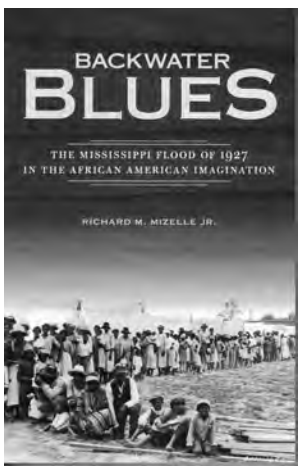
Reviews

Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination. By Richard M. Mizelle, Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. Pp. ix–xii + 160, notes, selected discography, index. $25, paperback)

Research on a region's social history often focuses on the most salient events with a community's historical memory. In this respect, the 1927 flood holds a prominent place in the collective memory of communities located along the Mississippi River. The rebuilt levee system and the continuing engineering projects for flood control are not only visible reminders of the flood but they also serve to elicit both sketchy memories and extensive accounts of the catastrophe. Although only a few elder residents can recount first-hand experiences with the flood, the verbal legacy of the disaster remains vibrant in the storytelling and historical recollections of contemporary residents of lower Mississippi River region. Richard Mizelle's new book draws from a range of sources to provide a trenchant interpretation of the history of this flood within African-American memory culture and historical imagination. He focuses much of his work on the legacy of the flood within the Mississippi River Delta—which he more accurately terms the "Yazoo-Mississippi River Delta." Along with his treatment of how the 1927 flood is important within African-American history, Mizelle also uses Delta blues music as a vibrant resource for understanding both the symbolism and the experiences of surviving the cataclysm.



The book begins with a strong and engaging study of the historical context for the massive deluge. Mizelle provides a fine balance of historical context and narrative to show the importance of this region within African-American history, and he outlines how the flood control system was initially constructed and maintained over time. In these introductory chapters, he makes and develops a strong case for using scholarship in blues music to augment the written record. Crediting Clyde Wood with an approach of "blues epistemology," Mizelle emphasizes how blues music and its related narrative tradition can yield insight into how African-Americans have sought resistance as well as healing in the face of racial oppression. The author mines dozens of blues songs and various biographies of blues musicians to show how the experience of surviving the flood not only is directly narrated but also symbolically expressed in music. A significant strength of the book, here, is that he doesn't simply posit interpretations of the lyrics using text-based theories, such as reader-response criticism. Rather he uses historically verifiable accounts to contextualize the musical expression, and he then unpacks a range of symbolic meanings that he specifically connects to this history.

Mizelle's emphasis is the place of the flood within the African-American imagination. This approach is important for numerous reasons. On an overt level, this approach is essential to writing the history of the flood because the flood disproportionately affected the higher black populations living in the region. In terms of historiography, a unifying interest in African-

American historical memory and imagination also demonstrates epistemological and ideological problems with dichotomizing the flood's history in terms of an "American history" that contrasts to African-American history. Mizelle convincingly demonstrates why African-American experiences are integral for understanding the region's history as a whole.

The book's five chapters are centered on a chronology of the flood and its aftermath. The economic and social disparities that existed across racial lines are clearly and vividly presented through a range of historical sources. It's common for residents of the region to have only sketchy impressions of this history, but the accounts of the deprivations, injustice, and violence that occurred in the region are important chronicles of a painful past. He provides a strong historical treatment of systemic oppression including the convict-leasing system, debt peonage, and abuses in the levee camps. The lyrics of songs like "Levee Camp Man Blues" and the better known "Levee Camp Moan" portray direct accounts and expressions of the atrocious conditions in these settlements during the flood. Mizelle strikingly demonstrates that even seemingly benign acts of charity were used to advance discriminatory and racist policies. The chapters on the American Red Cross's relief efforts could be used as textbook examples of institutional racism within a wider politics of culture that bolstered oppression in the name of benevolence. The largely neglected history of these interventions is integral for interpreting the lyrics of songs like "Red Cross Man." In his treatment of these lyrics, Mizelle's analysis elucidates the sketchy allusions and often esoteric symbolism in lines such as "Red Cross gives my man, three days a week, sack of Red Cross flour, hunk of old white meat." His interpretation indicates layers of coded meanings show how the relief efforts sustained the status quo of a segregated society.

Mizelle saves his treatment of "When the Levee Breaks" for his conclusion. Most readers will be familiar with this blues song through the Led Zeppelin cover version; however few listeners may directly connect Jimmy Page and Robert Plant's version with the 1927 flood. But, Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie wrote the song, recording it in 1929 as a direct commentary on the flood. Mizelle doesn't provide an in-depth treatment of their recording careers, yet his analysis suggests that their song could serve as an anthem for the entire history. He emphasizes how the song portrays human vulnerability in the face of technological failure. The short and direct lyrics exemplify central elements of blues aesthetics: "If it keeps on raining, levee's going to break / If it keeps on raining, levee's going to break / And the water gonna come and (you'll have) no place to stay." Mizelle also explicates how the deeply polysemic symbolism in these lyrics is also central to blues aesthetics. The song lyrics' provocative force becomes clear in the phrase that follows: "Crying won't help you, praying won't do you no good / Crying won't help you, praying won't do you no good / When the levee breaks, mama, you got to move." On the level of historical particularity as well as on the more abstract generalized articulation of African-American memory culture, Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie's song evokes the existential predicament of facing the hard reality of life yet somehow finding strength to endure.

--Gregory Hansen

Johnny Cash FAQ. By C. Eric Banister. (Montclair, NJ: Backbeat Books, 2014. Pp. vi–xiv + 355, selected bibliography, index. $24.99, paperback)

Johnny Cash died in 2003, but his legacy is stronger than ever. In the last year, fans have seen the opening of Nashville's Johnny Cash

Museum, the restoration of Cash's house in Dyess, and the release of a new studio album, *Out Among the Stars*. C. Eric Banister's *Johnny Cash FAQ* will please Cash fans. The book

doesn't contain "all that's left to know" about Cash, but even the most devoted fan will learn something from these pages. Cash was a musician for nearly fifty years, and he left behind scores of albums, not including the many Greatest Hits, Best ofs, and other collections. Cash's career leaves a lot for musicologists to write about.

Banister's work is another entry in music publisher Hal Leonard's FAQ series, which has featured books on music, film, and TV. *Johnny Cash FAQ* is a musical biography in which early chapters discuss Cash's roots in the Arkansas Delta and his musical influences, which ranged from Hank Snow to Sister Rosetta Tharpe. Cash got his start in Memphis, and his rise to fame was rapid. Unlike Elvis, Cash was a strong songwriter, whose best early songs, such as "I Walk the Line" and "Folsom Prison Blues" he penned himself. Cash lifted much of the melody and lyrics for "Folsom Prison Blues," but the crucial line, "I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die," was his own creation and solidified his status as the godfather of Outlaw Country. Early Cash songs set the template for his career: trains, prisons, cotton fields, and women obsessed him. Sun Records, however, only put out one real album, *Johnny Cash with His Hot and Blue Guitar*, which mostly consisted of previously released material. Cash's producer, Sam Phillips, however, was only following industry practice of the time, which focused on singles, not albums.

Cash moved to Columbia in 1958 for artistic reasons. He wanted greater creative control, which included the opportunity to record gospel songs. In his first two years at Columbia, Cash released an astonishing five albums. An ever-increasing amphetamine habit helped fuel Cash's productivity, but Cash also had a working man's approach to music. He tirelessly performed live shows and churned out albums, even when he wasn't very inspired. Cash could also work quickly. His 1960 album *Now, There Was a Song!*, Banister tells us, was recorded in a mere three hours.

By the mid-1960s, Cash focused on concept albums, folk themes, and the cause of Native Americans—best typified on his 1964 release *Bitter Tears*—not hit singles ("Ring of Fire" was an exception). Cash was not only the first major star to take up the cause of Native Americans, he was also the first to record an album in a prison. The year 1968 proved one of the most important in the singer's life. His *At Folsom Prison* record was a blockbuster, he married June Carter, and he kicked (albeit temporarily) his drug habit.

Cash's 1969 live album *At San Quentin* sold even better than *At Folsom Prison*. But Banister shows that in the 1970s, Cash struggled to remain relevant amid rapid changes in the country music business. The decade started well with Cash doing a hit weekly variety TV show. But when Cash ended the program in 1971, his record sales began a long slide. He had only one song that hit number one on the country chart in the 1970s, "One Piece at a Time" in 1976. Banister notes how Cash struggled to vary his musical style and try new things, though fans apparently wanted the familiar "boom chicka boom" sound that stamped his early Sun records. Cash's output in the 1970s was more erratic than his earlier work, and he saw himself being eclipsed by "newer" artists such as Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson.

In 1980s, Cash's career hit its nadir. In 1980, Cash fired his longtime bass player Marshall Grant; was the victim of a home invasion at his Jamaica mansion; and was nearly killed

in an ostrich attack (ridiculous had it not been so serious). Cash also lapsed back into heavy drug use. He floundered commercially and was dropped by Columbia in 1986. Cash quickly signed to Mercury Records, but was no more successful there than he had been at Columbia. Cash had success with the country super group the Highwaymen. But by the early 1990s, Cash was considering becoming a regular performer at a theater in Branson, Missouri.

Cash's failures in the 1980s, however, were not uncommon for stars of the 1960s. In the Reagan years, artists such as Neil Young and Bob Dylan could seemingly do little right. Cash's rebirth at Rick Rubin's American Recordings label in 1994 provides a terrific ending to Cash's story, whereby an elderly, "has been" country artist reaches new legions of fans with the help of a young, edgy producer. With Rubin's help, Cash's album sales skyrocketed, he won Grammys, and he made records that never compromised his artistic integrity.

Banister's book is a well-written and impressively researched musical biography of the Man in Black. His chapters contain numerous first-hand testimony by Cash and the musicians he worked with, all while placing Cash in his proper historical and musical context. The book is factually sound, though there are occasional missteps. Banister has Bob Wootton joining Cash's band before Carl Perkins, though the opposite was the case. Cash's concert at Cummins prison in Arkansas took place not in Little Rock, but Grady, a good distance from the capital. And Winthrop Rockefeller, who accompanied him, was not the first Republican governor of Arkansas, but the first Republican governor since Reconstruction. The Arkansas prison issue, furthermore, never did make it to the U.S. Supreme Court (rather, a federal court in St. Louis decided on the state penitentiary's constitutionality). Banister also misspells what is perhaps the most misspelled name in country music: David Allan Coe.

I wish the author had been more vigilant in deleting clichés from his prose, and I would have liked to have seen a more extensive bibliography. Quotations are not cited. Thus, readers will have difficulty determining where they came from. On the plus side, the index is copious, which will allow readers to use these chapters as a valuable reference source.

My criticisms are minor. Banister has written a stimulating book, which is a worthy addition to the many works on Johnny Cash now available. The Cash literary train shows no signs of slowing down, and music fans are all the better for it.

--Colin Woodward

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Staging the Blues: From Tent Shows to Tourism. By Paige A. McGinley. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014. Pp. 304. $24.95, paperback)

On its website, the Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, Mississippi, celebrates its locale as "the land where blues began." The slogan is the unattributed title of a film and book by folklorist Alan Lomax. In what might best be described as an act of symbolic annihilation, to use terminology coined by communication scholar George Gerbner, blues women are all but written out of blues history. In Lomax's 500-plus page tome, women who figure prominently in Paige McGinley's book, namely, Gertrude "Ma" Rainey and Bessie Smith, are scarcely mentioned, and

then only digressively, dismissively or derogatorily. Sister Rosetta Tharpe, a pioneering artist who like many blues performers, male and female, excelled in other genres, is presented merely as a "zingy" gospel singer. That a woman, Mamie Smith, was the first person to record a blues song warrants no mention at all.

