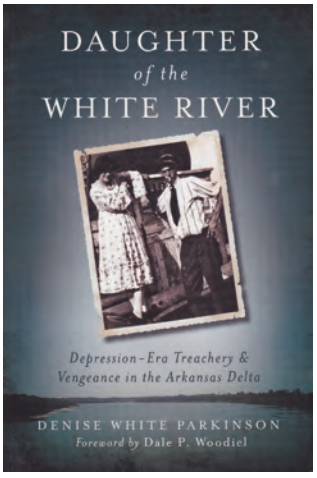
Reviews

Daughter of the White River. By Denise White Parkinson. (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2010. Pp. 144, Epilogue $19.99, paperback)

As a girl who grew up in the White River town of Batesville, I was intrigued by the book *Daughter of the White River.* The book brings to life the little known story of Helen Spence who committed murder and was murdered while incarcerated. It is a fascinating look at the life of the people who lived in riverboats on the lower White River during the Depression Era and their interactions with the people they called "dry-landers."

Parkinson gives readers a look at life during the 1930s in Arkansas by developing the story as a coming of age tale featuring a young man who grew up as a friend of Helen Spence. Life in the White River delta is explored with a freedom from societal expectations and rules. L.C. Brown takes us on a trip through his childhood recollections and gives us pictures of Easter at a Brush Arbor church, a community making molasses, measles, and summer days spent swimming from the edge of a houseboat. It is an idyllic look at a time when Eden is invaded by the serpents of murder and the Depression.

The first section of the book is from the memories of Lemuel Cressie (L.C.) Brown Jr. Brown was younger than Helen Spence, but remembers her with fondness and tells of his visits to the Spence family riverboat when he was a child. His father was a deputy sheriff in Arkansas County and a friend of Cicero Spence, Helen's father. Brown tells of his time with Spence and wants her story to be told in a positive light. Against a backdrop of fears, Brown introduces us to Helen Spence, an ordinary girl whom everyone liked and respected. Brown is awe-struck by the older Helen who gives him the name L.C. in place of his moniker of Junior Brown.



The mood of the tale changes as the Depression deepens, the families struggle to feed themselves, and the sheriff warns families to beware of strangers on the river. When Cicero Spence leaves on a fishing trip forgetting his lunch, the scene is set for tragedy. Helen and her mother paddle up river to take Cicero his lunch and witness his murder in a fight over money. In order to save her daughter, Ada Spence goes with the man who murdered her husband, promising to take him to the money only to lose her own life. Helen is found floating down the river in shock hours later. The turning point of Helen Spence's life comes when she murders the man who killed her parents.

The second part of the book tells of Helen Spence's life after murder. At this point, the story is reconstructed from newspaper accounts and court records. While awaiting her sentence, Helen is thought to have killed another man who was trying to take advantage of her after giving her a job. She serves her time at the prison farm and is paroled. Spence lives for one week in Little Rock before she confesses to the murder of the man who was her former boss. There is no evidence that Helen Spence actually committed this crime other than her confession, but she is sent back to the Pea Farm, as the prison farm is known, as a punishment for her supposed crime.

During her stay in the corrupt prison farm, Spence tries a series of escapes. The attempt is made when there are rumors that the warden is going to take the women to Memphis to act as prostitutes, and Helen is beaten with a whip once she is caught. Spence suffers at the hands of a corrupt prison system and is almost killed by the treatment she receives. She leaves the prison farm for the last time and shuffles slowly into history. It is thought that Spence was set up by the warden at the farm. She was shot in the back by a trustee who was acquitted of murder.

Helen Spence's story does not end with her death. People tried to help Spence in death with offers ranging from burial plots to dresses and flowers for her funeral. Her body was displayed in the front window of a funeral home in DeWitt, outraging the local people. Stories of her life and death filled the pages of true crime magazines beside those of people such as Bonnie and Clyde. Spence lies in an unmarked grave after her body was stolen from the funeral home by friends who buried her under the cover of darkness.

