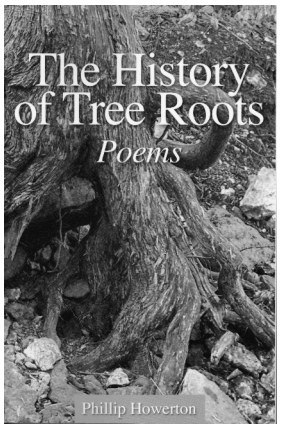
Reviews

The History of Tree Roots. By Phillip Howerton. (Kirksville, MO: Golden Antelope Press, 2015. Pp. vv–xvi + 87, preface, about the author. $16.00, paper)

Many poets credit attention as being key to their art. To be absorbed in noticing fosters what Elizabeth Bishop called the "self-forgetful, perfectly useless concentration" necessary for poetry (Bishop, letter to Anne Stevenson), while the practice of writing in turn deepens one's capacity for attention. "I don't know exactly what a prayer is," writes Mary Oliver. "I do know how to pay attention" ("The Summer Day," 11–12). In Kathleen Jamie's words, "When we were young, we were told that poetry is about voice . . . but the older I get I think it's not about voice, it's about . . . bringing the quality of attention to the world" (*Writer's Almanac*, May 13, 2015). Phillip Howerton, in his 2015 collection *The History of Tree Roots*, exemplifies the power of attention by leveling his gaze on the Ozarks of southern Missouri and north Arkansas. In poem after poem Howerton observes farmers and fenceposts, wildflowers and whittlers, rendering the elements of his region in images and words for readers to contemplate.

Howerton's quiet, unassuming tone, eye for detail, and affiliation with mid-American farmland bring Ted Kooser and Jo McDougall to mind. Another poetic influence may be the farmer-poet Wendell Berry, whose epigraph—along with the preface by Adam Brooke Davis—sets the stage for the book. Like Kooser and McDougall, Howerton writes laconically of small towns and fading ways of life. Like Berry, he takes pleasure in the natural world. Especially delightful are Howerton's wildflower poems, which describe and often personify several Ozark species with a botanist's eye and a word-lover's savor.



The poems are mostly free verse, told in direct, conversational language, with line breaks that are consonant with syntax. They move from matter-of-fact assertions and observations to quiet epiphanies. A few are in traditional forms—the sonnet "Icarus in the Ozarks"; "Farm Journal Haiku Sequence"; the epigram "The Last Ozarks Farmer"; and "When the Barn Was Red," a conversational couplet poem. Varied though they are, Howerton's forms are always welded to content. In "Nursing Home," for example, stanzas made of free-floating fragments manifest the broken memories and inchoate sadness of the nursing home residents.

The History of Tree Roots is enhanced by black-and-white photographs from family albums, by Arkansas photographer David Bell, and by the author himself. This lends the collection a documentary quality, underscoring the repeated movement from landscapes and artifacts to their implications. Especially in the section "Beyond the Image," many poems unfold as straightforward, conversational descriptions of photographs, the eye/I detailing and interpreting what the camera has captured. "Tripod," a heartbreaking catalog poem, lists all the family photographs in which the matriarch does not appear because she was behind the camera. The sentence construction is masterly: after a cascading inventory of pictures from the kids' growing-up, a semi-colon marks a watershed from which falls retirement, then the empty

nest, and then less and less peopled photographs leading ultimately to "her long shadow / stretching upon the ground / beside a flower-strewn grave / in a photograph containing no one" (p. 25).

This dwindling embodies the *ubi sunt* theme running throughout the book. A "Where are the snows of yesterday?" bemusement relates not only to individual mortality—as in the elegaic "My Father" section—but to ways of life that slipped away as large-scale agriculture swept the region. Howerton mourns what is lost when barns deteriorate, tractors rust in the underbrush, and old farm implements, long out of use, are daubed with crafters' paint and sold as kitsch.

The History of Tree Roots enshrines briefly flaring memories that show the transience and intransigence of the past—its tendency to resist appropriation the way an abandoned house resists visitors: "and both front doors are always open, / but we should never believe / that we are still welcome" ("Homestead on Federal Land," p. 48). The underlying critique of the present becomes at times outright sharp:

> Each year millions make the pilgrimage
> and pay their retired dollars
> seeking a version of the region
> as it never existed. . . .
>
> ("Condemned," p. 43)

Mostly, though, Howerton's tone remains understated, letting concrete details speak for themselves. This restraint gives the book its fine quality.

Like darkness and silence, our capacity for attention has never been more endangered. The human craving for distraction can now glut endlessly on tweets, posts, and emails—hundreds of channels to cruise, blogs to follow, articles to read. But when we dive through the white spaces of the margins and into the world of a poem, we are able to let go of frenetic self-preoccupation and hold in mind, instead, the cosmos outside ourselves. Phillip Howerton's poetry refocuses our attention in just this way, acquainting us with "a version of the region" (p. 43) as it did and does exist, letting us enter the reality of Ozark things, lives, and histories. To lay down the endless buzz and chatter is a delicious relief. As Yogi Berra said, "You can observe a lot just by watching."

--Hope Coulter

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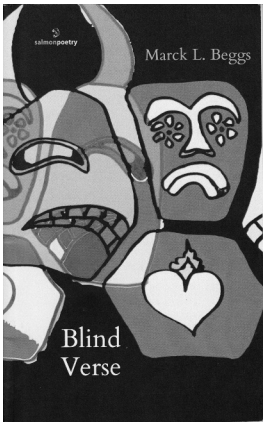
Blind Verse. By Marck L. Beggs. (County Clare, Ireland: Salmon Poetry, 2015. Pp. 57. $13.25, paper)

The Natural State boasts many gifted poets, but not many who are both masters of their craft and as bold with language and juxtaposition as Marck Beggs. His presence on the page is unique. The range and texture of Beggs's fourth collection, *Blind Verse*, is impressive, and its consistent daring is coupled with a scaffolding of craft that never lets the poems down. This is a poet who has traveled, literally and metaphorically, and who has the ability to express irreverence with respect, absurdity with grace, and humor with teeth. In "Morals," the speaker claims that "[e]verything is normal in a fairy tale" (p. 32), and although Beggs' poems often take notice of the dirt under humanity's shoes as well as their shine, there is nothing typical about his voice or poetic construction.



