experience," and scholars and writers like Paris teach white professors like me and all of our students a way forward. Even if that way forward circles back, teaching us the present through the past, and vice versa.

The "forgetting tree" refers, Paris tells us, to a tree where slaves were branded, then walked around to erase the memory of their homes, as if circling around could make you forget the life you had been ripped from (p. 55). The "hanging tree," on the other hand, is a tree referred to on a plantation tour, one of the guides claiming it was perhaps not used, but rather called that to intimidate slaves (p. 73). But trees, especially the iconic live oaks of the South, the ones that line the drive at Oak Alley or the ones that shade much of my campus, don't forget; they don't revise. They mark each year with a ring in their trunk, remembering droughts and fires. They make readily apparent the suffering they

have endured even as they grow through it. There is no easy way forward, for the daughters and sons of segregation, the tourist, the plantation guide, the student or the professor, and the degrees of difficulty vary wildly, yet the language to speak the truth and speak it openly by everyone is desperately needed, now more than ever. Rae Paris invites us to open this language up, to unforget, to re-remember, and revise not our past but our future.

--Sadie Hoagland

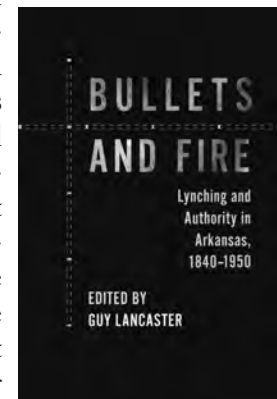


Bullets and Fire: Lynching and Authority in Arkansas, 1840–1950. Edited by Guy Lancaster. (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 2018. Pp. 344, Acknowledgments, Introduction, Contributors, Notes, Index. \$39.95, paper)

Bullets and Fire is an examination of lynching in Arkansas consisting of ten essays that cover various aspects of the topic in a time period from the antebellum era to the 1950s. The book intends, according to its editor Guy Lancaster, to move our understanding of this phenomenon forward by shifting from cataloguing individual lynchings to an investigation of the relationship of this form of violence with broader cultural and political forces present in society. The ten essays use four different approaches to the problem of lynching. Three of them examine lynching in the framework of broad time periods, assessing the apparent correlations between contemporary social and economic factors and this violence. Three of the essays look in greater detail at specific incidents. One of the essays approaches the phenomenon from the perspective of the perpetrators. Three

others are concerned with the role of polite white society in both opposing and perpetrating lynching in the state.

Essays looking at lynching within a broader time frame include Kelly Jones's on the antebellum era. Jones found that mobs actually murdered few blacks during this period. The value of slaves as property accounted for this. Incidents where slaves were lynched, however, usually involved ones where a slave had murdered a white person and in such cases Jones found that the perceived need among whites to assert and uphold white supremacy became more important than the protection of slave property. Randy Finley follows Jones's work chronologically with an in depth examination of lynching in the 1890s. In this period lynchings increased, with alleged sexual crimes becoming the most frequent stated cause. Finley accounts for these changes as being the "deep concerns about sexuality or gender roles and norms" generated by the uncertainty spawned as Arkansas changed from a rural to modern and urban society and the political upheaval caused by the Populist efforts at creating a bi-racial political party (p. 62). Guy Lancaster covers much of the same era, although focusing on Pulaski County. Lancaster finds the county unique among the South's capital cities, with a greater number of lynchings per capita than any of the others. In an explanation similar to that of Finley, he finds the cause in the county's more rural character, relative to other states, and the increased likelihood that it would be unsettled by the socio-economic changes that accompanied modernization. Fewer lynchings occurred in Little Rock itself because it was more integrated into the market revolution and was developing a middle class that opposed lynching.



The essays detailing particular lynchings point up the complex factors that led to violence. Richard Buckelew examines the murder of five victims in Clarendon in 1898. In this case a white woman actually set the stage for the violence by bringing the five black victims into a plot to kill her husband. The white woman may well have been lynched too, but she avoided being hanged by poisoning herself, leaving her fellow conspirators in the hands of the mob. Stephanie Hart writes about one of the state's better known lynchings, that of John Carter in Little Rock in 1927. In this case the murder of a young white girl led to the arrest of her alleged murderer and his near lynching, but when public officials spirited the man out of Pulaski County the outraged mob turned on another victim, a young black man only alleged to have insulted two white women. Vince Vinikas's essay on the St. Charles massacre is a republication of his article that appeared earlier in the *Journal of Southern History* and details how a brawl between a white man and a black man turned into one of the deadliest lynchings in American history. Vinikas's work emphasizes themes that appear in the work of both Buckelew and Hart, showing how the character of evidence concerning lynchings makes it difficult to explain a lynching from its apparent origins and virtually impossible to determine what caused a mob to form and act. Inconsistent and contradictory accounts, the little attention paid to lynchings by the white press, and the omission in all accounts of critical details conceals, in Vinikas's view, the secret past of lynching.