Helen Spence's life is a testament to the hard times experienced by many people during the depression. It may have been easier to confess to a crime and have three meals a day than to struggle outside of the prison farm. Her grandmother died believing that Spence never killed the second man and was wrongly imprisoned. Whether she was innocent or not may never be known, but Helen Spence's life will never be forgotten thanks to L.C. Brown and Denise White Parkinson.

--Kristine Rounds

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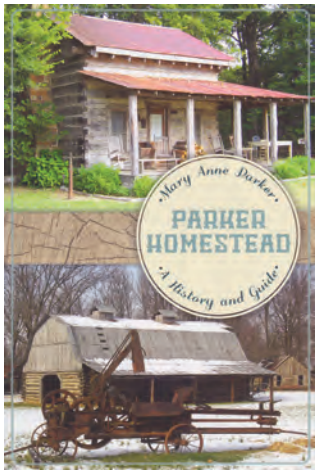
Parker Homestead: A History and Guide. By Mary Ann Parker. (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2013. Pp. 160, $19.99, paperback)

Mary Anne Parker's *Parker Homestead: A History and Guide* leaves readers wishing to take a road trip to Parker Homestead, a friendly and history-filled spot to visit. Certainly, anyone with children will want to take a tour, especially during one of the many festivals or events hosted there.

This work leaves no stone unturned. Every building on the property is featured in a black and white photograph, each showing a quaint and time-period appropriate building. Although the photos are much appreciated, Parker includes such vivid descriptions of the buildings that the pictures aren't necessary for one to easily imagine each place in one's mind. Not only does she include details of building materials, but she also includes specifics on when, where, and from whom each cabin or building was purchased.



The family's history and the tale of how the homestead came to be are included as well. The reader learns quickly that the Parker Homestead was built from the ground up, beginning with a cabin in the back yard of their Harrisburg, Arkansas home, which was originally used for card games. Yet this family's love of history left them gathering antiques and relics to put inside and outside of the cabin to give it a truly rustic feel. Soon they began to gather more and more things to add to the cabin. Over time they added many more cabins and buildings.

As interest grew in the community along with the number of buildings, the Parker's

hosted the first "School Days" event. Children from the local elementary school were invited to come visit, and the field trip went off without a hitch. Soon after, Phil began making sorghum molasses the old-fashioned way. When locals heard that Phil and Teresa were cooking sorghum on Saturday, two hundred people showed up. The rest is history.

Now the Parkers host many events throughout the year, including "Haunted Homestead" at Halloween. They have thirteen buildings on their much-expanded property, each with its own story. These buildings include a post office, print shop, three barns, a blacksmith shop, and a gristmill. Friends and family run each station with care for the customers and for the history of homesteading.

The work includes information on material folk culture of the area including lye soap making, quilting, and broom making. Along with these, one will find many recipes on how to make foods found at the homestead and used by pioneers with local, easy-to-find ingredients such as sarsaparilla tea. One can also find recipes for stone-ground cornbread, sweet potato biscuits, sorghum hot chocolate, and more (pp. 106, 96, 44). Along with the recipes, readers will find asides and tips from pioneers and short tales and tidbits about the homestead itself.

Also scattered throughout the text are stories of people who helped with the homestead. Almost every contributor to the Parker Homestead is mentioned by name along with a story of how he or she came to be involved with the place, and Mary Anne Parker weaves asides and tales throughout. Towards the end of the work, she does so while also explaining why the homestead is important to the family and the community at large. She writes,

> When I was younger, I asked my other grandmother, Mary Sue Redd, why there weren't a lot of historical markers in and around Poinsett County. She said, "Honey, it's because we come from poor stock." I agreed, but the explanation never sat well with me. I thought then, and still think now, that our ancestors who worked to clear the land and fought to send their kids to school—even if it was only for a year or two—are who built this state, and that is something to be celebrated. I am very proud that the Homestead has chosen, in a way, to celebrate these regular folks. (p. 116)

In the end, reading *Parker Homestead: A History and Guide* feels like having a lively chat on the porch with a new friend, one whom you'll soon be quite close with. All readers need do is bring out a glass of sweet tea, open up this book, and enjoy the afternoon sun.