Divided into two sections, "Travelogue," and "Lyrics and Narratives," Beggs's latest collection encompasses the global, the universal, the personal, the archetypical, and the past's dialogue with the present, and does so quite well. That in itself is a feat. As a whole, the book is

a powerful investigation of humanity today—who we are, how we got to be who we are, and especially how we choose to perceive ourselves. However, I particularly appreciate the individual bricks of the poems, which multiply to create the house. To me, the collection's irrefutable hinge is Beggs's mastery of image and line. He doesn't miss the mark, even when venturing into risky territory. He sidles up to cliché but kicks it sideways; he cavorts with feeling but never sinks into sentimentality; he goes to the dark side but comes back with enlightenment.

Poems that are tributes to dogs are always at risk of being awash in sentimentality, but Beggs escapes this as he enlarges the concept of dog by association with human in "Þunresdæg." The poem begins: "Forget the myths for a day, even / if they belong to Thor. Today / belongs to Farley . . ." (p. 23). We feel Farley's weight when we are told "he ran circles around everything" (p. 23) and his significance when he is paired with great athletes, as he was the "Mohammed Ali of mutts" (p. 23). However, it is the closing couplet summarizing Farley's life and departure, which resonates with such power: "He stamped this world with his face / and limped off among the greats" (p. 23). The slant rhyme assists, but the diction does the work.

In another title of the first section, "The Cynic's Calendar," an acerbic and witty chronicle of the months, imagery is sassy. In the opening, a brief encounter with April moves headlong into overbearing August, which reflects pretty accurately what spring and summer are like here in Arkansas, and the image stuns us just like the heat: "but the August Nazi drops / us to our knees, sweltering" (p. 18). Risky move to use a Nazi reference in a poem, as it is an image overly-relied upon, but under Beggs's trained hand it doesn't ask permission to do what it needs to do, or fall into cliché.

Beggs explores the opposites of life through tight quarters and questions. Another poem in the first section that is a delightful pairing of unlikely elements is "Sunnandæg," which begins

> Eventually, 4/20 and Easter
> were destined to meet in a smokefest
> of aura and brightly colored eggs.
> Who is to say which is the better tradition?
>
> I'll claim both. (p. 26)

And he does claim both, even when he is asking a more esoteric question and not offering a reply, as in the poem "Wōnesdæg Sonnet," a re-consideration of Wednesday's child from nursery rhymes. Beggs brings the gods, who are also full of woe, into the mix, as the speaker notes that "[t]he woeful lives of the gods are fraught with pain" and inquires, "[w]e humans sacrifice, but to what gain?" (p. 22). The juxtaposition of human suffering with that of the gods is an answer unto itself.

The second section, "Lyrics and Narratives," moves into more personal territory but never loses its grip on the startling image or finely-tuned line. The section opens wistfully but unsentimentally with the poem "Wraith," one of my favorites, which travels the direction of past to future in a dream of the speaker's parents. Dream poems or memory projection poems of parents from early photographs are many, and some are extremely well executed, from Fred Marchant's "Loose Ends" to Gail Marie Pahmeier's "Photograph of Her Parents, Dancing: 1956," but Marck Beggs records remarkably the contradictions inherent in time and awareness: "I want this future" (p. 35), and "I wish I had recognized it then, and that / it was all ahead of me. The clear horizon of my past" (p. 35). The line break adds emphasis to the thought that we can only know our past clearly by looking at it from our future; the past in its present form is as murky as a stirred up creek. That doesn't stop our desire, even if it can only be executed in dream.

I must make mention of "The *Eros*" for the sheer verve of the imagery. The *Eros* is a Merchant Marine vessel piloted by a corpulent Captain Lou who consumes his share of Wild Turkey and who ". . . sweated like / a frat boy in a maternity ward" (p. 46). The speaker's fall be-

tween this ship and the one it's tied to and the ships themselves are presented in equally evocative similes. When the speaker "went down like a shot seagull" (p. 46), Captain Lou saves him as he reels him in "seconds before the ships / clanked together, heavy as iron whales" (p. 46). With language like this, who needs silence?

Another poem I admire for its position and language is "Bully Poem," which could not be attempted by a lesser poet. The humorous images stay close like the bad breath of whispered threats, the kind a true bully would offer. After the poem does some ass kicking, it will

> . . . then hack
> into your Facebook account
> to replace your profile picture
> with a pornographic image
> involving unicorns and your sister.
>
> And, later
> This poem will smoke Camels in your bed
> and forget to feed your cat. It will leave
> behind a trail of mold that will require
> a government agency to remove. . . . (p. 44)

In our media-saturated world, there are few images with the ability to unnerve us, but Beggs's unique vision offers several, and relentlessly.

The collection *Blind Verse* will board the steps of your consciousness and take it over like the hijacking of a bus. Don't miss the craft, the daring, the ride.

--Lynn DiPier

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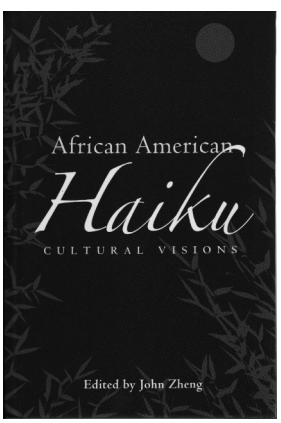
African American Haiku: Cultural Visions. Edited by John Zheng. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2016. Pp. ix-xxi + 190, introduction, contributors, index. $65, hardback)

Ask most Americans to name a composer of haiku poetry and the sound of crickets is all you will likely hear in response. Literary genres such as poetry tend to attract less attention than more widely circulated forms such as nonfiction. By extension, sub-categories of poetry such as haiku are even more obscure being known to but a handful of devotees. Perhaps the only thing most Americans remember from long forgotten high school forays in literature is the fact that the haiku style originated in Japan. Those with especially good memories or with school age children might recall the five-seven-five syllable count found in the standard three-line haiku poem. Despite a dearth of popular knowledge on the subject, the haiku form is alive, well, and has a global following. *African American Haiku: Cultural Visions*, edited by professor of English at Mississippi Valley State University John Zheng and published by the University Press of Mississippi, addresses one constituency not often associated with the poetry style. The compilation of essays effectively reveals the affinity many black writers have had for the expressive Asian poetry form, while also underscoring how these writers have transformed haiku composition into something uniquely American.