Lomax and his father John spent decades assembling vast collections of vernacular music, including blues, which today are housed in the Library of Congress. In doing so, they perpetuated a persistent myth of blues origins that is simultaneously masculinized, rural and Southern. In much the same way that certain regionalized evocations are reflexively identified with Appalachia or the Ozarks, the museum's slogan signifies archetypal images of old African American men, or prematurely senescent young African American men, sitting on muggy, sagging porches of sharecroppers' shacks situated somewhere on unpaved back roads in an imagined rural South, sing-shouting mournful lyrics and coaxing primitive twelve-bar tunes from battered acoustic guitars. Blues luminaries like Big Bill Broonzy, Howlin' Wolf, John Lee Hooker, Robert Johnson, Sonny Boy Williamson, and Muddy Waters come to mind: invariably masculine evocations of a quintessential American art form.

Paige McGinley's erudite analysis of blues history upends prevailing archetypes, yielding important insights about the emergence and evolution of a music genre that is deeply and, perhaps, at least somewhat erroneously embedded in the Mississippi Delta mythos. McGinley excavates essential aspects of blues history that the Lomaxes, and likeminded scholars, omitted, making the opaque transparent.

Two thematic tensions are recurrent throughout the book: femininity vs. masculinity and theatricality vs. authenticity. McGinley opens her case in a lengthy introduction and builds it in four subsequent chapters, each of which is a synoptic argument. Together, they constitute a revisionist history of the blues that directly and powerfully challenges the Lomax narrative.

In the introduction, McGinley declares her intention to resituate the context of blues origins from the front porch to the footlights. In Alan Lomax's reckoning, real or authentic blues resided on Delta farms and migrated to Southern and, later, Northern cities, where it was transformed (for instance, electrified) and transformative, becoming the root source for derivative music genres such as rhythm and blues, and rock and roll. While blues performers may have refined their stage personas and inspired imitators who adopted theatrical conventions to broaden their appeal for diverse audiences and satisfy the demands of theater owners, the "real thing" was what mattered most to Lomax and other blues purists. Reading McGinley, however, one can imagine that things to some extent might well have been the other way around, that life imitated art instead of art imitating life. She argues that authentic blues performance always was, in varying degrees, theatrical. Blues performances included the usual theatrical accouterments, such as backdrops, costumes and props; and these performances often occurred as part of traveling minstrel or Vaudeville shows that toured the country, including the rural South, in the early twentieth century. Blues performers such as "Ma" Rainey and Bessie Smith were versatile entertainers for whom blues singing was but one facet of their repertoires. McGinley acknowledges the difficulty of reconstructing ephemeral stage performances. Her interpretations are largely dependent on contemporaneous press reports and promotional materials. However, a glimpse of the ineffable that she may have in mind can be seen in a rare television appearance by Ethel Waters. On a 1960s episode of *Hollywood Palace* Waters performs in character, notably a dramatic skit rendition of the bluesy "Supper Time" from the 1933 musical *As Thousands Cheer* and, ostensibly, out of character in a duet with an admiring Diana Ross on Hoagy Carmichael's "Bread and Gravy." In any case, Waters's performance seems very much in

line with McGinley's descriptions of Rainey's and Smith's performances.

McGinley continues the theme of theatricality vs. authenticity in the following chapter, which profiles the performance styles of Rainey and Smith, and adds the tension of femininity vs. masculinity. Both women were formidable and massively popular entertainers for whom blues singing was but one of their varied talents. Lomax barely acknowledges their existence and never within the pantheon of blues titans, an exclusively male domain. For McGinley, they are consequential figures in the history of blues performance, and illustrative of the entwinement of blues and theatre.

In Chapter Two, McGinley shifts attention to Huddie Ledbetter who is better known by his stage moniker "Lead Belly." Ledbetter was discovered by John Lomax on a song-hunting expedition to Southern prisons. At the time Ledbetter was a prisoner in the Louisiana State Penitentiary. After his release, Lomax presented him to audiences as an authentic exemplar of the blues, but in doing so ironically "staged" his protégé in ways that were incongruous with Ledbetter's persona and incompatible with his performance sensibilities. In time, this led to the dissolution of the two men's relationship; nonetheless, Ledbetter's capacity for reinvention enabled him to enjoy a lengthy genre-spanning career.

Chapter Three begins with a brief narrative of the end of Ledbetter's life and career, and establishes his seminal role as an *international* blues celebrity. This leads to a consideration of the staging of blues performances for international audiences that provides further reinforcement for McGinley's argument about the blues' inherent theatricality; but, otherwise, the chapter seems somewhat superfluous. The narrative mainly concerns the historic 1964 British broadcast of *The Blues and Gospel Train*, a revue of American blues notables, that does not add much to the arc of the argument, although it is an interesting story, engagingly told.

Chapter Four is a fascinating study of blues tourism that securely binds the argumentative threads woven throughout the book. It returns the reader to Clarksdale and Coahoma County, Mississippi, the site of Bessie Smith's tragic and untimely death, and the so-called birthplace of the blues. McGinley analyzes the blues tourism industry as a theatrical endeavor itself that stages a sanitized, voyeuristic presentation of blues history, without due consideration for the milieu of economic injustice and racial violence in which blues performers, indigenous and otherwise, labored and suffered. And, it, too, is a version of history in which the contributions of women blues performers continue to be discounted.

McGinley has written a commendable study of a unique American cultural form that provides a much needed corrective to blues history. It is a fine work of scholarship that will have greater appeal for academic than for casual readers.

--Greg A. Phelps

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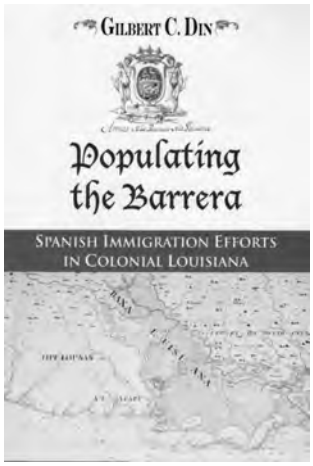
Populating the Barrera: Spanish Immigration Efforts in Colonial Louisiana. By Gilbert C. Din. (Lafayette, LA: University of Louisiana Lafayette Press, 2014. Pp. 177, bibliography, $20.00, paper)

Following the early explorations in North America, French, British, and Spanish empires raced for land grabbing. Policy makers soon understood that a claimed territory that remains unoccupied could be contested. Unable to populate its colony, France lost its colonial claim in North America at the end of the Great War for the Empire. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 divided the French territory of Louisiana between the British and Spanish empires. It signaled the be-



ginning of a new era for Louisiana's settlers west of the Mississippi River, under the Spanish rule, that ended at the turn of the century. Exploring the Spanish crown's control of the colony, *Populating the Barrera*, adds to a meager historiography on this short-lived chapter of colonial Louisiana's history. Gilbert Din traces the efforts of the colonial Spanish government officials' role in shaping the immigration policies designed to address the casi-empty colony from 1763 to 1800. Din assesses the different colonial administrations' efforts to increase colonial population. He is the first scholar to uncover and credit Governor Esteban Miró for his role in shaping governmental policies on populating the colony. In this work, Din also attempts to correct errors made by earlier historians and explain the reasons for the shift of Spain's policy over time as it endeavored to attract settlers to Louisiana and West Florida in the late eighteenth century.

The Spanish crown quickly began its efforts in populating the newly acquired territory to enable its colonial control. Din reveals Spain's efforts to enlarge Louisiana's inhabitants through the acquisition of Spaniards, Acadians, Canary Islanders, French Canadians, Irishmen, Germans, and even Americans as a crucial part in the colonization of Louisiana. The author argues that the Spanish efforts to increase the scarce population was aimed to create a *barrera* (barrier) to stop the Anglo-American aggressive encroachment on their North American possessions. In that regard, the Spaniards considered Louisiana as a buffer zone between the British Colonies (later the United States) and the more important Kingdom of New Spain (Mexico).

In fact, the colony was more of a costly burden to the Spanish Crown in as much as the colony produced almost nothing in revenue. The colony consumed significant quantities of money to provide gifts to the Natives to maintain peace in Louisiana. Additionally, for approximately twenty years, the Crown adapted several proposals and spent significant sums of money on the promotion of colonization and retention of Spanish or European Catholic immigrants. In addition to providing tools, guns, and ammunition, the government allotted the immigrants full rations for their first year of settlement and half rations for the second year. However, Din asserts that these efforts were scarcely productive and by the early 1780s, Spain accepted the impossibility of continuing to subsidize immigration in Louisiana. From 1785 to 1791, Governor Esteban Miró shifted Spain's immigration policy in an attempt to attract more settlers. Din believes that Miró was the "hidden inspiration" behind the Spanish policy that allowed American Protestants, who were traditionally excluded, to settle in Louisiana. His successor, the Baron de Carondelet, shifted the immigration policy again as he preferred Europeans to Americans. Under his administration, Carondelet adopted a defensive attitude towards the Anglo-Americans, who were no longer encouraged nor assisted if they immigrated into the province. Instead, the governor's policy emphasized securing a European Catholic population, which he considered to be best suited to the Spanish rule and monarchical government. In 1800, Spain was removed from the Mississippi Valley as the French recaptured their former colony, putting an end to the Spain's dilemma over immigration policies in colonial Louisiana.

Populating the Barrera serves as an umbrella that gathers Din's previously published articles on the subject of Spanish colonial Louisiana. While Din revised and updated his essays, because the articles were initially designed to stand alone, repetition appears in them occasionally. The articles are not pre-

sented in a strict chronology for the same reason. For instance, chapters one, three, four and six follow a chronological order as they trace the shifts in the colonial administrations. Meanwhile, chapters two, five, and seven explore certain aspects of Spain's immigration efforts. His very last article focuses on the hardship endured by the *Islenos* (Canary Islanders) in their first settlements in Spanish Louisiana during the second half of the eighteenth century.

Din provides a sophisticated and an extremely well-researched analysis as his language abilities enabled him to be among the first scholars to conduct a thorough research in several Spanish archives in Madrid and to access the treasures hidden in "*Papeles Procedentes de la Isla de Cuba*" collection in *Archivo General de Indias*, Seville. Taken separately or as a whole, Gilbert Din's academic essays provide scholars with a deeper understanding of Spanish colonial ambition in Louisiana. Din also introduces a general readership to a wide range of subjects including immigration, governmental policies, and race relations in eighteenth century Louisiana.

--Sonia Toudji

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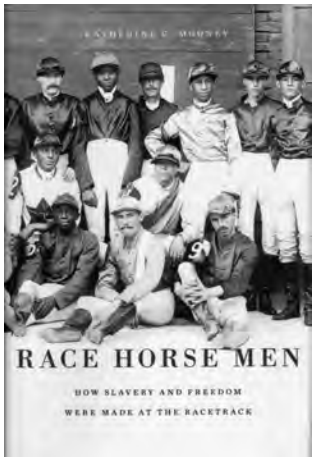
Race Horse Men: How Slavery and Freedom Were Made at the Racetrack. By Katherine C. Mooney. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014. Pp. 248, notes, acknowledgements, index. $35, hardcover)

In *Race Horse Men: How Slavery and Freedom Were Made at the Racetrack*, Katherine C. Mooney examines race, power, and privilege in nineteenth and early twentieth century America through the lens of Thoroughbred horseracing. For much of that time, Thoroughbred horseracing ranked as one of the most popular spectator sports in the United States. Especially fashionable in the South, the sport reflected the intricacies of the southern social order. Atop this hierarchy stood the turfmen, wealthy white planters who owned and bred the Thoroughbreds, upon which they wagered their fortunes and reputations. Their success depended largely on African-Americans, known as the "race horse men," who cared for, groomed, trained, and raced the horses. Largely the focus of the book, Mooney describes how the race horse men, who began as slaves, gained much success and acclaim as freedmen, only to be banished from the sport by Jim Crow.

African-American race horse men inherited their equine knowledge and skills from their African forbearers. By the seventeenth century, northern West African tribesmen prided themselves on their horsemanship. Skilled horsemen managed the stables of Yoruban and Hausan kings. Slaves themselves, the horsemen "were valued members of the royal household, supervisors of large staffs, and intimates of princes" (p. 7). Segregated from the slaves who performed physical stable work which personified the humiliation intrinsic to servitude, the privileged horsemen used their riding skills to pursue and capture slaves who attempted escape. In effect, the horseman made African slavery a complicated and contradictory establishment, in which knowledgeable and skilled slaves were played against those lacking such abilities to insure the permanency of human bondage.