Todd Lewis examines the dynamics of the anti-lynching effort in Arkansas in the early Twentieth Century, in one of the three essays that consider what motivated influential whites in the various positions on lynching that they embraced. In his era he finds that deeply religious and well-educated whites, often associated with the Progressive Movement, came to regard lynching as barbaric and worked to suppress lynching. As a result they supported Governor George Donaghey and the legislature in

actually passing laws in 1909 that created a mechanism to suppress lynching. The application of these laws proved largely ineffective, however, because they required the cooperation of local whites to be enforced. Cherisse Jones-Branch's consideration of the Arkansas Council of the Association for the Prevention of Lynching explains the role of white women in opposing lynching and concludes that while the organization did not bring an end to lynching, its educational effort, including attaching patriarchal rationales for mob violence, and pressure on public officials ultimately added to the forces that brought about lynching's end. William Pruden's chapter, on the other hand, reveals how members of the Arkansas Congressional delegation, ranging chronologically from Senator Joseph Robinson to J. William Fulbright, may have opposed lynching. However, their fears of federal intervention in the state and their desire to maintain state's rights led them to oppose all efforts by Congress to pass anti-lynching legislation until Blanche Lincoln and Mark Pryor helped pass a federal anti-lynching law in 2005. A theme running through these essays is how white opposition to lynching usually was based on disgust with the barbarity of mob violence or its immorality, but that its opponents seldom questioned the racist color line that existed that denied blacks equal access to justice or the political power needed to demand that justice and ultimately made lynching possible.

Finally, Nancy Snell Griffith's contribution explores the types of lynchings that occurred in Arkansas, using W. Fitzhugh Brundage's model of varieties of lynching from his *Lynching in the South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (1993). She finds lynchings in all of Brundage's categories, including private mobs, terrorist mobs, posse lynchings, and mass mobs, although the Arkansas pattern differed from those in other states that have been studied with the appearance of more private mobs in locations with large African American populations. The basis for these categories is the number and type of people involved in the

lynching and to some extent the supposed purpose of the lynching. As found by Buckelew, Hart, and Vinikas, however, Griffith also recognizes the difficulty of attributing an actual motive to perpetrators of a lynching in any of the categories. It may be noted that such categorization proves somewhat problematic and is revealed in other essays in this volume. Vinikas, for example, pointed out that in the several days of the St. Charles violence, mob action embraced all of Brundage's categories.

Taken together, these essays throw considerable light onto lynching in Arkansas, but they also point out the serious difficulties in achieving any ultimate understanding of the phenomenon. They struggle with basic questions as to what constitutes a lynching. They also grapple with the inadequate evidence that would allow real understanding of what was happening. They also leave questions unanswered. All of the lynchings examined involve black victims, justifying Guy Lancaster's observation as editor that these murders reflect the desire by whites to ensure white supremacy. That leaves unanswered, however, the meaning of events with white victims or violence with black mobs. Even with issues unresolved, this book is an important contribution to the history of Arkansas and sheds light on some of its darkest moments. It should be required reading for all persons interested in the state's history.

--Carl Moneyhon



Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy. By Elizabeth Gillespie McRae. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, Pp. ix-xiv, 240, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95. Hardback)

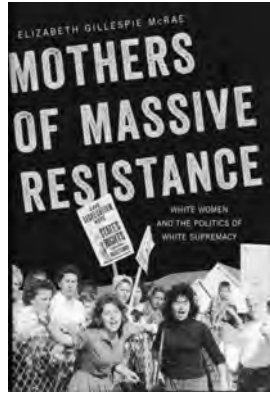
Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy plunges the reader into an overlooked world of long-lasting, well-organized, nationwide efforts of white women to resist racial equality in the United States. McRae correctly asserts that most historical narratives focus on vociferous, white supremacist male demagogues who used the most offensive language against nonwhite people and the halls of legislature to safeguard their way of life, while the women who did the daily work that their legislative agendas demanded are never confronted. McRae's book confronts those women.