African American Haiku consists of ten essays that explore the most prolific black writers of the form such as Richard Wright, James Emmanuel, Sonia Sanchez, Etheridge Knight, and Lenard D. Moore. The contributors to the edition who shed light on the aforementioned poets are all respected in their fields and well chosen for their diverse backgrounds. Contributors include professors in Japan where the haiku form originated, including Toru Kiuchi and Sachi Nakachi, along with distinguished faculty in America such as Sheila Smith McKoy and Yoshinobu Hakutani. With the excep-



tion of Meta L. Schettler, who is a professor of Africana studies, the remainder of the contributors are either English faculty members or as in the case of Claude Wilkinson a literary critic. The most revelatory concept addressed by all of the volume's contributors is the relationship between the haiku and American musical forms such as jazz and the blues. Both African American created musical styles are noted for their informal composition, expressive nature, and nuanced lyrics that can assume multiple meanings depending on the listener. Traditional haiku poetry shares many of these attributes making it a better vehicle for African American expression than might initially meet the eye. While remaining true to the basic haiku pattern, African American writers brought to it their own cultural and historical experiences and transformed it into something more clearly western, especially in the emphasis they placed on persons and ideas instead of on nature in their work. Even writers such as Richard Wright, whose 4,000 haiku poems most closely followed tradition, transformed the genre by emphasizing the catastrophic side of nature rather than its serene renderings typically found in traditional Japanese efforts.

For all of its strengths, *African American Haiku* suffers from a general lack of cohesion. Little in the essays ties the flowering of cultural innovation that included haiku poetry evident during the Harlem Renaissance with the modern output of esteemed poets such as Lenard Moore. Non-specialists will find the work more than a little opaque as its constituent parts assume extensive background in literary criticism. Those looking for an in-depth historical study of the life and times of the highlighted poets and an expansive analysis of the intersection of culture, history, and the lived experience that traces the composition of haiku poems across time in the African American community will find the essays in this collection disappointing. The essays tend to be long on interpretation of a given poet's principal body of work and short on a larger assessment of the haiku form and its relevance to the African American experience. To aid the uninitiated, an introductory paragraph composed by the volume's editor at the start of each essay would have added a thread of continuity between the essays. Those well-versed in American poetry and familiar with the authors privileged in this work, however, will find that the book suitably contrasts the African American manifestation of haiku with more traditional approaches to the form. Interpretational shortfalls aside, this slender volume provides those interested in absorbing more on the African American experience or on the literature that it spawned an impetus to dig deeper into the work of the five featured poets addressed in the book.

--Keith Finley

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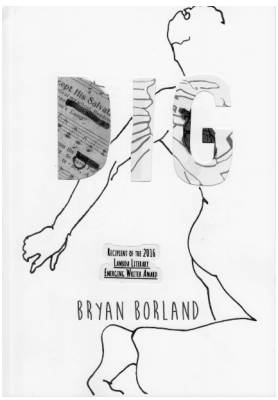
Dig. By Bryan Borland. (Fairfax, VA: Stillhouse Press, 2016. Pp. 72, acknowledgments, notes. $17.00, paper)

When I saw the title *Dig*, I—like many other poetry fans no doubt—thought of famed Irish poet Seamus Heaney's poem "Digging," in which he compares his chosen profession of writing to the strenuous work his father and grandfather did cutting dried peat to use as household fuel. The speaker in "Digging" opens and closes the poem saying, "Between my finger and my thumb / The squat pen rests"—adding at the end, "I'll dig with it." And dig with his pen is exactly what Bryan Borland does in his collection of poems about life and love—what else is there?



The first poem, "Dig," sets the stage, asking the questions "What is a poet? What is a husband?" (p. 7) Borland is both, and he delves into the emotional and physical experiences that make up a relationship—with a reader and with a partner. And physicality is a major theme throughout the poems, evidenced on the cover of the book, which features a cut out of the word *DIG*, offering a view of a ribcage, heart, and piece of music underneath. The title of an early poem is "The Body Is a Damn Hard Thing to Kill" and yet many other poems consider whether that is true, with the speaker, in "These Boys," relaying a near drowning that led to definite kissing in the Colorado River and, in "New Drug," opening a discussion with a physician about prescribing Truvada, a drug that reduces the risk of contracting HIV; the poem's speaker and his partner "come from a long line of great vanishing" (p. 42), but the doctor doesn't have those same experiences: "His wife isn't queer. From his box he talks down" (p. 42). And even the dead resist being killed; in "Don't Kill the Dead," the speaker says, "I'm learning not to kill / the dead in every poem. I've written poems about / my brother's death, an entire book about my father's / death / . . .The long dead, I'm learning, become quiet with age. / . . . I cannot remember / my brother's voice. The poetry of it / abandons me" (p. 31). The speaker says in the same poem, "We're designed to disappear like this" (p. 31), even as he captures the dead's existence on the page. Hard to kill indeed. In "The Significance of Matthew," the speaker references Matthew Shepard, a twenty-one-year-old gay man in Wyoming who was beaten by two men and later died of his injuries, and says that the much publicized murder made his own mother, and others, aware of what homophobia could do and that they had to pick whose side they were on: "Enough falls have passed that now I see what she stood to lose. When Matthew was murdered, / my mother couldn't forget his face. / When Matthew was murdered, the fence- / sitters had to choose." (p. 26) Shepard was hard to kill, too, living for six more days after he was tied to a fence and left for dead. Borland shows that his memory remains very much alive for many, especially gay men in present-day America, where life is not necessarily safer than it was almost twenty years after Shepard's murder.

Many poems deal with being gay—and coupled—in America, in the South, in Arkansas. Particularly striking is "Easter in Your Hometown," in which the speaker says, "I've married into religion, mothered by your Pentecostal ma who calls us *the boys*, / who prayed so hard for a son she made a god / who made you" (p. 55). She writes the speaker's birthday on the kitchen calendar, accepting him as her son's husband, as part of the family: "This is resurrection, I know. The end of one / faith. The beginning of another" (p. 55). Poems grapple with being coupled but not necessarily monogamous (also related to the Truvada discussion with the doctor); in "Santa Monica Without You," the speaker says, "Walking alone in the sand felt like cheating. / Another man's hand doesn't feel like cheating. / Twice last week the question. Are you open? / Twice last week the answer in too many words. / Yes. / And no. / And yes. / It's easy for me to accept the smell of foreign beds on your body. / It's impossible for me to accept the salt of Santa Monica on mine" (p. 44). But in a poem later in the book, the speaker decides to get rid of the Truvada pills, saying, "Do you know I take / these pills to protect myself from myself? / Do you know why I hit delete this morning, / hit reset, and flushed those pills away? / Because you've given me enough rope / to hang these shirts of other boys / that never really fit, then close the door / and crawl into bed next to you (p. 67). Like many couples, the speaker and his husband consider what parenthood would mean for them, if they would be good parents. In "Mirror Boys," the speaker says (highlighting the double meaning of "chest"—a place to hold tools of building and a place to hold items of value and a heart and other tools of living), "My husband thinks of his own father's chest / of knowledge and worries he does-

n't have the tools to / build a son into being" (p. 57). Parenthood means digging into the past for guidance and into the self for strength but also building something new.