--Lauren Willette

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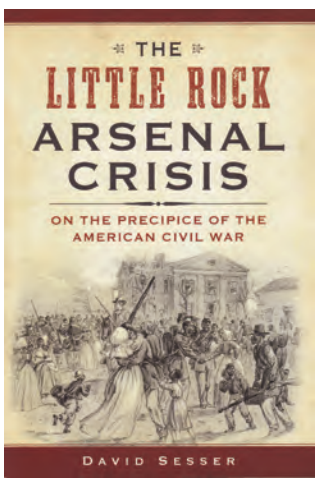
The Little Rock Arsenal Crisis: On the Precipice of the American Civil War. By David Sesser (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2013. Pp. 128, Appendices, Notes, Bibliography, Index, $19.99, paperback)



The invention of the telegraph is usually seen as a major victory over the age-old problems of distance and communication. Yet it was an incident with the telegraph that nearly provoked the Civil War two months before the first shots were fired at Fort Sumter, and in a state that had not yet officially seceded from the Union. What had been a quiet

stand-off between Governor Henry Rector and Captain James Totten over the Little Rock Arsenal quickly escalated into a major confrontation between Federal troops and state militias, all because of an unfounded rumor sent on the first-ever telegraph line from Little Rock to Memphis. This is the subject of David Sesser's narrative, *The Little Rock Arsenal Crisis*.

Sesser begins with Henry Rector and his role in the crisis. Although he had won the gubernatorial contest, Rector lacked the necessary connections to be a successful politician. He saw secession as a way to enhance his political standing. When his attempts failed to move the State Legislature, he sought a crisis that would force the issue and soon focused on the Federal presence at the Little Rock Arsenal. The troops defending the Arsenal were under the command of Captain James Totten, the son of a popular Little Rock physician, and had arrived there on 6 December 1860. Yet it was not until 28 January 1861 that Rector dispatched a note to Totten warning that he would tolerate Federal control of the Arsenal "until the state, by authority of the people, shall have determined to sever their connection with the General Government," (p. 38) and as long as his garrison "did not try to move or destroy the weapons" (p. 38) or receive reinforcements.

The real trigger for the crisis, however, was the telegraph imbroglio. Sesser recounts how the telegraph line finally reached Little Rock, connecting it to the wider world. In honor of the event, a local attorney but ardent secessionist, John M. Harrell, was chosen to send the first telegraph message from the State Capital. As part of his message, Harrell relayed as fact certain rumors that Federal troops were being withdrawn from Indian Territory to reinforce the Arsenal. Since the establishment of the telegraph link was a significant event, stations in eastern Arkansas were allowed to listen in on the transmission being relayed to Memphis. Based on Harrell's erroneous rumor, word spread quickly throughout the state that Federal reinforcements were converging on Little Rock. The citizens of Helena sent a message to Governor Rector offering the services of five hundred men to take the Arsenal.

Rector was careful to avoid being directly implicated in their dispatch and responded through the adjutant-general that he had no authority "to summon [them] to take possession of a Federal post," but "should the people assemble in their own defense," he would "interpose his official position in their behalf" (p. 46). Units from Helena arrived at the capital on the night of February 5, but others from the state had already entered based on other false rumors of Federal forces. Many of these units came from the upland regions, motivated less by the cause of secession, and more by the fear that the Federal government was intervening in a state matter. The Little Rock City Council, nervous over their presence, asked the governor to take command of the militias, and if necessary, to attack the Arsenal. The next day, February 6, Rector called upon Totten to surrender and ordered the Helena militia to surround the Arsenal.

But before dealing with the resolution of the crisis, Sesser goes into a long digression on the rift between the Capital Guards and the other militia units. This animosity, which stemmed from certain incidents in the Mexican War, threatened to reignite when the city council called out the Capital Guards in response to the militia presence. It is at this point that Sesser's normally crisp narrative begins to get very confusing as he weaves back and forth between the actions of the governor, the City Council, and an impromptu gathering of Little Rock citizens. In fact what sounds in Sesser's account like a long confrontation between the Capital Guards and other militias, probably lasted only a few hours before the governor intervened later that day and ordered the Helena units to the Arsenal. Unaware of this discord, Totten, vastly outnumbered, surrendered the Arsenal to state authorities on February 8.