Antebellum race horse men replicated the

world of their African counterparts. Highly valued and very expensive, slaves with equestrian experience enjoyed privileges unfamiliar to other slaves. They lived in separate quarters, they traveled to racetracks, they earned and kept money, they were consulted for their equine expertise, and they were entrusted with the maintenance of animals worth several thousands of dollars. Skilled jockeys won praise in the pages of the fledgling sporting press and established reputations throughout the region. Despite their advantages, the race horse men were first and foremost slaves, who lived in a world rooted in intimacy and hierarchy. Provided that the hierarchy remained undisturbed, intimacy across racial lines persisted as long as it remained mutually beneficial to master and slave. However, race horse men who displeased their owners could be sold or expelled to the fields.

In the world of Thoroughbred horseracing, antebellum turfmen saw an efficient slave system, which could possibly provide the foundation of an independent Southern nation. In the 1820s and 1830s, horseracing offered the promise of mobility to whites of lesser means, who hoped the purchase of race horses would improve their fortunes. In the 1840s and 1850s, Henry Clay's America System, epitomized by his Ashland, Kentucky, plantation, suggested a national interdependence supported by perfectly ordered slavery. In the 1860s, as sectional tensions made Southern sovereignty seem possibly inevitable, the plantation stable, managed and operated on a hierarchy of slave labor, provided the perfect social model, as long as the turfmen remained in control.

After the Civil War, race horse men experienced the possibilities and limits of emancipation. Most of them remained in the jobs they held as slaves, sometimes under their former owners. The turfmen pointed to their loyalty and respect for social and racial hierarchy to dispel white concerns of black freedom. Accepting the southern social order, wealthy northern businessman, financiers, and industrialists seized control of horseracing, and built magnificent racetracks in Saratoga, New York, and Monmouth, New Jersey. In their search for order, southern and northern turfmen established the American Jockey Club in 1867, which codified the rules of Thoroughbred horseracing, including one which stipulated that grooms, jockeys, and trainers must receive their employer's permission before switching to a new one. The rule, which undermined free labor, reflected the contract system that bound factory workers to employers, thereby nationalizing the intimacy and hierarchy of the southern plantation.

By the 1890s, African-American trainers and jockeys had risen to the top of their profession. Of the fifteen horses contesting the inaugural Kentucky Derby in 1875, twelve were ridden by black jockeys. The trainer, Ansel Williamson, and jockey, Oliver Lewis, of the winning horse, Aristides, were African-Americans. Black jockeys dominated the Kentucky Derby until 1902, when Jimmy Winkfield became the last African-American to win the race. Isaac Murphy won the race three times in 1884, 1890, and 1892, the most by a single jockey until 1948. Thoroughbred horseracing's most successful jockey, Murphy won 628 of 1,412 races; his winning ratio of 44% has yet to be matched. Lionized by sports writers and the African-American press, Murphy and other black jockeys became heroes and examples of success for the black community.

In the late 1890s and early 1900s, northern and southern turfmen systematically removed the race horse men from Thoroughbred horseracing. Northern whites, in particular, could not tolerate the success of African-American jockeys, since their achievements inspired and instilled confidence in the expanding population of blacks throughout the north. Influenced by the Social Darwinian thought of William Graham Sumner, white supremacists extended concepts of Thoroughbred breeding to people, developing racial theories grounded in pseudo-science. The turfmen, who owned the farms where the race horse men bred,

trained, managed, and rode the horses, strongly endorsed the "scientific" racial hierarchy. Casting decades of experience aside, the Jockey Club licensed fewer and fewer black jockeys, declaring them unfit to race. The increasing number of white jockeys refused to compete against blacks and often intimidated them on and off the track. Within a generation, the race horse men disappeared from the sport.

"Less an attempt to answer a set of analytical questions about historical cause and effect," *Race Horse Men*, Mooney writes, is "a portrait that seeks to reveal some complex and difficult realities in the lives of people in the past" (p. 3). In achieving so, the book is a solid contribution to the history of sport and race in America.

--Adam R. Hornbuckle

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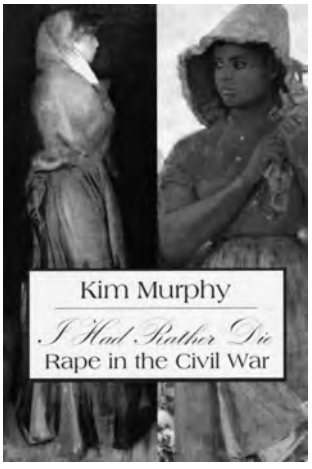
I Had Rather Die: Rape in the Civil War. By Kim Murphy. (Batesville, VA: Coachlight Press, 2014. Pp. vi–vii + 130, notes, bibliography, index. $14.95, paperback)

With the publication of Margaret Mitchell's sweeping saga *Gone with the Wind*, the romantic idealism of the Civil War burst forth in full bloom, all but sweeping aside the true horror that was the war between North and South. Kim Murphy, in *I Had Rather Die*, comes forth without bias and promptly breaks down the dreamlike, idealistic realm that the Civil War has all but been relegated to.

Using meticulous research, Murphy has scoured through old articles and letters and prison reports from the Civil War to weave together a horrifying documentary that will leave her readers cringing in repulsion. The subject is one that none before her have addressed so brutally and honestly: rape. Beginning with the early 1600s when laws against rape first began to come to the court systems, Murphy takes her readers through the years to the Civil War, giving account of how violence against women was taken with such disregard and inconsideration.

The women whose stories are documented in this book will leave you reeling at the injustice of a racially divided time when black women were seen as nothing more than property and white women, with very few exceptions, were seen as the bearers of blame for the atrocities committed against them. Murphy fills the pages with documented and historical reports, setting aside her own feelings on the matter and instead giving her readers a true and accurate accounting of crimes that were committed but very often ignored and have, even today, been largely ignored as an important part of Civil War history.

This book is, at times, difficult to read, and even Murphy herself expressed her angst in writing it: "More than once, I wanted to throw the manuscript in the trash. The women's stories that follow are not only difficult to read, but heartbreaking in many instances. When I thought of giving up, their voices haunted me" (p. 5). Yet it is a book that should be read by any and all who wish to know the true depths of the Civil War. Murphy goes to places that few talk about and even fewer have heard of.



It is a travesty that so many women suffered such brutal rapes and treatment, that very few fought for them to find a sense of justice, and that so many cases have never been documented but left to die with their victims. *I Had*

Rather Die brings these women's stories to life. Murphy, with her research and her straightforward documentation, has done something that many of the women of the stories could never do: she has brought the horrors enacted against them to light and she has given them the voices they did not have when they were alive.

Not only bringing light to the atrocities committed by soldiers against women during the Civil War, Murphy also brings to the front the injustice with which sentencing was carried out during this time. Women had to prove beyond doubt that they had done everything possible to fight off their rapists. Over half the men sentenced were black, and they were sentenced to death while the rapists who were white were, more often than not, given lenient punishments. Black women were property and as such were, the majority of the time, unable to accuse their attacker(s) and see justice done. White women, unless they were of wealthy and influential families, were seen as temptresses and accomplices in the crime. Female children as young as ten years were raped, and heads were turned the other way. "During the Civil War era, even a ten-year old girl could have been viewed as partly responsible for tempting men" (p. 129). Often times the crimes were brushed off as nothing more than propaganda with which to terrify women.

I Had Rather Die is compelling and heartbreaking but enlightening and necessary. Murphy does not discriminate against race or sex. She provides facts and leaves it to the reader to discern between justice and injustice. For lovers of true history and the ones who want to know the parts of history that are often considered too taboo to speak of, this is one book that comes highly recommended.

--Brook Biggs

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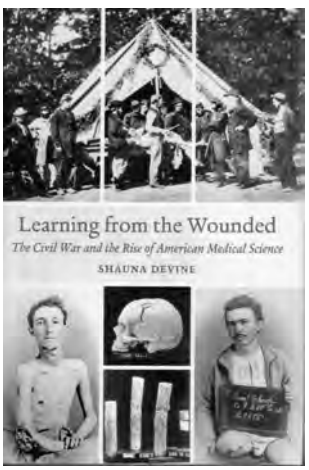
Learning from the Wounded: The Civil War and the Rise of American Medical Science. Shauna Devine. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014. Pp. ix–x + 272, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. $31.50, hardcover)

While it is unclear today exactly how many deaths occurred during the American Civil War, current research points to approximately 750,000 lives of soldiers lost as a direct result of the conflict. When contrasted with the current population in the United States, a loss of 7.5 million lives would have the equivalent impact today.



More shocking than the number of dead is the fact that roughly two-thirds of the men losing their lives died not from injuries suffered in combat but rather from disease. Many of these men died from preventable diseases that now appear only in the United States as mild childhood illnesses or in third-world countries due to a lack of effective sanitation. Ranging from measles and pneumonia to dysentery and typhoid fever, many diseases ravaged units before they ever entered combat. Even successfully surviving an encounter with the enemy did not mean that men escaped the ravages of illnesses that swept camps, especially if one received a wound.

Much of the blame for these diseases and their impact on the war effort can be placed on the officers in charge of medical efforts for the army. The prewar medical establishment had few regulations and required even less training, allowing many unqualified individuals to prac-

tice medicine. While field commanders should receive some of the blame for ineffective leadership contributing to terrible sanitation conditions, untrained and inexperienced doctors also negatively impacted the disease rates, especially early in the war.

Shauna Devine's new work *Learning from the Wounded: The Civil War and the Rise of American Medical Science* traces how these doctors created a new field of medical professionals to handle the overwhelming number of cases created by the war. Using a variety of methods, including autopsies, case studies, and the collection of specimens, the lessons learned reached the active surgeons in the field who quickly put them to good use.

The massive number of battle casualties and the large number of patients suffering from any number of diseases that passed through northern military camps provided doctors ample training and research opportunities. The lessons learned during the war were put to good use and provided a base for post-war medical training and research. New treatments for cholera, as well as preventative measures, were utilized immediately after the end of hostilities, with great effect.

Dispersed through the text are photographs of patients taken during or after their treatment using the methods being developed. Not for the faint of heart, these illustrations graphically display the scope of the injuries that men suffered in battle when struck by large, slow moving lead projectiles and the difficulty that surgeons faced when treating these wounds. Graphic descriptions of medical procedures and the sometimes gruesome outcomes that followed these operations are also included in the text.

The detailed index, extensive notes, and expansive bibliography all help readers use the work and will prove to be useful to researchers. The only drawback to the title is the lack of information about Confederate medical efforts. While Devine is upfront about the Union focus of this work, hopefully she will continue the work begun here and create a similar title that details military medicine in the South during the war.

An extremely detailed and well-researched title, *Learning from the Wounded* would be a great addition to the collection of any historian interested in the evolution of medical care, especially in a military setting. It would be less useful to anyone who has only a casual interest in the Civil War or those researchers who do not focus on Union war efforts.

A welcome addition to the field of Civil War medical books, Devine's work will soon be a staple for anyone doing serious research in the field.

--David Sesser

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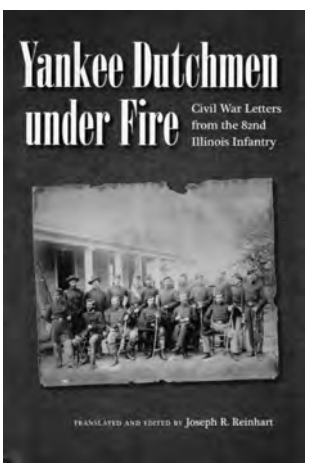
Yankee Dutchmen Under Fire: Civil War Letters from the 82nd Illinois Infantry. Trans. and ed. by Joseph R. Reinhart. (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2013. Pp. ix–xii + 193, epilogue, notes, bibliographic essay, index. $31.66, hardcover)



With *Yankee Dutchmen Under Fire: Civil War Letters from the 82nd Illinois Infantry*, Joseph R. Reihnart adds to his already impressive list of collections of Civil War missives from German immigrants fighting for the Union, giving further voice to and insight into an understudied but significant element of the forces who served the United States during

its greatest crisis. The book contains a total of fifty-nine letters, thirty of which were published in newspapers (which Reinhart classifies as "public" letters) and twenty-nine "private" letters, most written by five officers in the regiment and many of which were translated by the author. As can be expected, the "private" letters tend to be more frankly opinionated and offer insights into the interpersonal dynamics within the regiment—which were not, to say the least, harmonious.