As a poetry lover, as Borland obviously is as well, I appreciate his references to other poets I love—others who have dug with their pens before him: Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath, William Carlos Williams, Emily Dickinson. Like these poets, Borland posits ample concrete imagery and autobiographical content for the reader to hang on to, but he leaves some things elusive and personal, too. I look forward to seeing what else he will unearth as he continues to live and love and dig and write.

--Ali Welky

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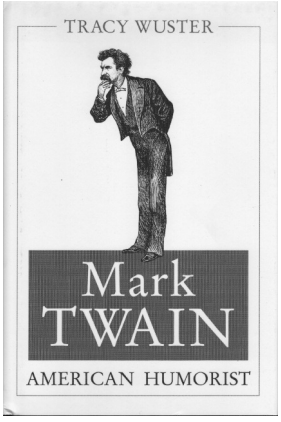
Mark Twain: American Humorist. By Tracy Wuster. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2016. Pp. ix-xvi + 372, list of abbreviations, acknowledgments, introduction, notes, bibliography, index of works, index of subjects. $60, hardback)

The image of Mark Twain arrayed in a white suit, sporting a wild shock of white hair, and emitting wisdom and wit with puffs of smoke is so iconic that the younger Twain in early photographs is often unrecognizable. A comparable challenge confronts anyone attempting to understand Twain's career, for, as Wuster argues, many studies of Twain are not grounded in the cultural context of Twain's emergence into the literary world. Wuster offers a detailed re-creation of these contexts as he analyzes the evolving status of American humor, grants order to the progression of Twain's early career, and delivers nuanced readings of key moments that formed Twain's literary reputation.

Wuster grounds this study on a close analysis of the status of humor in American culture at the time of Twain's rise. In his introduction, Wuster notes that his purpose is "to trace how the development of Mark Twain's reputation occurred" and that "[t]he old sage Mark Twain thus must be put out of mind for the remainder of the book" (p. 4, p. 10). He points out that Twain entered the American consciousness as a humorist when the literary value granted to humor was in flux and when the worth of humorists was determined by a "dynamic series of debates in which different critics attempted to shape the relative value of humorists through often inconsistent arguments" (p. 3). In addition to surveying the intricacies of American constructs of humor, Wuster offers insights into British views of American literature in that age. Rather than disparaging American humor as low art, British critics often argued that humor was the "first expressions of a national literature," and Wuster provides close study of numerous instances in which Twain fulfilled and challenged hierarchies on both sides of the Atlantic (p. 39).



While stressing the mutability of the literary context and the contested role of humor in American literature, Wuster grants meaningful order to Twain's career from the "birth" of "Mark Twain" in 1863 to his rise to literary prominence in the 1880s. Focusing on "the dominant critical images of Mark Twain, the main cultural locations in which he was discussed, and Samuel Clemens's efforts to shape his literary reputation," Wuster identifies three stages of Twain's early career that can "be useful tools" with which to probe the meanings of Mark Twain (p. 25). The first stage consists of

the three years from the creation of Mark Twain to his move from California to the East in 1866, years during which he experimented with his humorous personae in newspapers, magazines, and lectures. The second stage runs from Twain's arrival in the East to the publication of Howell's laudatory review of *The Innocents Abroad* in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1869, a stage in which Twain attempted to appeal to a more genteel audience. Wuster traces the third stage from Howell's review to Twain's speech at a breakfast banquet held in honor of Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1879, years during which, Wuster notes, critics viewed Twain's inclusion in high literary society with ambivalence and Twain viewed this inclusion with anxiety.

Wuster provides nuanced readings of key moments that dramatized Twain's evolving literary status. One such moment is Howell's review of in which Howells argued that Twain was a humorist who was "quite worthy of the company of the best," and Wuster analyzes how Howells used the aspects of Twain's humor to place him within the boundaries of literary realism and high literature (p. 122). Wuster also offers fresh insights into one of the most discussed moments of Twain's career, the Whittier Birthday Speech. After reiterating how this speech has commonly been interpreted as an embarrassment for Twain or as a subversive attack upon the literary establishment, Wuster uses this episode to illustrate the precariousness of Twain's literary status and the cultural ambivalence toward humor. Wuster closes his survey with observations about Twain's speech at a breakfast banquet for Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1879, a performance that Wuster notes is often seen as putting Twain back in good graces with the literary elite following the controversies of the Whitter speech. Wuster notes, however, that Clemens was never "able to escape the tensions that had helped to shape Mark Twain's early reputation" (p. 355).

In addition to offering a thorough study of the intersection of the history of American humor and Twain's early career, Wuster delivers engaging forays into numerous related topics, such as the lecture and lyceum circuits, subscription publishing, the influence of literary magazines, Howell's definition of realism, and critical receptions of Twain's books. Most importantly, however, Wuster succeeds at the formidable task of presenting the early Twain as he attempted to navigate the dark and shifting waters of literary taste.

--Phillip Howerton

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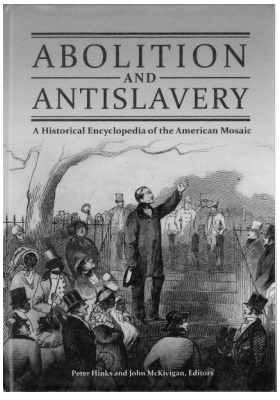
Abolition and Antislavery: A Historical Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic. Edited by Peter Hinks and John McKivigan. (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood 2015. Pp. v-xxxii + 447, list of entries, list of primary documents, preface, introduction, chronology, primary documents, selected bibliography, index, about the editors. $100, hardcover)

Abolition and Antislavery collects 146 thematic and biographical entries concerning important people, issues, and events in the history of emancipation to 1865. The book includes an introductory history of slavery, beginning with the Greeks and the Islamic world and continuing on into the European colonies. The book is another solid entry in Greenwood Press's library of historical encyclopedias. The editors do a commendable job of balancing the contributions of male and female, white and black, violent and nonviolent abolitionists.

The book also skillfully compares slavery in Britain and the United States. England was the leading slave trader in the eighteenth century, but became the foremost opponent of the prac-

tice by the 1830s. England's efforts to end slavery provide useful comparisons with the United States' role in it. England compensated planters in the West Indies, and England managed abolition and emancipation without the necessity of civil war. People in the United States, in contrast, often floated schemes of compensated emancipation and the colonization of black people as a means to end slavery, but in the end, it took four years of war to eradicate human bondage.