The introduction begins with a white mother spearheading a petition against the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education*. Though the introduction begins with a Southern, white mother making the case for her children to attend homogeneously white schools, it does not leave racism below the Mason Dixon line as studies of racism and segregations often do: it looks at white women's resistance to equality as a massive, national grassroots movement. The author grounds this seemingly-invisible network of national, segregationist women through the study of four individuals: "The public lives of Nell Battle Lewis, Florence Sillers Ogden, Mary Dawson Cain, and Cornelia Dabney Tucker paralleled the reign of Jim Crow segregation and were part of a broad and massive network of women across the South and the nation who now populate this story" (p. 5). Though this is a thoroughly-researched historical-study, McRae does not present strictly chronological order, but lets the lives of the women shine forth and parallel the historical events—local and national, domestic and private—that they shaped.

McRae divides the book into two parts. Part I: Massive Support for Racial Segregation, presents white women who entered the political arena in support of the white supremacist status quo. She begins in Virginia with the Racial Integrity Act. While this legislation

smacked of scientific racism, white women worked at the Bureau of Vital Statistics, acting as judges of who was/was not white. By Chapter Two, McRae explains that even before women officially received the right to vote, segregationist women were already politically active through use of their authority as educators to control textbook selection and school curricula by proxy. Mildred Lewis Rutherford, a long-term educator at the Lucy Cobb Institute pushed for the creation of textbook selection committees to monitor the removal of black history from school curricula and anything unflattering about white people of the South. The author writes, “Rutherford reminded white southern women that they were the daily workers needed to guarantee that white children learned the lessons of segregated citizenship and that they grew up to be white supremacy’s future activists” (p. 42). The crusade to control textbooks across America continues long past Rutherford’s original pamphlet, which was used to measure the fitness of textbooks for Southern students and continues to elude detection of federal regulation. Chapter Three introduces three women in detail—Florence Sillers Ogden, Mary Dawson Cain, and Cornelia Dabney Tucker—all segregationist women. In Part Two of the book, McRae reveals that these women were far from the political fringes but boasted political ties from Boston to California. By Chapter Four, McRae introduces Nell Battle Lewis, a seemingly progressive white woman, who used her very political opinion column to reinforce Jim Crow through sentimental presentations of black people who knew their “place” under white supremacy.

Part II: Massive Resistance to the Black Freedom Struggle, 1942-1974 addresses white



women’s reactions to the modern Civil Rights Movement. It is also where the strengths and the one weakness of the book shine forth. A strength of this book lies in its semantics. McRae is unafraid to plainly state where segregationist and conservative interests and rhetoric overlap and to pinpoint where even academics fail to showcase them. With the academic failures, she asserts that the community is “perpetuating a false divide in the historiography” (p. 232) and practices “intellectual segregation” (p. 232). She defines these terms to clarify that they are similar. Another strength is that for each of the women, she demonstrates how they approach segregation/conservative politics differently, even pointing to subtle differences between Mississippi Delta politics and those of the state’s Piney Woods. If the book has one weakness, it is that she did not explicitly state that white women’s fierce defense of the status quo explains black women’s hesitancy to embrace feminism. For all of their passion surrounding motherhood, white women only saw the black women who populated their imaginations as maids and mammies, but never mothers.

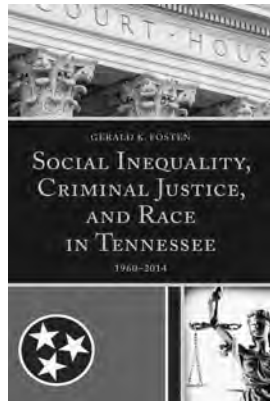
--LaToya Jefferson-James



***Social Inequality, Criminal Justice, and Race in Tennessee: 1960–2014.* By Gerald K. Fosten. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018. Pp. xv + 131, preface, acknowledgments, bibliography, index. \$85, hardcover)**

As a southern African American male, when I read the terms “criminal justice” and “race”, the first images that come to my mind are of mostly black and brown men working in

hot and humid southern fields while a horse-mounted correctional officer, shotgun in hand, oversees prisoners serving their time. This is an image constructed from my own observations as well as from first-hand accounts of family and friends who have experienced the correctional systems in various southern states. It is an emotional image that obviously echoes the horrible institution of slavery in our country's history. The relationship between criminal justice and race is complex, and so I approached Gerald K. Fosten's book with curiosity as to how he would approach this potentially emotional topic.