The 82nd Illinois was the second unit from that state recruited by Col. Friedrich Hecker, a veteran of the German revolutions of 1848–49 who had come to America following their failure. Nine of its companies were composed of Germans (Company I, consisting of Scandinavian immigrants, joined the regiment later), and one, Company C, was recruited from Chicago's Jewish community, making the 82nd "one of only two regiments in the entire Union army containing a company of Jews" (p. 2). The regiment fought at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg before transferring west to serve in the Atlanta Campaign and in Sherman's March to the Sea and fighting in the closing battles in the Carolinas. The 82nd Illinois Infantry, which had 850 men when it mustered in, would lose 102 men in combat and 60 to disease during the course of the war. Only about 30 percent of those who mustered in with the regiment in 1862 were still there to muster out in 1865, with many having left service because of sickness or wounds, or by desertion.

The letters reflect the issues that the 82nd faced as a primarily German outfit that had to deal with the prejudice of nativist Americans, such as an episode in the training camp at Camp Butler, Illinois, when a newly arrived regiment confronted Hecker's troops, its colonel cursing the officer of the day as a "good d—d saucy dutch son of a b—" before placing the entire 82nd under arrest (pp. 31-2). Nor was the regiment immune to internal dissent: a pair of letters describe a kerfuffle when a German was appointed second in command of the Scandinavian company, which led its captain to write Illinois Governor Richard Yates for relief, contending that it was "necessary for anny [sic] officers in this comp. to [k]now the Scandinavian language because two-thirds can't speak English and hardly none German" (p. 65). Other letters deal with cultural issues that were largely unique to German units, such as a September 2, 1862, plea to "Send beer in special trains, much beer, and your name shall be emblazoned in golden letters in the memories of our soldiers, and a Te Deum would ascend to the heavens after receipt of the barley juice" (pp. 36–37).

Many of the letters describe the battles in which the 82nd Illinois fought, including the one at Chancellorsville, Virginia, in which the Union's heavily German 11th Corps was surprised and driven back by Confederates under General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson. Friedrich P. Kappelmann described the battlefield to his parents: "The wounded were lying around everywhere and the dead of both sides were lying like cut glass [sic], one without a head, another one with both legs gone, the entrails were hanging out of another man, still another without his arms. The bullets were flying like during a hailstorm" (pp. 77–78). Editor Reinhart convincingly refutes the accusations made after Chancellorsville that the Germans in the 11th Corps were responsible for that battle's disastrous results, and the butcher's bill for the 82nd reflect the regiment's hard fighting: Hecker's troops lost 155 men killed, wounded and missing, the second highest regimental loss in their division. As one anonymous soldier of the 82nd Illinois wrote in a letter to the Illinois Staats-Zeitung, "Our regiment conducted itself well, better than most others. What we lacked was only a general" (p. 74).

Rudolph Müller, an officer and close friend and confidant (and future son-in-law) of Hecker, wrote twenty-one of the letters and they provide windows into the internal dynamics of the 82nd Illinois. Müller was frequently catty in his remarks about other officers in the 82nd in letters he wrote to Hecker after the lat-

ter had left the regiment. He was particularly disdainful of the Jewish officers in the 82nd Illinois, especially Lt. Col. Edward S. Salmon, whom he called "the Creole from Jerusalem" (p. 113) and "the popularity-seeking blister" (p. 162); in a letter from Atlanta in 1864 he complained "You should see what goes on here—just like a synagogue" (p. 154). Müller does provide excellent accounts of the 82nd's battles and marches, and gives praise—sometimes begrudgingly—to his fellow officers when they deserve it.

Reinhart does a good job of providing context for the periods of the war in which the letters were written, and his endnotes flesh out the narrative nicely. He also includes an epilogue in which he tells what happened to the letter writers later in life, including one man who had a habit of marrying and starting families without divorcing his previous wives, which caused many problems for the latter when they later sought military pensions. My main complaint with Reinhart's editing is his frequent and not always necessary insertion of bracketed corrections such as Reb[el] (p. 134) and Art.[illery] (p. 135), which are clear in the context of the letter in which they appear, and repeating "Chattahoochie [Chattahoochee]" three times in two paragraphs (pp. 144–45). These insertions detract significantly from the narrative flow of the letters.

With those few concerns aside, Joseph Reinhart does a fine job in arranging and interpreting the letters of German-born soldiers in a regiment that saw action in some of the major campaigns in two theaters, and this book is a must-read for both avocational and professional Civil War historians. I will close by agreeing completely with Reinhart's conclusion to *Yankee Dutchmen Under Fire*: "The dearth of published information about the motives, opinions, and combat and other experiences of members of the largest ethnic group in the Union army is regrettable and deserves much more attention from historians and other scholars. The task will not be easy. . . . Regardless, the fruits of such efforts would be immeasurable" (p. 202).

--Mark K. Christ

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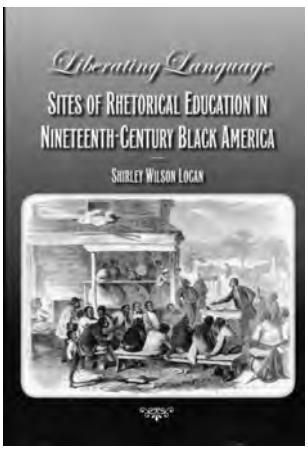
Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America. By Shirley Wilson Logan. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2008. Pp. xi + 134, notes, bibliography, index. $32.68, paperback)

At least once a semester, a graduate student in either my rhetorical theory or composition theory course will ask, "Where are the African-Americans in the history of rhetoric?" Because many of the textbooks on the history of rhetoric either have a very small sampling or a limited consideration of the contributions to rhetoric by African-Americans, I often point out resources that can help "fill in the gaps" in the history of American rhetoric. I now have a new valuable resource for my students.



Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America by Shirley Wilson Logan is that new resource. Dr. Logan's study presents an overview of "the rhetorical activities that African Americans pursued across the nineteenth century . . . how people learned rhetoric as they lived their lives" (p. 132). Logan seeks to answer the question, "Where did nineteenth-century black rhetors learn to speak so effectively?" In order

to answer that question, she explores rhetorical education outside the classroom, and shows how the constraints imposed by racial discrimination and segregation actually created opportunities for blacks to learn the art of rhetoric as an effective communication, social, and political tool.

Professor Logan first explores what she terms "free floating" literacies—sites of rhetorical education utilized by black Union soldiers on the battlefield, in the lessons of the pulpit, and in the industrial workplace. These examples help to illustrate how scholars must consider nontraditional educational spaces to better understand how people gain literacy and rhetorical skills. In the second section of the book, Logan traces the role of self-education for African-Americans in the nineteenth century. Logan effectively analyzes the implications for rhetorical education found in the diaries of such rhetors as Charlotte Forten Grimké, Ida B. Wells, and Charles W. Chesnutt to illustrate how a desire for self-improvement and broader racial empowerment contributed to rhetorical training. Logan then continues her examination by exploring the roles that literary societies and the Black Press played in the education of black rhetors.

What makes *Liberating Language* so engaging is Logan's reliance on the words and experiences of many of the great black rhetors of the time as primary sources. Not only do her examples help to support her argument about the value of rhetorical education, but reading the works of these individuals brings the power and skill of their rhetoric to life for the modern reader.

Liberating Language is a well-researched, engaging, and exciting look at a part of rhetorical history that has not gotten the attention it deserves. This book will find appreciative audiences in many corners of academia and with the general reading public. Logan's work enhances our understanding of history by uncovering hidden notions of literacy while also placing these activities within the context of the prevailing rhetorical theories of the era. It clearly shows how even though black rhetors were separated from their white counterparts, they were also very aware of the history and developments of rhetoric during their time. For rhetoricians and scholars of rhetorical theory and history, Logan has given us a text that adds richness and diversity to the study of nineteenth century western rhetoric. It is a welcome addition and a complement to any discussion of the western rhetorical tradition. Logan's text is also an excellent starting point for further research into the educational systems of the time and also into important figures, rhetors and rhetorical works of African-Americans during an important period in our nation's history.

Lastly, even though Logan's work is concerned with rhetorical education of the past, I could not help but to see implications and applications for the present and future of black rhetorical education and literacy. In her conclusion Logan writes: "the most effective rhetorical education seemed to occur in sites when the exigence created a heightened need to communicate, when there was collective effort among a broad range of people, and when there was an element of pleasure and gratification in the process" (p. 134). Present-day scholars of rhetoric and composition must remember that literacy is defined in many ways, including non-academic and nontraditional forms. Our students come to us with valuable literacies and rhetorical skills they have developed in their homes, in their communities, in their work, and in their play. The academy doesn't have exclusive rights as a site of rhetorical education. *Liberating Language* reminds us of that fact and encourages the idea of freeing ourselves to bring those other literacies and rhetorics into the classroom. It is a book I enjoyed reading and one I will enjoy introducing to my students of rhetoric and composition.

--Earnest L. Cox

Educating The New Southern Woman: Speech, Writing, and Race at the Public Women's Colleges, 1884–1945. By David Gold and Catherine L. Hobbs. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2014). Pp. 188, bibliography and index. $40.00, paper)

In *Educating The New Southern Woman: Speech, Writing, and Race at the Public Women's Colleges, 1884-1945*, David Gold and Catherine L. Hobbs's archival history project portrays a detailed, rich, and complex narrative of southern women's education during the post-Civil War era through the conclusion of WWII. While previous scholarship has focused on northern women's higher education in America, Gold and Hobbs's decision to investigate southern women's education expands contemporary understandings of female education "while avoiding the romanticism, presentism, and simple binaries that sometimes characterize representations of the South" (p. 13).

The book focuses on eight southern public colleges originally founded for white women: Alabama College for Women (now University of Montevallo), Florida State College for Women (now Florida State University), Georgia State College for Women (now Georgia College and State University), Mississippi State College for Women (now Mississippi University for Women), North Carolina College for Women (now the University of North Carolina at Greensboro), Oklahoma College for Women (now the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma), Texas State College for Women (now Texas Woman's University), and Winthrop College (now Winthrop University). To be noted, today, all eight colleges have become co-educational.

During the period of 1884-1945, these eight schools serve as an enlightening and historically important institutional artifact illuminating larger national trends, "including the shift from an agrarian society to an industrial one; the land-grant impetus and the democratization of education," to name a few (p. 3). These trends provide additional insight into the modernization of the South and its negotiations amongst a "socially diverse constituency" (p. 3). Each chapter in the book highlights the shifting histories southern education grappled with throughout the South's economic, social, and political evolution.

Chapter one articulates the impetus for southern states establishing public women's colleges. All eight southern colleges shared explicit intentions "to train [female] students for both domestic and professional spheres" and were founded to serve women of modest economic means, an important distinction from private, expensive, and often-elite northern all-female institutions (p. 22). Gold and Hobbs note the rhetorical strategies of faculty and administrators at these colleges who continually negotiated between "the [liberal] purposes of education and the proper public and professional roles of women," the latter of which were frequently upheld by legislators, parents and populaces (p. 27). With these tensions apparent, the authors find that "southern public women's colleges both made use of and reacted against traditional tropes of femininity as they negotiated a place for themselves and their students in the emerging new South" (p. 8).

Both chapters two and three focus on the explicit educational instruction women re-

ceived at these eight southern colleges. The role of writing instruction is examined in chapter two. While teaching traditional notions of writing, such as correctness in expression, instructors also advocated "a social view of writing," encouraging public and contemporary forms of writing (p. 36). Chapter three examines oratorical education and elocutionary rhetorics. Similar to instructor encouragement to pursue social aspects of writing, instruction in public speaking "helped women learn to present themselves in public and became a solid foundation for graduates who entered careers or engaged in civic activities requiring public speech" (p. 9). Interestingly, Gold and Hobbs note the rhetorical evolution of public speaking. While spoken rhetoric was traditionally viewed as a male skill, especially in the era of Aristotle, the focus on elocution at southern women's public institutions shifted assumptions of rhetoric's use and began to associate public speaking as a more feminine skill.