This volume contains many welcome entries, among them one on Cassius Clay, the Kentucky politician who was something of an anti-slavery Andrew Jackson. Despite having owned slaves, Clay spoke out against the institution. After the Civil War, he became a Democrat. And at the age of 83, he married a fifteen-year-old girl and gained notoriety for shooting a black man with a pistol. Unfortunately, I can only comment on a few articles in a short review, but the entries concerning the Quakers show that their role in American antislavery was more complicated than I had believed. Despite the fact that they believe in non-violence, Quakers were not necessarily abolitionists. Some owned slaves and others joined the army during the Civil War to end the institution. When it comes to the transatlantic slave trade, Claire Phelan provides a good overview of the African Squadron, the vessels that policed the international slave trade. As Phelan shows, the American effort to stop smuggling was ineffectual, with the result being that foreign imports of slaves did not end until after the Civil War.



Some of the historians who wrote for this volume are familiar to scholars, but I would like to have had a list of contributors at the end of the book, with information concerning their institutional affiliations. As is inevitable in the world of encyclopedias, there are entries that seem thin, while other subjects are omitted entirely. I found it curious that the book contained few details on the human toll of various slave insurrections. The Stono Rebellion, for example, killed more than "several whites," (340) and the articles on the Haiti revolt and Nat Turner are surprisingly sterile.

Abolition and Antislavery contains much good information, but it is hardly comprehensive. I would have liked entries on St. George Tucker, Fanny Kemble, Maria Stewart, Edmund Burke, the Zong case, Robert Gould Shaw, the 54th Massachusetts infantry, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the Point Coupee rebellion of 1795, reparations for slavery, Solomon Northup, Sherman's Special Field Orders No. 15, and John C. Calhoun (especially given that an excerpt from Calhoun's 1837 "positive good" speech is included in the primary documents appendix). I was also surprised to see no entry on the Dred Scott decision, perhaps the most important Supreme Court case in our country's history and one that had a profound effect on the slavery debate.

Perhaps the most difficult thing to assess here is this book's audience. This book would certainly find a welcome place on the shelf of anyone interested in the subject matter. It has, however, a high price tag. A student looking for information examined in this volume, for example, might be as well served going to *Wikipedia* or one of many other online reference works. Thus, this book's likely readers will be undergraduates and students in secondary education looking for a helpful and convenient source in the library. A graduate student could benefit from using this book in preparation for general exams, especially the more thematic articles written by such authorities as Paul Finkelman and Jon David Smith. Hugh Davis's entry on gradual emancipation and Eric Burin's article on manumission are also particularly strong.

Greenwood Press has had great success in issuing encyclopedias such as this, and I have

written entries for other volumes. I would be interested in attending a conference panel where scholars and publishers debated the merits of printed versus online encyclopedias. I can't help but think that the Internet has changed forever the merits of published reference works. Nevertheless, should one read *Abolition and Ani-Slavery* cover to cover, the reader will be reminded that slavery was not merely a southern problem. Some northern states did not rid themselves of slavery until well into the nineteenth century. New Jersey still had slaves as of 1865. One will also be reminded of how difficult and violent the effort to end slavery was. And yet, slavery still exists in the world. Today's progressives should take heed.

--Colin Woodward

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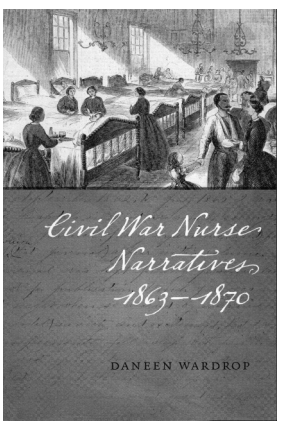
Civil War Nurse Narratives 1863–1870. By Daneen Wardrop. (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2015. Pp. ix + 204, acknowledgments, conclusion, notes, bibliography, index. $55.00, paper)

Unlike published first-hand accounts by military veterans of the Civil War, which immediately appeared in significant numbers and captivated the nation's reading public, personal narratives by the conflict's female participants proved a comparative rarity. In spite of a conservative estimate of approximately 20,000 female nurses who served on behalf of the Union during the Civil War, as well as thousands more who participated as civilian relief agents, sanitary commission volunteers and freed persons, a mere twelve personal accounts of female service appeared in print between 1863 and 1870.

That period of publication is crucial to the analysis of Daneen Wardrop, Professor of English at Western Michigan University, as materials published in the war's immediate aftermath offer a more detailed reflection on the impact of wartime service upon the changing nature of the American women's public roles and post-war opportunities. As with the work published by their male contemporaries, women's personal accounts published in later years expressed a different tone that is characterized increasingly by romanticism and attempts to contribute to sectional reconciliation.

The seven authors whose early memoirs Wardrop chose for analysis include Louisa May Alcott, Georgeanna Woolsey, Julia Dunlap, Elvira Powers, Anna Morris Holstein, Sophronia Bucklin, and Julia Wheelock. Some of the narratives are well-known and often cited, such as Alcott's 1863 classic *Hospital Sketches*, while Powers's 1866 *Hospital Pencilings* are less well-known and Julia Dunlap's 1864 authorship of *Notes of Hospital Life* was only verified in 2010. Arranged in chronological order by date of their original publication these narratives cover a wide range of experiences and locations, including service in large traditional hospitals in Philadelphia and the nation's capital, as well as Holstein's work in the field as chronicled in her 1867 memoir, *Three Years in Field Hospitals of the Army of the Potomac*.



Mostly young and unmarried, their experiences and motivations reflect their shared sense of idealism. Although motivated by patriotic sentiments similar to their male contemporaries, and as a natural extension of the traditional care-giving role associated with the concept of Republican motherhood, many women also viewed their wartime service as an opportunity to publicly expand upon the private, social or humanitarian causes they championed prior to the conflict. Wardrop's analysis

places these accounts in the context of three major social concerns of the nineteenth century (i.e. women's rights, interracial relations, and development of a national character). Women like Alcott and Powers published their narratives not merely to describe their experiences, but to justify them in relation to those larger social issues and desired historical change. Wardrop convincingly argues that these authors consciously analyzed and explained their wartime experiences not merely as an example of generalized patriotism, but also as a strategy to bridge the gap between public acceptance of the established traditional female role of caregiver in the private sphere of the household to a public role that helped redefine potential post-war occupational and educational options for America's increasingly modern female citizens. Although the priorities of war necessarily reduced the opportunity for female reform activism as practiced prior to the war, the conflict offered an opportunity to extend their antebellum opposition to slavery (while sometimes challenging their existing assumptions). It also allowed them a chance to make a practical and public demonstration of female potential in the workplace and, thereby, to the on-going development of the national character.