Fortunately, Fosten's *Social Inequality, Criminal Justice, and Race in Tennessee: 1960-2014* goes beyond the emotional dimensions of his controversial topic to present a well-researched, reasoned and credible argument that the post-civil rights era Tennessee justice system is playing a major role in the civil disenfranchisement of a significant number of the state's African-American males, which in turn is leading to what he terms a "civil death" for a portion of the electorate. He notes, "The consequences of civil death associated with benign neglect, laissez-faire racism, and policy racism result in an unequal distribution of national, state, and local resources and compound the inequality undermining local, regional, and national stability" (p. x). His study presents a disturbing view into a process that sees government policy, private corporate interests, and systematic racism collaborating in the creation of a state of social inequality that undermines the very foundations of a strong and functioning democracy.

Fosten's ultimate purpose is presented to the reader in the early sections of the text when he states "this study examines race, mass incar-

ceration, felon disenfranchisement, and lack of political will to address social inequality in post-civil rights African American communities in Tennessee. The central thesis of this book is that business-public relationship arrangements by using public policy are designed to support a racist conservative agenda by disproportionately incarcerating African Americans" (p. 1).

Fosten then goes on to make his case in six chapters which address many complicated issues of interest to anyone concerned about social inequality and social justice in our nation. The first chapter of the text lays the foundation for his overall argument by establishing the criminal justice system as a tool of social policy in the state of Tennessee. This opening discussion includes a look at the state's history of problems related to the criminal justice system and its application to African Americans. In this chapter, he also presents the two main research questions that led to his in-depth research and his alarming conclusions:

- Q1: Are race, mass incarceration, and felon disenfranchisement collectively used to influence election outcomes in Tennessee?
- Q2: Did profit-seeking motives or other forms of economic incentives contribute to racist policy in the criminal justice system of Tennessee? (p. 11)

With these two questions, Fosten places his study at the troubling intersection of race, politics, and economic profit. By doing so, he frames the problem in a manner which took me back to a commonly held view of the prison system as the "modern day plantation" for African American men. Fosten's research questions cast shadows of slavery and Jim Crow, dressed in a post-Civil Rights hood, over the issues faced by African American communities in Tennessee. It is a shadow that extends into the second chapter.

In his second chapter, Fosten moves his discussion to the topic of white nationalist interests and the history of African American social inequality in Tennessee. Fosten directly and effectively addresses the role white supremacy

plays in the application of justice in the state. He argues that the unequal justice in Tennessee is founded on the fear of the majority white population losing some of their political power to real or perceived threats from African American economic and political progress in the state. Fosten's study shows that criminal justice policies have addressed this threat by making a segment of the African American community incapable of using political power. Through the use of aggressive law enforcement targeted at the African American community, black men are being subjected to policies which lead to felony imprisonment and the "civil death" of ex-felon disenfranchisement after they are released. One of the most striking sections of Fosten's text is a segment where he outlines the overly complicated procedure an ex-felon would have to go through to regain an essential part of citizenship—the right to vote. Fosten successfully shows how every stage of the criminal justice system seems to be aimed at making the ex-felon politically powerless. As he so accurately writes, "The criminal is the new second-class citizen . . . and Tennessee law denies criminals participation in a host of activities essential to self-determination" (p. 30).

After addressing the role of white nationalism in the sustained social inequality of African Americans in Tennessee, Fosten reviews the debates and perspectives that surround his topic of study. In his third chapter, he does a thorough job of outlining and responding to competing perspectives on the following topics: the role of the criminal justice system in black inequality, assessments of the prison industrial complex, the symbiotic relationship between the justice system and the prison system, conservative agendas and white supremacy, and African American responses to all these subjects. This chapter's review of relevant literature effectively enhances Fosten's ethos as he clearly presents the depth of his knowledge on these topics.

The next two chapters of the text present comprehensive analytical responses to Fosten's

initial research questions. He first addresses the question of African American disenfranchisement. Through a synthesis of qualitative and quantitative data, Fosten presents a very convincing case that "the criminal justice system serves as a control system to subjugate and disenfranchise African Americans" (p. 82). This is a bold conclusion that some might see as incongruent with 21st century America, but Fosten's persuasive presentation of data forces the reader to face the reality lived by many black communities in direct and unwavering terms. When it comes to answering his second research question, Fosten does not sugarcoat the conclusions about the role profit-seeking motives play in black inequality in Tennessee. The author approaches this topic with the same attention to detailed data he used to answer his first research question, coming to the sobering and well-substantiated conclusion that "Justice is not the primary motive. The criminal justice system in Tennessee is more susceptibly motivated by the generation of revenue and profit" (p. 94).