Sesser argues that the peaceful resolution of the crisis provoked a Unionist backlash, perhaps best illustrated by the 107 Little Rock

women who presented Captain Totten with an engraved sword for his gallant conduct during the crisis. Such a gesture was hardly commiserate with an ardent secessionist stance. Sesser also cites the strength of Unionism in the referendum to elect delegates to the Convention that was to decide on the matter of secession. But the label "Unionist" is a deceptive term because it takes in a variety of political views. Many of the delegates were "conditional Unionists" in favor of remaining in the Union as long as no hostile actions were directed against those states that had withdrawn their allegiance. That situation changed after the attack on Fort Sumter when Lincoln issued his request for volunteers. Now the very same unionists voted to secede by a vast majority.

What Sesser has written confirms that it was not the Arsenal Crisis that pushed Arkansas out of the Union. This would appear to diminish the significance of his book. Yet framing the question only from the standpoint of "what it did not do" is a mistake. It really ought to be reframed in the context of "what could have happened" if Totten had not been so gracious to the women of Little Rock and decided to resist the taking of the fort. What if the commander had not been Totten, but someone of the disposition of a Nathanial Lyon? The crisis might then have taken a much more dramatic turn than its rather anticlimactic ending.

--Edward Tenace

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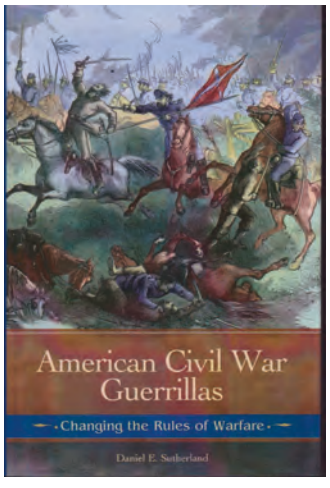
American Civil War Guerrillas: Changing the Rules of Warfare. **By Daniel E. Sutherland (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013. Pp. ix-xi + 162, Epilogue, Appendices, Notes, Bibliographical Essay, Index, $37, hardcover)**

The first word that comes to mind when one thinks of Daniel Sutherland and his writings on the guerrilla conflict during the American Civil War is *prolific*. By this writer's count, this is at least the third book written by Sutherland on the topic, not including the numerous articles, chapters, and other publications that have explored the topic over the past three decades.

Part of Praeger's "Reflections on the Civil War Era" series, Sutherland's newest work that examines the actions of guerrillas during the war is not limited to a specific geographical region or time period. Rather, the work focuses on the impact that guerrillas had in each theater of the war, beginning with the earliest engagements in the summer of 1861 and continuing through the cessation of hostilities in 1865.

With the outbreak of war, Confederate officials realized that their northern borders were vulnerable to attack by Federal forces and southern units were not yet organized to repel an invasion. To fill this defensive void, home guards and other local defense units were organized across the upper South and in border states by both pro-Confederate and Unionist groups. Soon, these groups began to engage one another in a type of warfare known as bush whacking. Ambushes, assassinations, and attacks on governmental institutions soon expanded into engagements with enemy military forces.



These early actions led the Confederate government to step in and create a system for irregular military units to operate within and which would

lead to positive military outcomes rather than expending valuable resources with negligible gains. These men, known as partisan rangers, were organized in units with a formal military structure. As the war progressed, this system evolved and in some areas eventually collapsed as irregular troops pursued the type of war they wished to inflict on the enemy without reporting to Richmond.

Guerrillas were active in every theater during the conflict, but most previous research has focused on the events that took place in Missouri and surrounding states. Sutherland explores the actions of irregular troops on both sides on the conflict with special attention to the war in the Trans-Mississippi. The years of violence along the Missouri-Kansas border that preceded the outbreak of war made the conflict in that area seem to be especially violent.