Personal and professional problems or obstacles (as well as the frequent lack of official support for grievances) will resonate with the modern reader. Overwork, under-appreciation by military and civilian authorities, power struggles with misogynistic surgeons or hospital administrators, and sexual harassment, all occur in abundance and suggest the slow pace of historical change.

With service as a nurse and matron in military hospitals in Indiana and Tennessee, tending to soldiers, civilians and refugees of all description and loyalties, Powers's observations stands out as arguably the most varied and insightful of the publications included in Wardrop's study. As the only publication in the study to detail service in the Western Theater it is intriguing to ponder how Wardrop's thesis might be further enhanced by additional female accounts from those important arenas of the war.

By pairing lesser known first-person accounts with some of the war's most famous female memoirs, *Civil War Nurse Narratives 1863–1870* helps shine a worthwhile new light on these sources, and adds an important and thought-provoking contribution to our understanding of how women's wartime roles affected not only the conflict itself but also the development of the nation that emerged in the years that followed its conclusion.

--Robert Patrick Bender

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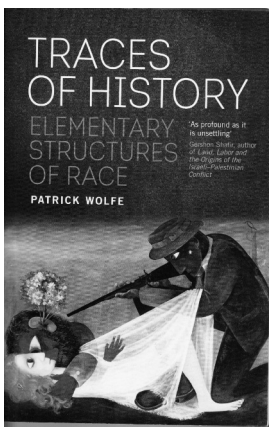
Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race. By Patrick Wolfe. (New York: Verso, 2016. Pp. 296, acknowledgments, select bibliography, index. $29.95, softcover)

The idea that race constitutes a social construct, rather than a biological reality, has been rather universally accepted, but less well understood have been the "traces of history," to use Patrick Wolfe's term, which produced a global array of different racial formations. For example, the American black-white divide, with its roots in slavery, functions differently than does the Australian, with roots in settler colonialism that better parallel the Native American experience. Nor does a term like "racial justice" mean the same thing for African Americans



and Native Americans. For the first group, who were subject to various forms of legal segregation, it has meant inclusion into white-controlled social and political spheres, while for the latter, who were subject to intense pressure to assimilate into white society as individuals, justice has meant tribal sovereignty and self-determination.

As Patrick Wolfe writes at the beginning of *Traces of History*, "racial constructs emerge at different times as well as in different places. Thus it is reasonable to question the grounds for treating these multifarious differentiating practices under the one rubric" of race (p. 6). An Australian scholar, Wolfe begins his world tour of racial formation in his native country, a settler state whose attempts to assimilate Aboriginal peoples have been "part and parcel of the settler campaign to suppress their uniqueness, which irreducibly comes down to territoriality, to the political matter of their ongoing connection with the land that has been physically taken from them" (p. 57–58). In the United States, a different black-white binary regime was imposed, a one-drop rule that forever separated anyone with black ancestry from whiteness; of course, the origin of this rule lay in slavery and the desire, on the part of slave-owners, to mark as property any offspring of a slave. Wolfe next explores anti-Semitism in central Europe, observing that the experience of Jews in some respects mirrored that of Natives and Aborigines, the ghettos being an equivalent to the reservation, but the emancipation of both Jews and African Americans did not result in assimilation but rather in violence and other measures to prevent the acquisition of political and economic power. Wolfe's chapter on Brazil is particularly enlightening, as he demonstrates how the present "Brazilian baroque" of racial classification resulted from a unique set of material circumstances that favored manumission—not because the Portuguese were more humanitarian, but because, in part, slaves were cheap for them (they owned both ends of the trade, Brazil and Angola) and the brutal work on sugar plantations made upkeep for old and indigent slaves less attractive for owners. The second half of the book opens with two chapters on the Native American experience, the first covering the shifting legalities behind Indian Removal, exploring in particular the desire to open up Native lands to exploitation by slave labor, while the second covers the reservation era and the emergence of "blood quantum" as a tribal identity marker. The last two chapters analyze Israel as a settler colonial state that employs the Palestinian and Arab "other" as a means to cover over internal divisions in Jewish identity.

While the parts of this book most pertinent to the Mississippi River Delta experience are those covering slavery, Jim Crow, and Indian Removal, there is a broader value in Wolfe's global exploration and explication of racial formation and its relationship to specific material circumstances. Thinking about race as "traces of history" can allow for the investigation of more specifically local regimes of race that existed. For example, in their book (2015), Amy Kate Bailey and Stewart E. Tolnay examined how such factors as income or place of origin could play a role in determining the victims of lynching. Moreover, the shape of local economies often determined whether African Americans would be valued for their labor and thus protected (paternalistically) from vigilante violence or hated as possible competitors for land and jobs and thus expelled from communities. Too, Wolfe illustrates how the operations of capitalism not only produce regimes of race but complicate those same projects. Brazil imported foreign labor to undermine emancipated slaves and their descendants, while Israel also worked to attract foreigners, even broadening the definition of "Jew," in order to avoid economically empowering the Palestinian natives. This certainly has its parallel in the Delta, where plantation owners conducted various "experiments" with Italian and Chinese laborers so as to sideline the local black population, no longer so ideally meek and subservient after

the end of slavery.

As Wolfe writes, "Race, it cannot be stressed enough, is a process, not an ontology, its varying modalities so many dialectical symptoms of the ever-shifting hegemonic balance between those with a will to colonize and those with a will to be free, severally racialized in relation to each other" (p. 18). By tracing these traces of history, by showing the discrete processes that created ideologies of racism, Wolfe provides not only an enlightening study of an American—and global—dilemma, but also the tools for undermining these ideologies and working toward justice.