Fosten is not content, though, with just painting the bleak picture of race and criminal justice in the state of Tennessee. He concludes his book with a detailed presentation of policy recommendations aimed at balancing the scale of social standing and political power in the state. It is this final chapter that is the shining jewel of his ultimate argument. The recommendations are thoughtful, specific, and provide a foundation for further research and consideration by both policymakers and those who are negatively affected by the criminal justice policies of the state. This chapter underscores how the book is not just a text for academics. It is a study for anyone, ranging from ex-felons to elected officials, who is interested in the dynamics of social inequality and in finding possible solutions. One of Fosten's stated goals for the book was to "serve as a reference for researchers on the subject of social inequality and political and economic participation. More importantly, this book will inform those African

Americans who are conscious of institutionalized forms of discrimination and its relationship to African American social inequality” (p. 61). Fosten has definitely achieved this goal.

What is most powerful about *Social Inequality, Criminal Justice, and Race in Tennessee: 1960-2014* is the manner in which Fosten delivers a well-researched, extensively documented, honest, thought-provoking, and accessibly written study. He speaks “truth to power” using his credibility as a researcher, his logically arranged discussion points, and his ability to not shy away from the dark reality of his subject matter. Fosten’s book is a rich resource and a significant research study that serves as a strong indictment of the Tennessee justice system.

I began this review with an emotional image I had of the African American male’s place in our modern-day justice system. After reading Fosten’s book, my emotions are still there, but they are now grounded in logical, evidence-based data that creates a more complete vision of justice and race in our society. It is a vision which makes this reader’s indignation even stronger, but it is encouraging to know that scholars and activists, such as Fosten, are working towards creating a future of social and political equality for all.

--Earnest L. Cox



The Burden: African Americans and the Enduring Impact of Slavery. Edited by Rochelle Riley. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018. Pp. xi + 178, notes, author biographies. \$18.95, hardcover.)

On the same day that I received my copy

of *The Burden: African Americans and the Enduring Impact of Slavery*, the ABC Network fired Roseanne Barr and cancelled the reboot of *Roseanne* over a tweet in which Barr compared former Obama advisor, Valerie Jarrett, to an ape. This insult hurled at Ms. Jarrett reverberates four centuries’ worth of American history, more than half of which witnessed white Americans using the dehumanization of Africans and African-Americans to justify their enslavement. This debasement frequently centered on the comparison of African-descent people to primates—perhaps most infamously in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in which Jefferson provided intellectual validation to pseudo-scientific musings that would later mask uncomfortable truths about the third president’s own second family with his enslaved sister-in-law, Sally Hemings. Unwrapping my copy of *The Burden* on this particular day was poignant, as the central thesis to this collection of essays is that the legacy of enslavement lingers in a nation that has refused to fully recognize or atone for the stolen people and labor, destroyed families, and bruised psyches of black Americans to whom the economic and cultural success of the United States is owed. Renowned journalist Rochelle Riley, who edited this volume and offered her own contributions, asserts that “enslavement did not end,” but just “changed addresses” in the forms of Jim Crow, and then the school-to-prison pipeline and destruction of black communities through drug epidemics, government neglect, police violence, pervasive caricatures and appropriation of blackness (2). This powerful work is a sobering, exhausting, sometimes joyful, and timely reminder that there is yet much to do in dismantling white supremacy and reliving black America from the burdens of enslavement.



Among its twenty-four articles, standout pieces in *The Burden* abound. Of particular significance to Arkansans is a critique from Michael Simanga, an expert in African American art and culture at Georgia State University, who visited Bentonville's world-renowned Crystal Bridges Museum and noted the absence of African Americans and virtually all Americans of color in the galleries that reflected only white-created art, and whiteness. In a darkly funny comparison, Simanga states that Crystal Bridges, like most American museums, props up an ahistorical narrative that "minimizes the extreme violence" of white supremacy on black and brown bodies to sanitize whiteness in all American cultural institutions, much the way "rap music sold at Walmart" is the "clean version . . . devoid of the rhyme that houses the pain, the rage, the demand to be heard" (134-35). Biographer A'Lelia Bundles confronts the continuing problem of white-washed public education in the "The Armor We Still Need," recalling the utter dearth of black history in the nation's junior high and high schools in the 1960s that is still largely unrectified in an education system where white authors and teachers make few efforts to correct textbooks or build on the narratives uncovered by historians of black American history. Bundles remembers her own history classes in 1968 Indianapolis and that she never learned anything about men like her ancestor, Representative Henderson B. Robinson, who was elected to the Arkansas state legislature during Reconstruction and who later served as sheriff of Phillips County (29). That Arkansas-educated students do not learn about the Representative Robinsons of their own state in 2018 speaks to the urgency of Bundles's writing.