Women and children were not immune to attacks by guerrillas, and families across the country suffered violence and the loss of property to raids and outright thievery. However, not all families were negatively impacted by the presence of guerrillas so close to their homes. While some women openly rode with guerrilla groups, many more provided material support to bands operating near their homes.

Captured Federal soldiers also suffered at the hands of some guerrillas, with executions occurring in Missouri, Kansas, and other states. Wounded troops were sometimes executed on the field after engagements. The troops most likely to suffer at the hands of irregular troops if captured were African-American members of the Union Army. Sutherland documents numerous examples of guerrillas murdering black troops after they surrendered or were wounded.

The sheer brutality of the warfare practiced by guerrillas set them apart from regular troops. The units that opposed them soon answered in kind. Union commanders in the field were often at a loss of how to effectively counter the actions of guerrillas operating nearby. This changed after Dr. Francis Lieber wrote an essay at the request of Federal commanders which examined the obligations and duties of Union troops when faced with guerrillas. This publication was soon used as a blueprint for dealing with irregular troops wherever they operated. The essay denied captured guerrillas the right to be held as prisoners of war or to be treated as regular enemy soldiers. Under these regulations, countless guerrillas were executed in the field or convicted in military courts of crimes against Federal soldiers and civilians. After such a conviction, guerrillas could typically expect to face either execution or a lengthy sentence to be served at hard labor.

At the conclusion of the war, Sutherland argues that many guerrillas simply shifted to the Ku Klux Klan and other organizations to drive Federal occupation forces out of the South. In the post-war years, former guerrillas defended their actions or claimed to be regular Confederate soldiers, never distinguishing their actions as out of line with acceptable methods of warfare.

A short and interesting read, Sutherland ably argues that the guerrilla war had a much greater impact than a historiographical examination of current scholarship would suggest. A few suggestions would improve the work a bit. Unionist guerrillas are briefly mentioned in the work, as the vast majority of the irregulars covered by Sutherland were allied with the Confederacy or at least actively opposed Federal troops. Many readers would find more information about guerrillas in the Deep South enlightening as most of the material in this volume focuses on the conflict in the border states or by groups and men who are discussed in other works.

Any scholar without a firm foundation in the literature of the irregular conflict that accompanied more traditional combat during the Civil War would find this work not only enlightening, but an entertaining read as well.

--David Sesser

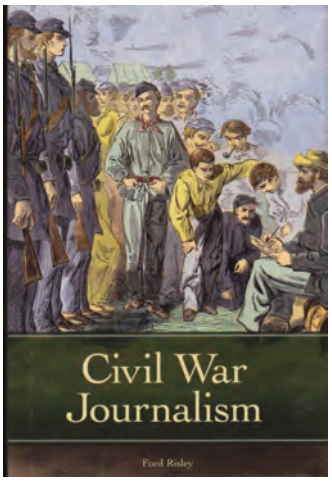
Civil War Journalism. By Ford Risley. (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012. Pp. ix-xiii + 107, Epilogue, Notes, Bibliographical Essay, Index, $37, hardcover)

The Civil War was a turning point not only for the United States, it was a turning point for American journalism. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the US press, which included newspapers and the increasingly popular magazines, was growing and maturing, reflecting technological changes and the country's phenomenal population growth. With the war, 1861-1865, the press came of age.

That's the central theme of *Civil War Journalism*, a slim but fact-packed volume by Ford Risley. The author, a longtime leader among American journalism historians and the head of the Department of Journalism at Penn State University, does a superb job of covering his subject in five chapters, ranging from how the war was reported to how the conflict affected journalism.

The author has a knack for presenting fascinating factoids, such as a paragraph about the resourcefulness of the *New York Tribune*'s Henry E. Wing in reporting the end of the war. Wing and other journalists were to be kept outside when Union General Ulysses S. Grant met with Confederate General Robert E. Lee at the Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia, so Wing arranged for one of Grant's staff members to give him a signal. Should Lee surrender, the officer would walk outside, remove his hat, and use a handkerchief to wipe his forehead three times. "When the officer gave Wing the signal, the correspondent jumped on his horse and galloped off to the telegraph office to file his story. The war was over and Wing got his scoop (p. 29).