--Guy Lancaster

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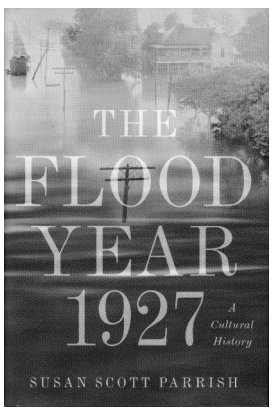
The Flood Year 1927: A Cultural History by Susan Scott Parrish. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017. Pp. ix – xi + 396, list of illustrations, acknowledgments, notes, permission acknowledgements, index. $35, hardcover)

Early in her new study *The Flood Year 1927: A Cultural History*, Susan Scott Parrish, a Professor of English at the University of Michigan, explains that the Mississippi River's tributary tendrils extend into an "area [that] covers about 40 percent of the United States" and whose "reach makes it not only a regional but fully continental land feature" (p. 22). The geographic reach of the river is important to note, because when months of abnormal weather conditions prompted an unheralded overflow of the river's banks in April of 1927, all of America felt its resonances. It was not only through physical experience that Americans were affected, however. As Parrish argues in her fascinating text, the flooding reveals as much about environmental destruction, as it does the ways in which popular and literary texts mediated and alerted the public of disasters. Through an exploration of the environmental impacts catalyzing and resulting from the flood, the print media's reception and distribution of information, Vaudeville's attempts to perform flood scenes to raise awareness of the disaster, music cultures that narrativized the flood, and the flood's resultant mark on the American literary canon, Parrish approaches the flood and its cultures from a variety of angles all in the service of demonstrating "how groups, working across multiple media and genres, and often in conflict with each other, made the flood significant" (p. 18).

While Parrish's ambitious study covers the 1927 flood and its significance on American culture, it avoids feeling overwhelming in its scope thanks largely to the author's decision to include brief interludes at the onset of each section that familiarize the reader with the critical trajectory of a given field. For example, the study's second section, which concerns the various modes of relief and conversation which took place in the immediate aftermath of the flood, begins with an informative consideration of how media diffused the event and "created another public much larger than the contiguous comprised in the disaster zone: those who read newspapers and magazines, listened to radio and records, watched movie reels, and attended Vaudeville benefits" (p. 57).



One of the primary modes of media Parrish discusses is print newspapers. How the press, particularly Northern and African American news outlets, mediated their audiences' understandings of the flood concerns Parrish for a significant portion of her work. Although the information disseminated through these venues

proved instrumental in spreading awareness of the flood's devastation and engendering donations and charity benefits, "the perception and transmission of 'facts' [were] not necessarily neutral" (p. 122). And thus, for all of the financial goodwill generated by the coverage, reporters (Parrish specifically notes H.L. Mencken) seldom missed an opportunity to highlight the perceived "chronic moral and physical hygiene problem[s]" of the Southern populace (p. 122), thereby furthering stereotypes about the South and encouraging Northern paternalism.

A note on the composition itself: It becomes evident early in the text that Parrish chooses not to confine herself to traditional literary analysis. Over the course of 290 pages, Parrish explores literary texts to be sure, but also theatrical history, critical race theory, comic studies, ecological criticism, and print culture. What emerges is a type of academic high-wire act. To witness Parrish write volubly and convincingly on such an array of subjects is absolutely thrilling. One such section that deserves specific attention is the lengthy consideration of Bessie Smith's "Back Water Blues."

In her fourth chapter, Parrish argues that blues icon Bessie Smith used her 1927 performances and recordings of "Back Water Blues," a song she composed about the flooding, "to tell a story about the black experience of lowland flooding to a more cross-racial and capacious audience than any journalistic medium could or did" (p. 142). To provide evidence supporting this argument, Parrish excavates the history of Smith's 1927 tour and how performing in both locales devastated by the flooding and those that remained dry, and to both black and white audiences, allowed Smith to present "attitudes and ideas about the flood while it was occurring to a large multiracial, multiregional public" (p. 126). Beyond historicity, though, Parrish further provides a line-by-line close reading of both the lyrical and, remarkably, the sonic components of Smith's song, where she explores how the lyrics alongside vibratos and melismata assisted "Back Water Blues" in "becoming the anthem of the 1927 flood" (p. 131).

If there is one section that falls short it is Parrish's argument that Faulkner forces psychoanalytic criticism and Freud "out of doors" (p. 210) by imbedding environmental trauma as a key component of Quentin Compson's psyche in *The Sound and the Fury*. While this section forms a compelling argument in its own right, it doesn't require the 1927 flood in order to work. In other words, Parrish delivers a strong eco-psychoanalytic reading of Faulkner's text, but not one that feels inexorable to the Great Flood of 1927 and therefore not wholly necessary to Parrish's overall argument.

The subheading of Parrish's study is *A Cultural History* and readers would be well served to remember that when approaching the text. While Parrish's work reveals the concatenate intricacies between historical event and artistic interpretation, it does not perform this feat in an overtly accessible fashion; this is an academic work, after all. Scholars interested, therefore, in Faulkner and Wright's oeuvres, early twentieth-century print and media culture, Vaudeville, or the blues will undoubtedly discover much to admire in this work. Conversely, those with a more general interest in the Great Flood itself and stories of the chaos and survival during the flood itself might find a more accessible entry point in John M. Barry's classic *Rising Tid*e. For those with a keen interest in disasters and the cultures they produce, however, Parrish's work is invaluable. Rarely has so ambitious and capacious a project been executed so articulately and gracefully.

--Jim Coby

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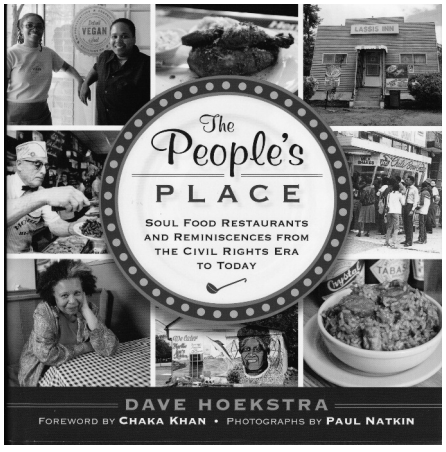
The People's Place: Soul Food Restaurants and Reminiscences from the Civil Rights Era. By Dave Hoestra. (Chicago: Chicago Re-

view Press, 2015. vii + 224. $29.95, cloth)

Former *Chicago Sun-Times* reporter Dave Hoestra's *The People's Place* offers readers a tour of twenty or so iconic soul food restaurants in locations ranging from Chicago to New Orleans to parts in between. The book is part travelogue, part folk ethnography, and part historical narrative. Scholars of African American food history may quibble with some of



Hoestra's claims (including, for example, the idea that Amiri Baraka single handedly invented the term "soul food"), but such factual quibbles are beside the point for a book that is designed to be more evocative than didactic. In a style befitting his status as a former Studs Terkel Awards winner, Hoestra endeavors to capture the voices of the proprietors and patrons of community landmarks like the famous Sylvia's restaurant, which serves abundant quantities of soul food staples to up to four hundred and fifty customers at time in Harlem, to the less well-known Lassis Inn, a tiny, vibrant blue restaurant that dishes up only fish to its patrons in Little Rock.