Yet the soul of *The Burden*, is in the essays that honor the legacies and continuing work of black women who fight for justice. Enslavement meant that black women and girls never enjoyed the same legal protections as did their white counterparts; every moment from kidnapping in Africa to the present has reflected that

black female bodies are exploited in a system that values them for manual or sexual labor to white benefit. Charlene Carruthers, founder of the Black Youth Project 100, connects the debasement of kidnapped African women by European captors in the slave castles of coastal Africa to the police violence and state murder of women such as Korryn Gaines in 2016, arguing that the United States was "not designed to love or care for black women . . . any semblance of dignity we possess was fought for and maintained by those who imagined another world was possible" (41). Author Tamara Winfrey Harris further connects the legacy of bondswomen to persistent state abuse of black school girls, affirming that in the twenty-first century, "black girls still cannot be children" because black womanhood is a "threat to be neutralized," and that until black girls and women are free, "none of us is free" (pp. 72-73, 75). The visibility of these girls and women in the current Black Lives Matter and #SayHerName movements; the political climate where brown immigrant families are separated with impunity; the situation in which black femininity has been and continues to be abused; and the resilience of black women—each of these reverberates. Journalist Michelle Singletary remembers the story of her enslaved great-great-grandmother, who was brutally beaten for nursing her own child from her left breast—the breast that her white mistress favored specifically for her newborn, white child (pp. 153-54). The image of a black woman's body used as a resource for white benefit at the expense of black well-being resounds in an era where viral videos prove that the state views black female bodies as expendable. Nevertheless, black women and girls persist—a reminder beautifully affected in anthropologist Mark Auslander's essay, "Object Lessons: Re-encountering Slavery through Rose's Gift," that details a patched cotton bag that Rose gave to her daughter Ashley, just before the little girl was sold in a South Carolina slave auction. Ashley's granddaughter, Ruth Middleton, later embroidered the bag

with the words Ashley remembered her mother saying to her: “It be filled with my Love always” (p. 89). This material reminder that love and spirit can never be enslaved, was rediscovered in 2007 and can be viewed today at the National Museum of African American History. *The Burden*, and the burden, sting.

--Misti Nicole Harper



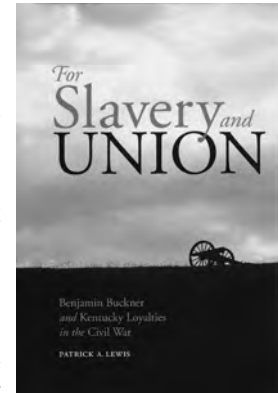
***For Slavery and Union: Benjamin Buckner and Kentucky Loyalties in the Civil War.* By Patrick A. Lewis. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2015. Pp. 181, epilogue, acknowledgments, notes, bibliography. \$50.00, cloth)**

For years, some scholars have argued that the Civil War was not about slavery. Patrick A. Lewis challenges this notion and masterly reveals in his book, *For Slavery and Union: Benjamin Buckner and Kentucky Loyalties in the Civil War*, the complexity of fighting for the Union army and the ideals of the United States Constitution while seeking to protect and sustain the enslavement of people of African descent, especially within the state of Kentucky.

According to Lewis, Kentucky was one of four Border States known in part as the “Upper South” that did not side with either North or South during the Civil War. The historian William E. Glenapp points out, “Together Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri had a white population of almost 2,600,000, nearly half that of the population of the eleven states of the Confederacy.” These border states also had a combined enslaved population of 1,208,758: nearly one-fourth of the US black population. Kentucky never freed its enslaved population as the other Border States did.

Patrick A. Lewis, a distinguished researcher and scholar of Kentucky Civil War history offers insight into the mindset of the nineteenth century white, loyal, pro-Union men. Through letters, journals and newspaper articles, Lewis illustrates Benjamin Buckner and fellow Kentuckians’ interventions to control slavery and their efforts to restrict the rights of Negroes during and after the war.

In his book, Lewis also discusses some of the prominent political figures of Buckner’s time, including Henry Clay, who was instrumental to the Missouri Compromise, which was the first compromise that attempted to settle the issue of slavery; Abraham Lincoln, who practiced law with Buckner’s father



(Aylett) and was elected the 16th President of the United States; and John Marshall Harlan, who became an associate justice on the Supreme Court and was the “Great Dissenter” in the Plessy v. Ferguson decision in 1896.

John M. Harlan was a contemporary of Buckner. They would both become bluegrass lawyers; they would join the federal army and command men in battle and fight to maintain the Union, as they knew it. Buckner’s legacy, unlike Harlan’s, however, would be lost to the annals of history if not for the diligent research and writing of Patrick A. Lewis.