Chapter four examines the professional training women received at these southern colleges as well as the ways rhetoric and writing influenced women's career decisions. Writing and speaking were traits important not just for preparing future teachers, but rhetorical skills were also necessary for success in home economics and business. Many southern women receiving degrees in home economics went on to work as extension agents creating and distributing information on products for farmers. These southern colleges and their vocational missions continued to impact women's professionalization during this era.

Chapter five addresses the role, or rather, the absence of a racial presence at these colleges. The authors stress a historical understanding of the absence of race at these institutions, reminding the reader "these schools . . . were [originally] established as both separatist and segregated institutions for white women" (p. 10). And while there is evidence of these female students adopting a "Lost Cause" rhetoric, Gold and Hobbs's analysis of their writing reveals a level of complexity to attitudes of race at these colleges. To be sure, student attitudes towards race did not remain stagnant (p. 124). While their writing reveals a level of romanticism in an antebellum past and the privileges of a plantation lifestyle, evidence in their writing also points to a layer of critique against such romanticism, particularly pointing to the lack of economic, political and social mobility for women during such times. The authors are quick to assert that such evidence does not erode the racism that clearly did exist at these colleges. Most important is that this chapter calls on future scholarship to further complicate the relationship between race and female education, pushing for "a more complicated picture of white women's education history than has been previously acknowledged" (p. 131).

As the book concludes, Gold and Hobbs reflect on the legacy of the public women's colleges. In their reflection, the authors find particular connections between the role of administrators and their potential impact on the role of rhetorical education at institutions. Pondering the significance of administrative work and rhetorical studies, Gold and Hobbs leave the reader with a series of questions, found on pages 139–40. It is by ending with these questions that readers are left to continue future scholarship on the intersections of rhetoric, archival history, and education.

--Maria Novotny

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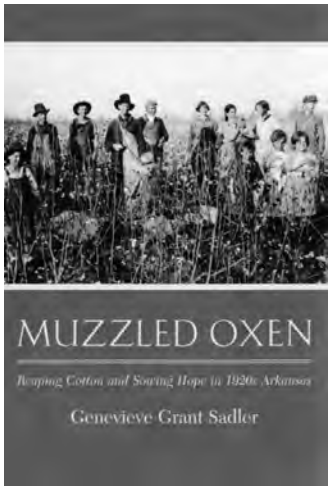
Muzzled Oxen: Reaping Cotton and Sowing Hope in 1920s Arkansas. By Genevieve Grant Sadler. (Little Rock: Butler Center Books, 2014, Pp. 358. $23.95, paperback)

A compilation of letters written by

Genevieve Grant Sadler and edited for publication by her son Gareth Wayne Sadler, this work offers a vision of Arkansas rural life from 1920 to 1927. Genevieve Sadler, a California girl, married Wayne Sadler whose family had deep roots in the rich soil of Arkansas's cotton-growing river bottoms. The Sadler family had moved to Santa Cruz, California, in the early 1900s leaving their farmlands in Arkansas to the oversight of several tenant farming families. In 1920, fearing the property was being neglected, the Sadler family made a six week automobile journey back to Arkansas. Wayne, Genevieve, their two young sons (Jimmy and Donnie), Wayne's mother (Nancy Sadler) and his brother (Henry) were returning to resume a rural farming life at Sadler's Bend near the banks of the Petit Jean River in northwestern Conway County, a life for which Genevieve and her two sons had almost no knowledge.

For the next seven years as she struggled to meet her life's new challenges, Sadler's numerous letters written to her mother in California chronicled her experiences, views, and reactions to rural life in 1920s Arkansas. As such, these letters offer a useful but somewhat subjective "outsider's" view of a wide range of the realities of the meager existence of tenant farmers and sharecroppers and an equally subjective portrait of the lives of landowners and those living in nearby towns. All of this makes for a fascinating read, but lacks the contextual basis and thoroughness of understanding to render this work a suitable analytical, historical study. Nonetheless, if the reader accepts its monotone view and its rather one-sided understanding of its subject, this work offers powerful insights.

Sadler's letters reveal her initial shock as she encountered Southern rural culture. First, she was amazed by the close connection people had to their family heritage and their veneration of past generations. Then, she was truly caught off guard by the lack of cleanliness and the constancy of dust and dirt in the towns, the houses of rural residents, and with the people. Her shock continued as she first met the family farm's overseer and his wife and viewed their home. Shabby, rundown, poorly outfitted with little furniture, and surrounded by various discarded bits and pieces of yard trash, Sadler struggled to maintain a polite posturing while seeking privately to understand why people lived in these conditions. Referring to herself as a "rebellious, homesick woman, my eyes seeing little good in anything around me," Sadler was "surprised to find that I was beginning to feel eager . . . even willing to put my shoulder to the wheel in helping Wayne to have a good trial at his heart's desire, farming here in Dixie"(p. 73). She cleaned and refurbished their small house, planted a large garden, canned food for winter use, read to and taught her sons, and began to visit with other women seeking to understand their lives and how they coped with crushing poverty and its ramifications.



Even as Sadler began to settle into her new life, the book continued to register her horrified reactions to the poor diet of the tenant farmers, their lack of proper medical care, their birthing and death practices, the dreadful state of their country schools, and their relationship to their mules, horses, and farm stock. Her writings also speak of the lives of African-Americans, country church socials, camp meetings, singings, and everyone's omnipresent interest in and concern over the price of cotton and weather conditions.

The descriptions of the individuals she observed are perhaps the most thoroughly honest portions of the work, especially her firsthand view of 1920s rural tenant farmers. "They were thin and sunken-eyed . . . looked tired, and they

were tired, showing a lassitude in their every movement. When they walked they slouched. . . . Even their drawling voices, so slow and easy, were also the outcome of general debility" (p. 350). Sadler continued, saying that she was tired of "the expressionless faces, the twisted mouths turned down at the corners, indicating a seeming soul-sadness that enveloped both mind and body" (p. 351). This work also offers significant insights into the lives of poor rural women during the 1920s, and the careful reader is able to discern some of the reasons for the gender disparity that was particularly prevalent in rural areas. "I saw Lidy Cowder standing there in the door with seven children in sight. All the children looked half-starved. . . . Lidy seemed like an old woman now. Her hair hung in strings around her face. Her clothes were torn and her feet were still bare. . . . Yes, Lidy had lived, to have another baby each year" (p. 354).

The only part of this work that seems unnecessary appears in the first chapter and details the Sadler family's month long stay on Mt. Nebo near the town of Dardanelle immediately after they arrived in Arkansas. While offering an insight into Genevieve Sadler's unrealistic understanding of her new location and a few interesting perspectives on Mt. Nebo social life in 1920, this chapter has nothing to do with the Sadler's rural farming experiences. The book would have been stronger and organizationally more tightly developed had this long portion in the first chapter been omitted.

While presenting a useful, earnestly written first-hand vision of 1920s Arkansas rural life, this book is incomplete and un-objective, as the title itself indicates, as it compares poor farm laborers to muzzled oxen. Although it begs for additional factual information to counterbalance its romanticized view of a highly complex, multi-layered subject, nonetheless this book offers the general reader a highly comprehensible work capable of rendering great enjoyment.

--Mildred Diane Gleason

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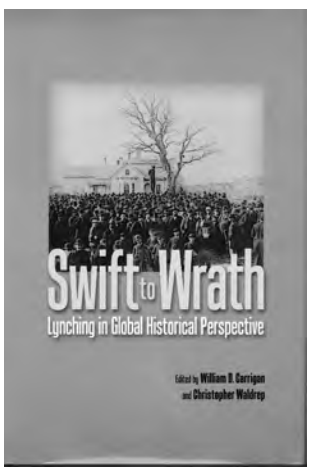
Swift to Wrath: Lynching in the Global Historical Context. Ed. by William D. Carrigan and Christopher Waldrep. (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2013. Pp. 236, contributors, index. $39.50, cloth)

On January 26, 1921, tenant farmer Henry Lowery was brutally murdered on a plantation in rural Mississippi County, Arkansas, having been chained to a log and slowly, sadistically roasted in front of a crowd of about 500 people, including his wife and children. Reports on the lynching circulated widely in the United States, not surprising given the attempt by many in Congress to pass an anti-lynching bill, but the Lowery lynching was also covered by newspapers as far away as Japan—and this at a time when news distribution was more challenging than at present and when there was no shortage of comparable cases of violence in the aftermath of the Great War. However, as the contributors to *Swift to Wrath* reveal, there were reasons aplenty for the world to take an interest in American lynching.

First off, there have been analogues to American-style "rough justice" across the globe and through the ages. The first half of *Swift to Wrath* examines "lynching" as manifest outside the United States, starting with the ancient Near East, where, according to Scott Morschauser, xenophobia and violence were closely



related and where "retribution for a crime by the injured individuals or groups rather than by the state was sometimes sanctioned" (pp. 25–26). Brian P. Levack tackles the persecution of suspected witches from the sixteenth century to the present day, finding that anti-witch violence, "just like the lynching of African Americans, has been inspired by the perceived threat represented by subordinate and marginalized segments of the population" (p. 64). William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb explore the many reasons that lynching declined in New Mexico, particular the role of official complaints from the Mexican government, while Joël Michel and Rachel Monaghan explore analogues to lynching in France and Northern Ireland, respectively. In each contribution, the authors are careful to avoid one of the pitfalls discussed in the introduction: "Using the word lynching to describe mob violence can obscure historical context, even imply that neither time not geography matters by suggesting that there is a universal human behavior that can be objectively understood outside time and space" (p. 7).

The second half of this volume examines how American lynching, especially its most virulent anti-black manifestations, was interpreted by an international audience. First, Robert Zecker sifts through Slovak-language newspapers and finds that reports of lynching were often presented to immigrants with little sympathy for the victims, for "these accounts invariably characterized black self-defense itself as illegitimate" (p. 143). British public debates on lynching, as revealed by Sarah L. Silkey, ranged from an abhorrence of mob violence that allowed the British to cast themselves as more morally and culturally sophisticated, to a romantic view of the American West and its need for swift justice; moreover, the Tory Party, during the early 1800s, "cultivated middle-class anxieties about the potential spread of American lawlessness to England in an attempt to rally opposition to further proposed British democratic reforms" (p. 164). Fumiko Sakashita uses the January 25, 1942, lynching of Cleo Wright in Sikeston, Missouri, as a launching pad for her broader investigation of both how the Japanese used American lynching as a propaganda tool and how African-Americans' views of Japan developed before and during World War II; most notably, Japan "intentionally employed racial themes particularly targeting African Americans to justify Japan's war to liberate the colored races from Western colonialism. Nothing served this purpose better than lynching" (pp. 195–96). Closing out the volume is Meredith L. Roman's chapter on the Soviet uses of lynching, illustrating how, before the rise of Nazi Germany, anti-black violence in America was viewed as the most defining feature of Western capitalism.

For many readers, the first half of *Swift to Wrath* might seem to struggle a bit with its attempt to present analogues to lynching from other places and time—the comparisons never seem quite apt, occasionally bleeding over into the realms of feuds, vendettas, or terrorism. (Of course, lynching could entail all three of those—and was certainly a form of terrorism.) But this may be a function of the rhetorical power of the word "lynching" and the images it automatically calls to mind. Jens Meierhenrich, in *Genocide: A Reader* (2014), called upon scholars to study forms of violence related to genocide so as to have a better sense of the broader spectrum of atrocity, in part to be able to evaluate ostensibly marginal cases in a more informed manner, and scholars of lynching might likewise take such advice and work to understand lynching not as a defined category but a spectrum of violence. In this respect, the first half of the book functions quite well, though the second part probably proves more relevant to the Mississippi Delta region—after all, there was a significant Slovak community in Prairie County, Arkansas, and Kenneth Barnes published an article in the Autumn 2010 issue of the *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* on the subject of black Arkansans seeking inspiration from Japan before World War II. That said,

both halves of *Swift to Wrath* work to expand the context in which we consider American racialized violence. How might our own perceptions change if we understand these mobs acting on a global stage and within the broader context of human history?