The book goes beyond mere factoids, however, providing in-depth looks at a wide variety of subjects. Take Chapter 2, which focuses on



illustrations and photographs. Among other things, this chapter helps the reader see that manipulation of reality (the downfall of occasional contemporary photographers) existed long before Photoshop. One example describes the ghoulish lengths that Alexander Gardner went to in portraying battlefield sights. A leading Civil War photographer and a former assistant to the famed Mathew Brady, Gardner had learned from the Battle of Antietam in September 1862 that photos of fighting's aftermath were in public demand, so he and his assistants visited Gettysburg soon after the July 1863 battle. They made about sixty photos, about three-fourths of which included dead horses and corpses. Risley notes that in an age before ethics codes, Gardner and his assistants set up some of the photos. In one case, after taking pictures of a dead Confederate sharpshooter, Gardner, with some help, dragged the body to a rock wall. He then placed a knapsack under the corpse's head and leaned the soldier's gun against the wall. (One may see this picture, one of the better-known Civil War photographs, by typing "Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg" into an Internet search engine.)

Not that photographers were the only ones to distort the war. Risley notes that, in some cases, both reporters and military authorities made stuff up. Chapter 4 ("Censorship and Suppression") contains part of a letter in which Southern correspondent Peter W. Alexander complained to the *Savannah Republican*: "The truth is there are correspondents who invariably magnify our successes and depreciate our losses, and who when there is a dearth of news will

draw upon their imaginations for their facts. The war abounds in more romantic incidents and thrilling adventures than poet ever imagined or novelist described; and it would be well if the writers of fiction from the army, who devote themselves to the marvelous and poetic affairs rather than to the stern realities of the campaign, would remember this fact" (p. 91).

Savoring the words of Alexander and some of his fellow correspondents is one of the great pleasures of reading this book. These writers vividly conveyed the war's spectacle, along with its horrors and hardships. In describing General George Pickett's charge at Gettysburg, the *Boston Journal*'s Charles Coffin wrote: "Men fire into each other's faces, not five feet apart. There are bayonet-thrusts, sabre-strokes, pistol shots . . . oaths, yells, curses, hurrahs, shoutings . . . men going down on their hands and knees, spinning round like tops, throwing out their arms, gulping up blood, falling; legless, armless, headless. There are ghastly heaps of dead men. Seconds are centuries, minutes, ages; but the thin line does not break" (p. 23).

This literary journalistic style began to disappear around the end of the Civil War, replaced by the inverted pyramid form of reporting in which a news article's facts are arranged in order of descending importance, answering the who-what-when-where-why-how questions in unadorned prose.

Just as the reporting style was changing near the war's end, so was much else about this country. For a public hungry for war news for four years, newspapers had become essential reading for many, Risley says. Magazines were growing in popularity too, thanks largely to illustrated weeklies. And photography had become important in depicting events.

"As with so many aspects of American life, journalism had been unalterably and forever changed by the Civil War," Risley concludes. "With the country embarking on a new era in its history, the press was in a better position to cover it" (p. 124).

Civil War Journalism, which has a thorough set of endnotes and an excellent bibliographical essay, is essential reading for journalism teachers and students. It could serve as an excellent springboard for research. Anyone else with an interest in the war also would find it captivating to read about those who penned the first rough draft of this brutally historic time.