Lewis portrays Buckner as somewhat of a victim, caught between his struggles to engage his wealthy fiancée, to lead in the Union Army, and to serve “the government he loved as well as the section of the country (and its institution) which, indeed, shaped him as a white man.” Much of Buckner’s motives are predicated on the approval of Helen Martin to win her love, the blessing of Dr. and Mrs. Samuel Martin (Helen’s parents), and the status that he would obtain thereby—economically, socially

and politically. The question arises: how much of this portrayal represents Buckner's own volition or beliefs rather than Lewis's interpretation of them?

In *For Slavery and Union*, Lewis writes that Buckner's pivotal point was in his second year of the war, as Major of the United States 20th Infantry, when he expressed these sentiments: "We joined the people of the North (a people whom we did not love) to fight the South (a people with whom we were connected by ties of relationship, interest, the identity of our heart and institutions) merely upon principle and to preserve that Constitutional form of government which was the wonder and admiration of the world. But the president has by the shake of the pen taken away all that. But what are we to do? Where can we go?" (p. 103).

According to Lewis, this "shaking of the pen" was Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which undid Buckner's commitment to the United States and challenged his support for the Union Army. He reluctantly united with former Confederate combatants to challenge and undo the benefits of the 14th and 15th Amendments to the United States Constitution within Kentucky and beyond.

Lewis's writing invokes comparison to Lawrence Goldstone's *Inherently Unequal: The Betrayal of Equal Rights by the Supreme Court, 1865–1903*, which deals with acts of violence, court cases, militia, and legislation that hindered the advancement of former slaves and black veterans and ushered in the era of "Jim Crow." The 1860 census for Kentucky indicates that there was a population of free people of color of 10,684 in the state, causing one to wonder what contact or interaction that Buckner may have had with any of them. Whatever the case, Buckner left the Union Army in protest of Black men joining the fraternity of US soldiers, and Kentucky enlisted 25,000 Negro soldiers comprising over 16 regiments of US Colored Troops from 1864 to the end of the Civil War. These Black Kentuckians fought and died for their freedom, to save the Union and

the Constitution, and, ironically, to protect Buckner and his fellow "loyalists" who later labored to deny them of their rights as citizens.

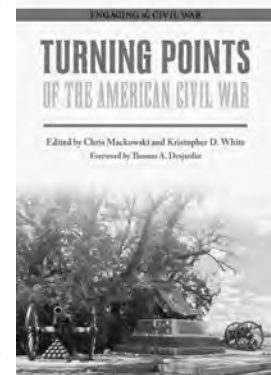
For Slavery and Union is a must read for anyone looking for insight into the unique position of Kentucky during the Civil War as well as for those who are seeking to understand disenfranchisement of African Americans and the inception of "Jim Crow" in its aftermath.

--Ronnie A. Nichols



***Turning Points of the American Civil War.* Engaging the Civil War series. Edited by Chris Mackowski and Kristopher D. White. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2018. Pp. xxi + 248, lists of illustrations, forward, acknowledgments, note about sources, introductions, contributors, index. \$24.50, paper)**

To most casual history readers the turning point of the Civil War is a seemingly simple and obvious no-brainer; Gettysburg, case closed. It was, after all, the most famous and largest battle of the war in terms of name recognition, troops engaged, and total casualties sustained by both armies. In addition to such statistical support for its claim of preeminence, President Abraham Lincoln made a personal visit to the battlefield within months of its final shot and, through the eloquence of the



Gettysburg Address, christened it as hallowed ground upon which the Union Army changed the war's moral trajectory into a righteous mission for the simultaneous goals of reunification and emancipation. Likewise, John Badger Bachelder began his self-anointed process of tightly controlled commemoration of Gettysburg shortly after the battle's conclusion, and thus did as much as anyone to position the July 1863 battle's enduring popular reputation as the war's most crucial turning point.

That assessment has been reinforced through testimonials authored by veterans of both armies, enough monuments to commemorate seemingly every square foot of the contested terrain, as well as numerous books and movies and other pop cultural interpretations of history. However, as decisive as the Union victory was, and how poignantly poetic were Lincoln's words, the military outcome at Gettysburg did nothing to change the fate of Vicksburg or the strategic importance of the Western Theater. All of which leaves significant room for on-going debate by professional historians and enthusiasts alike, which usually comes down to different and even competing definitions of the term "turning point."