--Guy Lancaster

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Trouble in Goshen: Plain Folk, Roosevelt, Jesus, and Marx in the Great Depression South. By Fred C. Smith. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2014. Pp. vii–xi + 146, notes, bibliography, index, $60, hardcover)

> The impalpable sustenance of me from all things, at all hours of the day; . . .
> The similitudes of the past, and those of the future
> The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearings—on the walk in the Street, and the passage over the river;
> The current rushing so swiftly, and swimming with me far away;
> The others that are to follow me, the ties between me and them;
> The certainty of others—the life, love, sight, hearing of others
>
> Walt Whitman, an excerpt from *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*

Whitman's poem about the individual augmented by the crowd, his imagination of how the past shapes and connects us to the present and future—and, tellingly, all set on an elemental river—has always expressed for me the core reason to study history. Clinical study of history will not lead to avoiding mistakes in quite the way George Santayana famously quipped. But if one pays careful, cultivated attention, exploring the past in richness of context might attune us to our need for others and for our places, and do so in ways that might help us sense or limn rupture, and thereby situate us to face the future together, in strength, and with emotional bonds renewed.

Reading Fred C. Smith's *Trouble in Goshen: Plain Folk, Roosevelt, Jesus, and Marx in the Great Depression South* made me think of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" because Smith's emotional connection to the "plain folk" of the Mississippi Delta is manifested on each and every page, just as Whitman's was on display so long ago. Smith's textured and detailed book, written largely from sifting through the paper-trail gumbo that are public-records archives preserved from America's bureaucratic expansion in the 1930s, will not allow the reader to lose sight of the importance of reestablishing human, affective connection with the people of the Delta whose names we have never known but who are as elemental to our very selves as the river itself has been. Professor Smith might well say that the possibility of those in our region of the nation replenishing our moral community depends upon breathing life back into these threads of historical connection. If so, I would agree.

"Goshen," of course, is an Old Testament reference to a fertile swath of the Nile Delta reserved for Joseph's people by God, where the chosen Israelites could ride out the famine years afflicting Egypt protected from poverty. Goshen, then, is an apt metaphor for the central subjects of Smith's history, which are three planned communities conceived and developed to help the struggling chosen of our own Delta

persist in the midst of the famine-like Great Depression. The fact that the Tupelo Homesteads in Tupelo, Mississippi, the Dyess Colony in eastern Arkansas, and the Delta Cooperative Farm of Bolivar County, Mississippi, did not work like the original Goshen evidently did does not lessen the impact of the metaphor, for Smith's goal is not to stretch that metaphor to contortion but to help us recapture the sense of peril then facing our chosen people and to appreciate the sense of promise these three social experiments held for those who had lost almost everything but their dignity.

The thesis of *Trouble in Goshen* is that through the Depression, and as the plain folk (an admittedly elusive term to define both with respect to class and to race) encountered Roosevelt, clung to Jesus, or were introduced to Marx, these common women and men became akin to the heroic, maintaining their diminishing social status and self-respect even as their Goshens collapsed in the bureaucratic infighting born so often of scarce resources captured by venal politicians. The operative motif throughout is that figures like Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, or Carl E. Bailey, Governor of Arkansas, or the Christian Socialists who resisted necessary critiques of American exceptionalism—wittingly or not—undermined the democratic actions and blunted the common-sense voices of the plain folk who deserved better than they got and who should have been given more control over their lives and livelihoods. Tragedy there was, but the human spirit overcame.

There is not space here to recount the details that are the backbone of this fine, yeoman's work of history. Comparing and contrasting two state-planned communities (Tupelo and Dyess), and one undertaken as a modern socialist experiment (Delta Cooperative Farm), must not have been easy because the structure of the project introduces a rather vast thematic array. But, given the book's thesis and motifs, if two wishes about Smith's book could be granted me, they would be first, that greater appreciation be given to the implications that derived directly from the seriousness of the global crisis in a maturing capitalist order that was the Depression. For instance, even the leaders whose actions can and should be criticized were working in situations that were dire and very likely inexpressibly constrained the concern they could afford to give to these Delta Goshens (a point that is particularly pointed toward Smith's reading of Harold Ickes, who was a remarkable figure in American history). Second, I would have liked to have gotten to know better the plain folk who are the reason for this history, but the voices of these men and women sometimes get drowned out in the details and disagreements in Smith's history, even as they once did in their historical moment. Clearly, introducing this particular irony is not Smith's intention, and the state of the archives combined with scarce academic resources, in all likelihood, make a social-historical wish-list like I offer here enormously difficult. But, as we move toward the future, let me just observe that the social history of the Delta region is a fascinating subject and worth additional study.

That said, *Trouble in Goshen* remains a spirited defense of the dignity and place of common women and men in our lives, cultures, and histories. Any reader who is interested in making a connection to the rhythms of life in this rich and tragic region of the South will not just benefit from this book, they might find they need it or, perhaps, come to see in this history a similitude that might contribute to the impalpable sustenance of their own historicized selves and communities.

--Scott Lien

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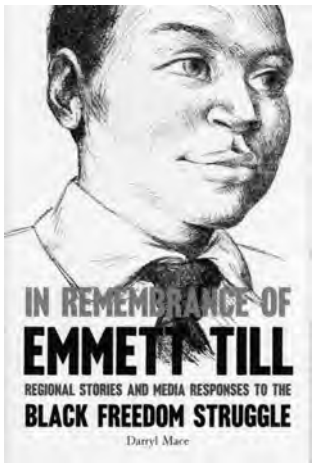
***In Remembrance of Emmett Till: Regional Stories and Media Responses to the Black Freedom Struggle*. By Darryl Mace. (Lexing-**

ton, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2014. Pp. ix–xi + 152, acknowledgements, notes, bibliography, index. $40, cloth)

In the summer of 1955, fourteen-year-old Emmett Till left his Chicago home to stay with his great-uncle, Moses Wright, in Leflore County, Mississippi. He knew little of the world he had entered, a place synonymous with Jim Crow segregation and white supremacy. When Till stepped inside the Bryant family store on an August day and, according to most accounts, whistled at a white woman, Carolyn Bryant, he likely had no idea of the fateful consequences of his actions. Three days later, Roy Bryant, J.W. Milam, and possibly others, kidnapped Emmett Till, took him to a remote plantation, and brutally beat him, ultimately shooting him in the back of the head. On August 31, 1955, a fisherman saw feet edging out of the waters of the Tallahatchie River and notified Sheriff H.C. Strider. Local authorities attempted to bury the body in an unmarked grave, but Till's mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, intervened, insisting that the child's body be returned to Chicago for a proper burial. Over the ensuing weeks what might have been a local story brewed into a national debate over civil rights and the conditions for blacks living in Mississippi. Before long, Emmett Till had become to many Americans a martyr in the cause of racial justice. Darryl Mace's book *In Remembrance of Emmett Till: Regional Stories and Media Responses to the Black Freedom Struggle* argues that those living outside the South "took pride in the fact they were not from the state and looked on with voyeuristic fascination" (p. 5). Meanwhile, many Mississippians decried the media spotlight placed on the state as another example of outside agitation.

Mace depicts 1950s Mississippi as a cauldron of racial tension, as "the South on steroids," and as a "grotesque relic of racism, poverty, ruralism, and violence" (p. 5). Focusing on the media response to the Till case—from the first reports of the murder, to its aftermath a half-century later—Mace reinforces the idea that Till's murder was unique in the annals of American lynching, and that it accordingly shook the nation's conscience. Till was simply too young, too northern, to be ignored as so many other victims had been. While acknowledging that Americans did not draw their opinions on Till's death solely from media coverage, this book effectively demonstrates that the media primed the public with a particular narrative, emphasizing certain details while excluding others. For instance, national reports, especially those appearing in prominent black newspapers like the *Chicago Defender*, stressed the savagery of the killing. Local papers throughout Mississippi, though, tended to prime their readers with stories and editorials that typically portrayed Till's murder as a local matter wildly exaggerated by a national media compliant to the agenda of interest groups like the NAACP and, to a lesser extent, the Urban League. Such bifurcated coverage occurred throughout the civil rights movement, yet in the Till case, at every level, the media sustained public interest and shaped the discourse surrounding it.



The *Chicago Tribune* played a key role in arousing sympathy by focusing on Till-Mobley's emotional and often provocative calls to action. "Someone is going to pay for this," she intoned, "the entire state of Mississippi is going to pay" (p. 27). Other newspapers, with other agendas to pursue, tamped down such statements, choosing the phrase *should pay* over *is going to pay*. As Mace suggests, these were not minor discrepancies, but rather evidence that the

media subtly, consistently framed the story in varied ways. Major newspapers like the *Washington Post* and the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* propped up half-truths and occasionally outright lies. In one dubious instance, Sheriff Strider tried to cast doubt about the entire affair by claiming that Till's body "looked more like that of a grown man instead of a young boy" (p. 38). The *Charlotte Observer* took such statements as fact, noting in an editorial that the "whole thing looks like a deal made up by the [NAACP]" (p. 38). In the South, only the black press, led by papers such as the *Atlanta Daily World*, consistently condemned not only local figures in the Till case but also the broader southern culture and the "mentality of the people who run the state" of Mississippi (p. 39).

As many scholars have noted, the trial of Bryant and Milam was a farce. Mace's work, however, adds great depth to our understanding of the case by demonstrating how media portrayals subtly shaped the public's perceptions. Carolyn Bryant's testimony illustrates this tendency, as journalists worked either to support or to mitigate her statements. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* noted that "[Till] allegedly climaxed his visit with a wolf-whistle at the slender, attractive brunette" (p. 87). According to Mace, the authors and editors of such accounts deliberately chose words such as climaxed in an effort to sexualize the events at the grocery store, reinforcing negative stereotypes of black males as dangerous predators, no matter the age.

After four days of trial, and just one hour of deliberation, the jury returned a not guilty verdict in the Till murder case. Closing his book with how Emmett Till's story was reshaped and remembered over subsequent years, Mace shows that as the civil rights movement gained further traction in the mid-1960s, the national print media gradually, though never entirely, began to side with the view of those who sought to right the wrongs of the Jim Crow South. Galvanized by their outrage at Till's murder, Americans mobilized to work toward achieving precisely that goal. An important contribution to civil rights scholarship that combines historical research with media studies, *In Remembrance of Emmett Till* represents a landmark account of one of the defining moments in America's tortured past.

--Brenton E. Riffel

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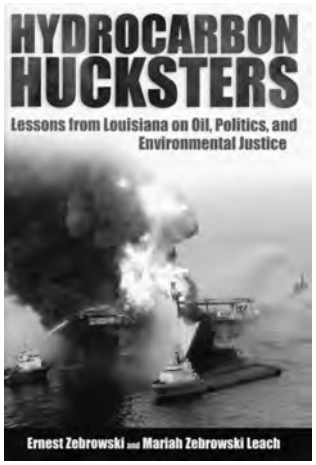
Hydrocarbon Hucksters: Lessons From Louisiana on Oil, Politics, and Environmental Justice. By Ernest Zebrowski and Mariah Zebrowski Leach. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2014. Pp. ix–xiii + 184, source notes, further reading, index. $31.50, hardcover)

Anyone who has spent appreciable time in Louisiana is aware of the state's many positive characteristics. It is a place where the good times roll—where thousands of tourists come each year especially to New Orleans for Mardi Gras or for one of the many sporting events or conferences which make the Big Easy their destination. For those merely visiting Bourbon Street in the French Quarter, the experience is exhilarating and not at all like life in the remainder of the state. Drive a few miles from New Orleans and the signs of the pervasive presence of the oil and petrochemical industries is everywhere. In *Hydrocarbon Hucksters*, Ernest Zebrowski, a for-



mer physics professor, and Mariah Zebrowski Leach, an environmental lawyer, chronicle the unseemly story of how Louisiana became infatuated with oil money at the start of the twentieth century and has never looked back in spite of the staggering environmental consequences of continued drilling and unfulfilled dreams of a better tomorrow.