--Sonny Rhodes

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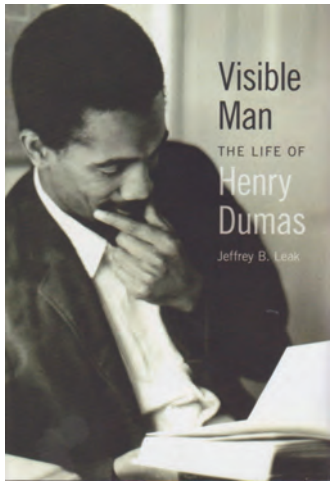
Visible Man: The Life of Henry Dumas. By Jeffrey B. Leak. (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2014. Pp ix-xi+ 154, Epilogue, Notes, Selected Bibliography, Index, $39.95, cloth)



Impressively revered by a devoted contingent of friends, editors, relatives, and a modest group of scholars, yet largely unknown in general literary and scholarly communities, African American poet and fiction writer Henry Dumas, visionary articulator and practitioner of an expansive black aesthetic, lived and died a life of mystery. His short thirty-three years were punctuated by "What ifs." What if Ralph Ellison had encouraged him instead of snubbing Dumas when he was a student at Rutgers University? What if Bread Loaf had given Dumas a scholarship instead of just admitting the financially-strapped young writer? What if Viking Press had taken a

chance on *Jonoah and the Green Stone*, Dumas's novel? What if the little magazine that Dumas and his white mistress founded had made a splash in the literary ocean? What if Dumas had not given in to the powerful influences of drugs and alcohol? What if he had passed up going to New York in May of 1968 to serve as best man in a friend's wedding? What if the white New York City Transit cop who killed Dumas had had a bit more experience and hesitated just thirty seconds longer before firing his fatal shot? What if Toni Morrison had been in her role as editor at Random House and had become aware of Dumas's work *before* he was killed? In *Visible Man: The Life of Henry Dumas*, biographer Jeffrey B. Leak dives into the mystery that is Henry Dumas and tries to mediate these "what ifs," to put a talented man into fuller view for the literary world.

By the time Henry Dumas met his fate with the bullet on 23 May 1968, he had traveled from his birth place in Sweet Home, Arkansas in 1934 to Harlem, to a stint in the air force, where he served on the Arabian Peninsula and studied eastern religions, to marriage and fathering two sons, to Rutgers University, to Hiram College in Ohio (where he became one of the editors of the *Hiram Poetry Review*), and finally to the Experiment in Higher Education in East St. Louis, Illinois. Since thirty-three year-olds do not confront mortality sufficiently to leave extensive records of their lives, Leak had to become a super sleuth in unearthing materials about Dumas. He relied heavily upon interviews with Dumas's widow, Loretta Dumas, with Eugene B. Redmond, whom Dumas met in East St. Louis and who became Dumas's literary executor and the primary force behind the posthumous publication of Dumas's novel, stories, and poems, and with Lois Silber Wright, who had been Dumas's mistress. From these sources, along with publishing and public records and interviews with Dumas's acquaintances, Leak pieces together the life of a man who was creatively brilliant but self-destructive.

An inquisitive personality, Dumas parlayed his explorations of nature in Arkansas into various of his works, including the sometimes anthologized "Ark of Bones," which showcases his diasporic and otherworldly connotations of black history and heritage. A fanatical embracing of Christianity after his discharge from the air force also shaped Dumas's early philosophy, including his moralistic, shaming lecture to staff members of the *Anthologist* (the Rutgers literary magazine; Dumas later edited *Untitled*, the evening school's literary magazine). From the classical music he loved early in life, Dumas progressed to a close friendship with the musician Sun Ra and to viewing jazz and other African American music as crucial to the evolution of his aesthetic. In "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?," for example, he posits that music is powerful enough to kill. Following Sun Ra, Dumas believed that music had transcendent, cosmic, revelatory qualities.

During his years at Rutgers, where he was mentored by Rutgers University Press Director William Sloane, shared writing aspirations with Jay Wright and Robert Pinsky, and learned from professors William Wynkoop and Maurice Kramer, Dumas befriended members of the NAACP and had his consciousness raised about the status of blacks in America. He also listened to and admired Malcolm X (with whom he shared a three-hour dinner on one occasion) and even received "a letter of acceptance into the Nation of Islam" (p. 66—no record exists of Dumas's having applied for such membership). His heightened nationalism (he even traveled to Tennessee to meet with evicted sharecroppers) occurred simultaneously with his participation in Beat generation ethics and social behavior. Though he married an African American woman, he had passing relationships with several white women and an extended affair with Lois Silber.