In *Turning Points of the American Civil War*, editors Chris Mackowski and Kristopher D. White have brought together nine authors who present and frequently challenge our understanding of traditional turning point claims such as Gettysburg and other potential turning point events, as well as significant political developments (including the creation of the congressional Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, Emancipation, and the election of 1864). Following a fine introductory essay by Thomas Desjardin that summarizes and challenges the nearly immediate claim for Gettysburg as the war's high-water mark, the editors also provide well-written introductory essays that set the context for each essay. The chronological arrangement of this collection of essays reinforces the editor's foundational concept that all of the events of the war built off each

other, from the earliest days to later events leading to the conflict's conclusion. Furthermore, the search for a definitive single turning point is at least partially an over-simplification of how conflicts come to their end and how that conclusion might have been reversed if a single event had turned out differently.

The earliest event under consideration is the July 21, 1861, Battle of First Bull Run and the rise of George McClellan to command of the Union army in the Eastern Theater necessitated by the embarrassingly decisive nature of the Union army's defeat under Irvin McDowell. Despite his many shortcomings, which would be exposed over the course of the next year, McClellan initially looked like the man for the job and he deserves credit for the way he reshaped the army through a rigorous regime of training that turned an armed mob of patriotic but inexperienced volunteers into a well-disciplined and capable army. The fact that McClellan soon proved inconsistent in leading the newly christened Army of the Potomac in battle does not diminish the importance of that achievement or its status as an early turning point. James Morgan makes a convincing argument for the creation of the Congressional Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, in the wake of another early battlefield debacle at Ball's Bluff on October 21, 1861, as a turning point of a political variety. Although the committee conducted many legitimate investigations, it also pursued politically-motivated investigations about the loyalties and command performances of high-ranking Democratic officers, most notably against Fitz John Porter, which created an atmosphere of suspicion that interfered with the prosecution of the war in the Eastern Theater.

Gregory Mertz, Kristopher White and Daniel T. Davis challenge some of the most timeworn assumptions about the impact felt through the loss of particular individuals. Mertz argues that Albert Sidney Johnston's death at Shiloh stands less as a turning point in that battle and more so in relation to what Johnston

might have contributed through the remainder of the war in the Western Theater. The Confederates would probably still have lost at Shiloh, but Johnston showed enough potential to perhaps have made a positive difference elsewhere in the Western Theater. White tackles the biggest “what if” question of the war—the death of Stonewall Jackson at Chancellorsville. White concludes that Lee’s so-called masterpiece of maneuver and timing stood out more as “a hollow victory representative of a highly destructive command style bound to doom the Army of Northern Virginia” (p. 106). In other words, Lee’s aggressive command style proved too costly both at Chancellorsville and throughout the war, creating casualties that the South could not replace even early in the war. Meanwhile, Daniel Davis shows how Grant’s successful capture of Vicksburg proved not only a death knell for the Confederacy, but also as an announcement of Grant’s rise to prominence in the Union’s command structure. Stephen Davis finds a similar negative turning point for the Confederacy in John Bell Hood’s over-aggressive approach during his 1864 campaign in Tennessee, culminating in the destructive battle of Franklin in November.

Kevin Pawlak and Rea Andrew Redd examine two wartime events tied closely to President Lincoln. Pawlak correctly credits the Emancipation Proclamation with changing the moral trajectory of the war, which in turn altered the war in diplomatic and military ways. Redd’s exploration of the machinations of the 1864 election process, and Lincoln’s ultimate re-election, also proved decisive as turning points related to the North’s resolve to support the Lincoln administration to the conflict’s end. Following the editors’ and authors’ concept of a more fluid understanding of the term “turning point,” one in which the on-going military and non-military events of the war built consecutively toward its ultimate outcome, there would appear to be room for some additional turning points not covered in this volume. For example, a case could be made for the

paired inclusion of the battles of Pea Ridge and Prairie Grove as turning points in the often overlooked but strategically significant Trans-Mississippi Theater. Fought respectively in northwest Arkansas in March and December 1862, these twin Union victories helped secure Union control of the northwest Arkansas and southwest Missouri border, which in turn helped the Union maintain political control of Missouri despite that state’s hotly divided sympathies for the Confederate and Union forces. Those outcomes also influenced a turn toward the increased use of guerrilla tactics in Trans-Mississippi states.

In the end it is important for authors and readers alike to remember that, no matter how heavily commemorated in stone and bronze, no single individual or event is solely responsible for the outcome of a struggle that was years in the making and years further in its conclusion. In this fascinating volume, the editors and authors succeed in expressing that message.

--Robert Patrick Bender