In *Hydrocarbon Hucksters*, the authors are left wondering, why, after all of the failed promises from the oil industry over the course of decades, has nothing changed? Initially, the discovery of oil in Louisiana was viewed as a get-rich-quick plan in a state which remained mired in rural poverty. Over the years, oil companies have been permitted to drill across the state and beyond its shoreline into the Gulf of Mexico. Enormous quantities of crude oil have been extracted, yet Louisiana remains at the bottom of practically every quality of life measure. Decades of drilling have generated untold sums of money, but that capital does not stay in Louisiana. The vast share of the wealth lines the pockets of a few oil executives while a pittance remains in the state. Despite a mountain of evidence to the contrary, Louisiana politicians continue to push the idea that the oil and petro-chemical industries have a major economic impact on the state—that without them, the state's financial house would collapse. Zebrowski and Leach have dissected every facet of this argument, only to find that at its greatest extent the oil industry employs about three percent of the state's eligible work force (p. 120). If the returns are far lower than believed and the consequences of unchecked drilling and refining so detrimental, then why do Louisiana politicians fight so rabidly in defense of big oil? The not too surprising, yet tragically disappointing, answer is money. Party affiliation is less important in Louisiana than fidelity to oil, but there is clearly an ever-expanding conservative Republican majority in the state. At the time this book was written, Democrat Mary Landrieu still held one of Louisiana's US Senate seats and received a critical review from the authors for her pro-oil voting record. When this review was penned, Landrieu had just recently lost a tough 2014 Senate race to Republican Bill Cassidy, in part, because she was allegedly not doing enough to encourage congressional action on the Keystone Pipeline.

For those who remain abreast of environmental issues, much of what is discussed in *Hydrocarbon Hucksters* is familiar territory. It is a sad story that has been chronicled in numerous articles and books but rarely put together as comprehensively as here. The deleterious environmental consequences of unchecked drilling have left permanent scars across oil rich portions of the state, while the fallout from the 2010 Deepwater Horizon BP oil spill is still being felt by those who make a living fishing along the Gulf. Of course, big oil spreads its largesse to politicians across the nation thereby ensuring the industry gets a favorable hearing in Washington and in statehouses throughout the country. Things are bad on the national level but nothing compared to the wholesale manipulation of the political process that takes place on the state level in Louisiana. In the Pelican State, according to the authors, a poorly educated and deeply provincial populace believes, despite the incredible evidence to the contrary, that they live in the greatest place on earth. The authors speculate that so many Louisianans love their home state because so few of them have ever been anyplace else. While some Louisianans might take issue with this generalization, it is hard to deny that many in the state turn a blind eye to the shenanigans going on in their backyard and that grinding poverty and poor education is at the root of popular inertia.

In the end, *Hydrocarbon Hucksters* offers readers a multi-point plan to make things better. Despite the inherent wisdom of these proposals, its success is predicated on fundamentally changing Louisiana's political culture. Few suggestions are offered on how this transformation can be achieved. The authors rightly note that oil is a finite resource that will

one day be unavailable. For many defenders of the oil industry, calls for reform are largely ignored precisely because the good times will come to an end at some point, hopefully in the distant future. Why redirect attention now while there is still plenty of easy and scarcely regulated money to be made? Perhaps most damning of all is how much Louisiana is responsible for its own problems. Oil exists in many locations in America, but most states recognize the need to corral an industry that has not always been known for being a good steward of the environment. In Louisiana, politicians and the people who vote for them have created a political system in which the mere act of questioning the oil industry is tantamount to heresy. If *Hydrocarbon Hucksters* were distributed to all registered voters in the state it is hard to imagine how things could remain the same. That they will likely never come across the book is symptomatic of the enormous problems that confront Louisiana.

--Keith M. Finley

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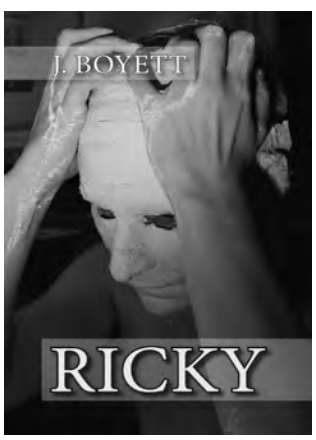
Ricky. By J. Boyett (New York: Saltimbanque Books, 2014. Pp. 112. $12.95, paperback)

I first came to Boyett's work with his previous Little Rock novel, *Brothel*, the not-too-salacious, thoroughly Arkansas story of a trio of young women who decide to start a house of ill repute and the tribulations they experience because of it. Boyett struck me with his humor and lack of fear when it came to writing, reminding me of John Fergus Ryan with touches of Charles Portis. He avoided the obvious clichés and expectations and went for more realistic, human characters and actions; instead of writing characters as laughingstocks or Southern grotesques, he created vibrant, interesting characters. So I came to his new novella, *Ricky*, hoping for more of the same. I wasn't disappointed. *Ricky* is a much darker story. It follows the titular character who has just been released from prison. He was in for armed robbery, and was actually the only survivor of his gang. There's a story there I won't spoil, but that quagmire of guilt and shame is quickly subsumed by more pressing matters. Ricky doesn't really have anywhere to be or anything to do. He goes to visit his sister, who he was very close to. Ricky is drifting, and his sister is his only real lifeline. Even when he was in prison, she kept him going by sending him letters and giving him mental territory to dwell in outside of the cell. Now that he's out everything has changed. His mother has even lost weight and seemingly gotten her life together. All the places he used to go have changed, and the people he used to know are either dead or gone, or are painful reminders of the life he has missed out on.

But almost immediately after he's released, his sister is brutally murdered, which overshadows every other concern in his life. Now, his mother doesn't really want anything else to do with him, and Ricky feels that he has to track down the person responsible. Boyett again avoids the obvious clichés the story could have devolved into—Ricky isn't harassed by the police, for example. In fact, he's mostly ignored by them, which makes him feel even more alienated.

The book is a character study of an alienated, out-of-step young man existing in a liminal state. Something Boyett does very well is capture Ricky's mental state—from the fugue over his sister's death to his attempts to reconnect with other human beings. Ricky isn't a hero, or even an anti-hero, in many regards. He's simply someone who has



been manipulated by events and ended up in a certain place, without really taking responsibility. Now, through the search for his sister's killer, he has an opportunity to redeem himself. But at its heart, the significance of his sister's murder is even more troubling for Ricky; she was his one, true, connection to his old life. Now that she's gone, what will he do? How will he live?

Ricky is a powerful meditation on alienation, on learning how to live, and on becoming. When many people think of Southern characters, they think of farmers or preachers, the kind of elite of Southern society, but it is the outsiders who truly populate Southern culture. Outsiders, loners, and rebels are especially the stuff of Arkansas writing. Ricky is one of these outsiders, and Boyett has crafted a powerful portrait of a life that most of us simply haven't seen.

--C. L. Bledsoe

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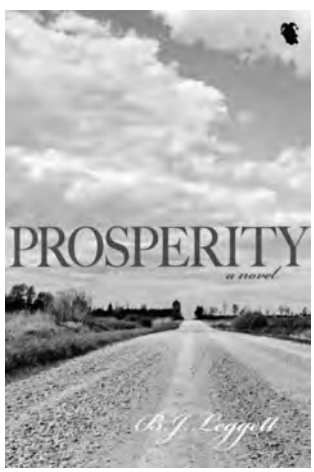
Prosperity. By B. J. Leggett. (Livingston, AL: Livingston Press, 2014. Pp. 212. $18.95, paper)

Prosperity, B. J. Leggett's excellent second novel, finds the author taking a familiar genre—the literary detective novel—into deep and unexpected territory. Fans of the genre will find familiar elements all in their rightful places: the ex-cop with a checkered past, the beautiful woman who knows more than she is telling, the menacing small-town Southern sheriff operating far above the law. Leggett breathes genuine life into the Appalachian town of Prosperity, Tennessee, and its inhabitants. The richly observed setting, characters, and the compelling murder mystery at the novel's center should alone be enough to keep a reader turning the pages. It is the story-within-the-story, however, that elevates the novel beyond mere formula and convention. The central plot arc in *Prosperity* is as much about finding meaning in the act of storytelling as it is about the revelation of a murder.



The narrator and protagonist of the novel is Lt. Robert O'Brian, a Knoxville police officer. The novel opens with O'Brian's retirement, ostensibly due to a gunshot wound he received during a drug bust. Although he has amiable relations with his fellow officers, particularly his hard-cursing partner, Eddie, it quickly becomes clear that O'Brian is somehow out of sync with the rest of his department. They call him Shake, short for Shakespeare, due to his having published a successful thriller. He relocates to Prosperity, his childhood home, in part to investigate the murder of a childhood friend at the behest of this friend's beautiful sister, and in part to begin work on a second book. We learn that O'Brian left Prosperity under a dark cloud many years previously, implicated in the accidental death of a man named Billy Ratliffe. As O'Brian remarks at the end of the first chapter, "when a man gives you three reasons . . . none of them is the real reason" (p. 7). It is this proliferation of motive, not just of the suspected killers but of O'Brian's own troubled interest in the tale itself, that propels the plot forward. O'Brian wants many things in the course of the novel. He wants the love of his murdered friend's beautiful sister; he wants to make good in the town which exiled him for his troubled past; he wants the respect of a former English teacher to whom he dedicated his first novel and has yet to receive a response. More than any of this, he wants to get the story right—to understand what it all means. Much of the pleasure in the novel derives from watching as

Lt. O'Brian tries, and often fails, to get his story straight.

Fans of B. J. Leggett's first novel, *Playing Out the String* (Livingston Press, 2004), will recognize this playful, self-referential narrative strategy straight off. *Playing Out the String* is also at heart a mystery, albeit a mystery without a murder. The protagonist of that novel is a university professor accused of exposing himself to a graduate student in a remote corner of the college library. The narrators of both novels believe, erroneously, that they can acquit themselves if they can somehow twist the story just right. Both narrators make specific reference to Nietzschean duality, and the problem of how our poor, fragmented selves can hope to make art with anything akin to a unified effect. The story is always shifting just out of reach; the hope is that we can continue to tell the tale, to get the right details in the right order, at least until the other shoe drops and all is again thrown into chaos.

Sophisticated narrative strategies aside, the quality of the language throughout *Prosperity* is consistently high. Though Lt. O'Brian may be a hack at the novel's outset—his best-selling thriller is humorously retitled *Body Parts* by his New York agent—by the end his power of observation is clear and striking. Characters that begin as genre-familiar stereotypes quickly slip their moorings through vivid description and memorable dialogue exchanges. At one point O'Brian re-envisions his past through the fragmented lens of a dream: "You'd think you would see from the start that it's a dream, so faded and badly lit, with people you know changing into one another, but it fools you every time, so that when you wake you will thank God that you don't have an exam in a course you've neglected to attend for an entire term . . . and can't find the room and walk through empty hallways, opening doors onto deserted classrooms and read on a blackboard Bobby O'Brian killed the Rat Man" (p. 117). It is the chief achievement of the novel that O'Brian's ruminations on the seductive power of storytelling continually make us forget that there is a murderer, maybe several murderers, at large in the town. *Prosperity* is highly recommended to fans of the literary detective novel, and to readers of serious fiction everywhere.

--Mark D. Baumgartner

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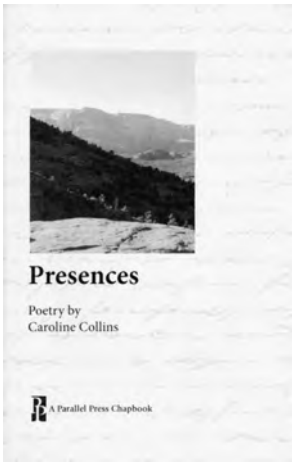
Presences. Caroline Collins. (Madison, WI: Parallel Press, 2014. Pp. 46. $12, paper)

Presences is a collection of poetry that primarily deals with Native American identity and explores specific historical events and people, all set within the Mississippi Delta. The author, Caroline Collins, is a University of Arkansas alumna and professor of English at Andrew College, located in Cuthbert, Georgia. *Presences* is a volume of poetry that deals with time and places and is separated into two appropriately-named segments titled; "Buried History" and "Presences." The subject matter of most of the poems deals largely with the forgotten and unseen and uses borrowed and created memory to explore these themes.