A swift departure from the early circumstances of his marriage, when he and Loretta were more financially stable and traveled to California, the years at Rutgers (nearly seven) proved almost financially destructive. Shifting

jobs (copier/errand boy at IBM, tutor, social worker) as a result of increased family responsibilities brought Dumas close to a psychological breaking point—and eventually to excessive use of drugs and alcohol. That, combined with living a double life with a mistress, put undue pressure on Dumas's creativity. Always wanting to be numbered with the upper crust of black writers (he met several of them in the 1960s and interacted with Umbra, the New York black literary group), Dumas always missed the mark. He published stories (some even award-winning) and poetry, but not the novel.

What is clear is that this enigmatic figure, who altered his personality with his writing friends, his mistress and his wife, never gave up the fire and drive to become a well-known writer. Respected as a mentor during his teaching at the Experiment in Higher Education, Dumas guided students through the development that had eluded him, including helping with raising money at one point for one of his students to go to Africa. Reputed to have had boundless energy, a dazzling charm, and an unmatched (though at times misunderstood) creativity, Dumas produced works that, mostly published posthumously, are just beginning to garner the critical attention they deserve. Leak's biography of this intense, driven "man of wonder and contradiction" (p. 2), who was "a vessel of pure energy" (p. 126), is invaluable. Leak's detailing in the "Epilogue" his journey of discovery about Dumas as well as post-death efforts to get Dumas's works published is equally invaluable. The volume will assuredly contribute richly to the process of making Dumas visible to students and scholars who can appreciate a distinctive voice in the African American literary tradition.

--Trudier Harris

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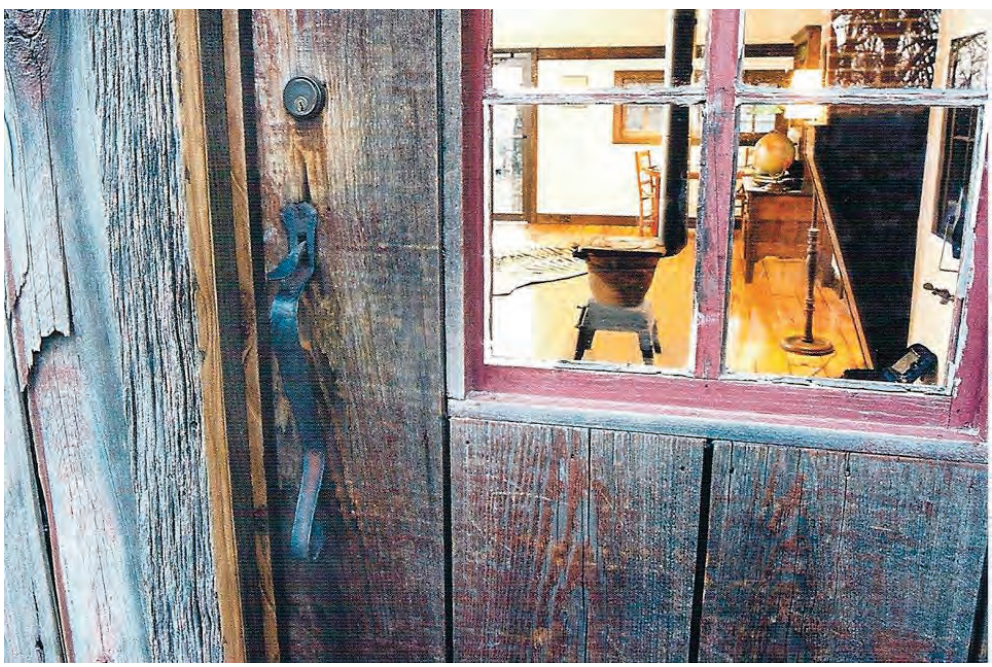

Door into Hemingway's Barn Studio.
Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum and Educational Center, Piggott, Arkansas.
Photograph by Adam Long.