The poem "Crossing," an historic and romantic revisioning of the Black Hawk War, adds a humanistic quality to a criminally-forgotten historic event. Many, if not most of the poems found within this collection revolve around Sauk-leader, Black Hawk, whom Collins seems to revere. The final stanza of the poem titled "Hunger," a poem dedicated to Black Hawk, states:

Deep within my words lie the ancestors
That Tenswakawa knew: rigid jaw
and dug-in heels, weapons leveled, voices
rising. The grudges carried to the grave.
The hunger that nothing can glut.

Collins has the ability to take historic details and give them the treatment of a revisionist to give these historical events a human element. "Crossing," is a poem that is structured around correspondences between specific historical personalities, such as Thomas Forsyth, William Clark, George Atkinson, and George Catlin. The poetic exchange invokes a sense of empathy in the reader for Native Americans and the atrocities committed against them. At times, the poems can be vague and broad, which seems fitting for poetry that deals with a numberless community we have an unclear and incomprehensive knowledge of.

Collins's writing is carried by a poetic voice that strikes simultaneously as being sincere, as well as authentic. Geographic beauty is expressed along with an historically-accurate plot, which seems to be bitterly recalled through gritted teeth. In "Questions from the Living in the City of the Dead," a poem which exhibits a speaker representing an abjected community questioning the virtues of independence:

What is the price of resistance?
misery and defeat
What is the price of obedience?
misery
What may be gained by patient endurance?
the fate of Quashquame
the lot of Shabbona
the wealth of Keokuk

The poems contained within *Presences* are connected by an over-arching theme of exploitation, a theme which is beautifully encapsulated within the poem "In Praise of Opulence," which explores not only the exploitation of a community of people, but also of the Earth:

With the nuts and bolts of Manifest Destiny,
with the practice of giving the natives less
for more, with the railroads that tore the
earth
and drove away the buffalo, on the ground
that absorbed what was left of Black Hawk
after they'd melted him down to the bones
. . .

With Collins's diction and simplistic narrative, her poetry has an element of accessibility and rich, emotional depth. *Presences* is crafted exclusively in free-verse, which seems an appropriate choice given the emotional range of the poetry found within the volume. While not having a form to frame her poetry, Collins has a mastery over her own style and poetic voice that has a constant presence throughout the book. It would be an easy task to come across a poem from Collins shuffled together with other poems from various authors and still have the ability to pin-point her writing by identifying her distinctive voice.

Presences is for poetry lovers who enjoy elements of historicism in their verses. Bottomless emotional depth, historical accuracy, painfully sincere thoughts, and poetic richness are all contained within this wonderful collection of poems. Collins is a poet of considerable talent, it will be exciting to see what she will come out with next.

--Stephen Turner

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You Don't Know Me. By James Nolan. (Lafayette, LA: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2014. Pp. 296. $20.00, paper)

This luminous collection is comprised of ten new stories, found in Part One, "Inside the Courtyard," and ten selected from Nolan's previous collection, *Perpetual Care* (Jefferson Press, 2009), found in Part Two, which I reviewed in this journal (40.1). Since I have discussed the older stories in some detail already, I shall concentrate on the ten new ones in this

review. All of them are set in New Orleans, a city Nolan knows as well as anyone alive, I suspect, as a fifth-generation inhabitant. Nolan is one of the most entertaining and skilful short story writers working in this country today. Andrei Codrescu has said of him, "If Flannery O' Connor had been a bad boy living in the French Quarter, she'd have been James Nolan." Well, maybe. Nolan does not have O' Connor's theological concerns, but he shares her wit and her interest in eccentrics and unimaginable, dark fates.

"It seems that I specialize in crackpots," says Kirby, the narrator of "Latins on the Loose" (p. 91), but this could be said equally of James Nolan himself. Most of the stories have quirky narrators or protagonists whose foibles get them or others into trouble. In "Reconcile" for example, Zola is a Katrina survivor of ambivalent gender who has retained nothing of her former life but her adored cat, Boom-Boom, which she rather trustingly leaves in the care of neighbors, who do their very best to look after the animal, with hilarious results reminiscent of a Truman Capote story. Then there is Roberta, the pistol-packing lady of a certain age who enjoys a little pot while babysitting the daughter of her crackhead nephew, and handles two menacing dealers with comical élan. If this sounds like pure farce, in fact it is not; funny as the stories are, they have depth too. The characters are complex and convincing, and Nolan is always nudging the reader to think about what life must be like in shoes very different from our own. His characters, many of whom are feisty elderly women, have moments of insight and wisdom, which they impart with gritty wit. Roberta admonishes her loser nephew after he has just told her glibly that he loves her: "Go study that mess in the living-room if you want to know what love is made of. A bunch of hot wires jumbled together with shards of light and hard, hard choices" (pp. 46-47).

The high comedy continues in "The Whole Shebang," in which Justin, an adjunct philosophy professor at Tulane who has done his dissertation on Nietzsche, finds that a libidinous and vengeful Canadian (and ex-wife of a colleague) is taking an unhealthy interest in him. Should he appease her? He makes a series of disastrous choices, or rather, a series of disasters befalls him. "No, he had to admit that he wasn't the victorious one, but the passive one, an innocent bystander to the crime of his life" (p. 68)—like most of us, Nolan might have added. The irony is that Justin, who longs for the life of academic security,—precisely the one that Nietzsche would have despised—has to learn in the hardest possible way the cost of freedom.

If humor is the prevailing tone, it is the humor of a Breughel, bursting with life and yet tinged with vulgarity, with sadness, despair and even tragedy. In "Overpass" Mr. Claude is an elderly man who plans to bomb the overpass that is blighting his neighbourhood, little realizing what the consequences of his terrorism will be for himself. Similarly in "Abide with Me," a story with two cleverly interwoven plots about confidence tricksters who prey on the elderly, the scheming turns out not to be merely mischievous but murderous and sinister.

Not every story is comic. Some are serious and moving, like the triad of stories whose theme is the troubled relationship between parent and adult offspring. The minor masterpiece "Hard Freeze" is about a concert pianist of mixed race who performs in New Orleans, the city his father grew up in. Despite the international acclaim he enjoys, Émile still longs only for one thing—the approval of his dead father, who never showed his son his love. "The Empty Throne," though more farcical in tone, shares the same theme. Wally, a failure who is miserable because of his lover's infidelities, accepts

the role of king of the Krewe of Mirth at Mardi Gras, a part procured for him by his wealthy parents; he is desperate for their approbation—so desperate that he deceives them, knowing that their pride in him can last only minutes, giving the story at its finale a tragicomic air.

Another touching story is "Mary Sorrows," whose narrator is a pregnant teenage girl. She considers her mother, a Honduran woman who works as a secretary, a failure, a ridiculous person, and only understands who she really is when she happens to see her mother performing as a flamenco dancer in a little club:

> It's mom all right, she says, but at the same time it's not her, like some sneaky spirit has descended into her body, twisting it into fierce angles. Every movement is sharp, glinting like a knife. . . . Her body curls into a crescent moon, then whips around and she stomps . . . as if she's daring to place her foot down on the earth for the first time. . . . She lands, then marches forward, yanking bloody daggers out of her heart and hurling them at the audience (p. 49).

Witnessing her mother's transformation, understanding the dignity and the strength she possesses, against all odds, gives the young Delores the courage to make a very tough decision.

I quote from this story at some length not only because the passage moved me almost to tears, but also because it typifies Nolan's attitude to his characters. He may poke fun at them, reminding the reader of all the absurd ways in which we behave too, and yet it is clear that he has deep compassion for them, flaws and all. Like a beneficent god, he loves them and forgives them their trespasses. And like a god, too, somehow he confers dignity on their suffering. He transforms them into heroes.

If John Kennedy Toole and Walker Percy were the iconic New Orleans novelists of the late twentieth century, James Nolan deserves to be considered the voice of the city for our even more troubled century. *You Don't Know Me* is a collection that demands to be read.

--Garry Craig Powell

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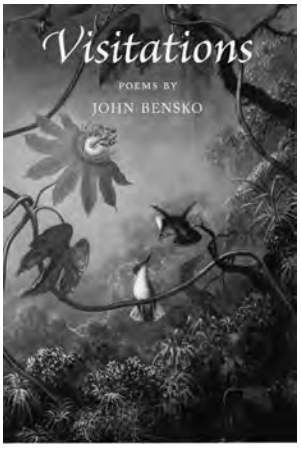
Visitations. By John Bensko. (Tampa: University of Tampa Press, 2014. Pp. 72, notes, acknowledgements, about the author, about the book. $14, paperback)

John Bensko's latest book of poetry, *Visitations*, is not a collection one can read through quickly. Each poem encapsulates its own voice, and within that voice, its own history. This collection is one that a reader should take slowly, allowing each poem to digest completely before moving on to the next. It truly allows visitations into the past and into the author's contemplations.

Many of the poems, including "Hatch" and "Snow Day," use images from nature to invoke a self-reflection of the author, which in turn causes the reader to ponder the same reflections. The images of robins feeding their young in "Hatch" present a perfect allegory to what humans require for sustainability in their own lives.

Other poems, such as "Niagra: Winter 1878" and "Henry Wirz, November 1865," suggest by their titles certain events from the past. Bensko establishes a nostalgic feel within these historically-oriented poems, but also presents subjects relevant to any period of time; for instance, he questions compassion, religion, the soul, and the self. By juxtaposing historical antiquity with timeless inquisitiveness, Bensko eradicates the lines of



time to show that human emotion and thought are nonlinear and not era-specific.

Bensko's poetic style is not consistent throughout. His arrangements range from stanziac form, to couplets, to various free forms. The style works for most of the poems, but in some cases, the lack of form detracts from the potency of the poem. For instance, "Mississippi Boil and Snag" begins with end stops relevant to the language; but about halfway through the poem, the end stops begin to seem random. It feels as though the author lost patience with the writing of this poem and, so, left it raw and unfinished. If he were aiming to make his readers feel as fluctuating as the Mississippi itself, then he has completed his goal. However, it does make the reader stop and stutter over lines such as: "Those words someone desperate on a bridge / above you would say, contemplating the illusory / marriage beneath your surface. Go away, I might / tell you" (p. 49). Here, the punctuation and line breaks make the lines difficult to comprehend as there are a multitude of stops in so short a space. The style is not reflective of the Mississippi, since the long and windy river hardly makes one think of multiple stops and jags. This style appears in most of Bensko's couplet-style poems, including "To the Ocean." This poem at first reads like the waves of the ocean themselves, but then, like in "Mississippi Boil and Snag," the lines become chopped and inconsistent. This style, though difficult to read through, gives the poems the very alliteration of the poetic subjects themselves. The rhythmic pace of "To the Ocean" becomes choppy and slurred, like literal ocean waves along the shore. Overall, whether done intentionally or not, Bensko has written poems which require multiple readings in order to see the validity of this form choice.

The golden gem of this collection is no doubt "Ectoplasm." Bensko placed this poem as the first in the collection, knocking his reader off her feet from the start and leaving her wanting to read more. His organization of poems into sections, "The Spirit," "The Landscape," and "The Stop Before Night," gives the broad topics his poems fall under as well as good stopping places for reflection.

Bensko also took special care to make his collection aesthetically pleasing. He includes the reasoning for his type choice in the "About the Book" section at the end. The font, Adobe Caslon Pro, is adapted from "the English fonts by William Caslon that were first cast in the 1720s" and were used in "the first printings of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution" (p. 69). Readers should read the "About the Book" section first in order to realize the significance and overall cohesiveness of historical ambiance throughout the collection.

The poetry collection *Visitations* is an excellent companion to any outdoor adventure or even on the back patio on a summer evening. His seasonal poems offer enough imagery and detail that they can be read any time of year. He perfectly captures the chill of winter and the heat of summer in their respective poems, allowing the reader to shiver or swelter when reading regardless of her actual surroundings. Bensko's poetry captures various ranges of human self-interrogations as well as emotions and passions. He has produced another successful collection that can be enjoyed by anyone.

--Leslie R. Malland