Although the book features recipes in each chapter, Hoestra is more interested in the role these establishments played as important meeting places during the civil rights movement and beyond than in the food they served. Hoestra marvels at the storied past of places like Paschal's in Atlanta where Martin Luther King, Jr. and his supporters strategized over early morning breakfasts and of Ben's Chili Bowl in Washington D.C, which served as a safe haven for activists struggling to channel communal rage after King's assassination in 1968. Hoestra's skills as an interviewer become apparent as he inspires his narrators to confide in him—and by extension in his readers—about the emotional significance of cooking and dining in places of great historical and cultural significance to the black community. It becomes clear that the black owned restaurants that predated the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawing segregation in public accommodations have become sites of nostalgia that conjure up memories of once vibrant black commercial districts. Paradoxically, the political gains of integration led to financial losses among the black business community. Reverend Robert Smith, Jr. of Detroit told Hoestra that "We lost so much with social integration" (p. 88). Similarly, David Swett, owner of a "meat and three" restaurant in Nashville, fondly remembered bygone days, remarking, "Colored people were nice to one another when I was a child. They all took care of one another" (p. 110).

Although loss is a recurrent theme in the book, it is not the predominant one. Collectively the proprietors profiled in *The People's Place* are, according to Hoestra, unified in their belief that "soul food is love" (p. xii). Betty Joyce Chester-Tamayo, the owner of Alcenia's restaurant in Memphis, acts out this ethos by not only serving food that "brings people together from different races" but also by greeting each customer with a hug (p. 48). Thanks to the candor of Chester-Tamayo and others who were equally willing to share stories and recipes, many passages of *The People's Place* contain something of the intimacy in an embrace.

--Jennifer Jensen Wallach

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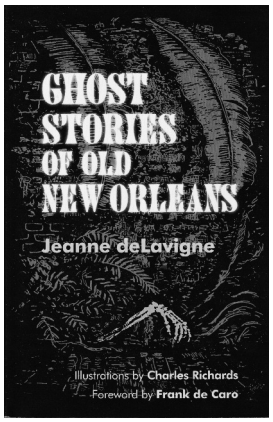
Ghost Stories of Old New Orleans. By Jeanne deLavigne. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2013. Pp. ix-xxii + 374, foreword, author's note. $22.50, paperback)

Jeanne deLavigne's collection, *Ghost Stories of Old New Orleans* was originally published in 1946 by Rinehart & Company of New York but was out of print for decades and difficult to obtain except from rare book dealers until Louisiana State University Press rectified the situation with a new edition in 2013 and a second printing in 2016.

According to the dust jacket from the 1946 edition, "Where there's smoke, there's fire and where there's a ghost there's a story—that's what Jeanne deLavigne thought when she set out to make this superb collection of *Ghost Stories of Old New Orleans*. From the haunted streets and ghost ridden mansions of this old southern city she gathered the legends, and from old newspaper accounts and hearsay she found the facts. She has woven them together into tales calculated to rival the most fantastic invented by man." Despite this somewhat flowery praise, the book is definitely a collection of forty enjoyable stories, which deLavigne claimed she gathered through archival newspaper research, reading personal diaries, and conducting interviews. Academics will be disappointed, however, at the lack of sourcing throughout. In a few places, a specific newspaper is mentioned, but never enough for a scholar to find the same materials, and no first-person sources are identified.

DeLavigne had experience in journalism, having written for several newspapers throughout the south. She also collaborated with Jacques Rutherford to write two novels, *And the Garden Waited* and *Fox Fire*, as well as several short stories. Clearly, she relied less upon her journalistic background and more upon literary flair when crafting the stories in this collection. They read like entertaining fiction, replete with imagined dialogue, internal monologues, and carefully crafted character motivations, but there is a great deal of historical accuracy or explanation that deLavigne excluded or embellished to entertain. And, despite the lack of an organizational strategy, the stories are definitely entertaining, with many fully developed characters, intricate plots, and a wealth of historically compelling detail. Perhaps one of the reasons that a note at the beginning of the text declares "no one . . . has ever been able to hear more than one or two of its ghost stories" is that deLavigne has taken on the role of sharing versions of ghost stories she polished to an unrecognizable sheen, not repeating accurate oral history. In the process, she does offer an array of reasons for ghostly visitations, including love, betrayal, revenge, and a desire to communicate with a loved one, often about hidden riches left behind at death.



Readers should be warned that the book, as with most works of literature, reflects the context within which it was written; there are racial, ethnic, and stereotypically sexist slurs throughout the collection of stories. Also problematic is the stilted, hackneyed speech patterns that deLavigne invests her black characters with to make them "authentic." While certainly typical of prose during the time in which it was written, the presence of this nearly incomprehensible representation of dialect unfortunately may detract from the enjoyment of the stories for many readers.

There is also a significant sprinkling of French, Spanish, German, and Latin terms that reflect the diversity of New Orleans's populace

but may have younger readers searching for a translation or explanation. Additionally, deLavigne references streets and landmarks of the New Orleans area as if they are commonplace, obviously writing for an audience familiar with New Orleans, its geography, and its history in a way that many current readers will not be. Readers who benefit from a visual representation of location may want to keep a city map close by.

The illustrations used here are by New Orleans native Charles Richards and are from the original text. They have a dark macabre tone to them without being overtly graphic. They are used sparingly, with fewer than a dozen black and white sketches throughout, which is probably best as some readers might find them disturbing in nature, such as the abstract but meticulously rendered illustration of a person's skin devoid of a body which accompanies "Golden Slippers."

The new edition includes a foreword by Frank de Caro, a folklorist and LSU Professor Emeritus of English. De Caro also served as president of the Louisiana Folklore Society and editor of the *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*. De Caro's foreword is an excellent addition to this text. He places the work and the author within an academic framework and a historical context of the 1940s that adds gravitas to what might seem an otherwise less scholarly publication. He also shares details of the author's life that he and the publishers uncovered, including her death in 1962, and bemoans the lack of information about many facets of her life other than the well-known fact that she was born in New Orleans and her father came from France. Most importantly, De Caro emphasizes how important deLavigne's work is, not for the stories themselves, but for what they might provide to scholars studying folklore or the development of New Orleans and New Orleans cultural influences. Finally, De Caro mentions the continued influence that *Ghost Stories of Old New Orleans* has had on the culture of ghost beliefs in New Orleans.

Anyone interested in the cultural history of New Orleans, especially ghost tourism, might find this book especially interesting, as several stories deLavigne weaves remain compelling stops on New Orleans ghost tours, evidence of the continued impact of *Ghost Stories of Old New Orleans*.

--Valerie L. Guyant

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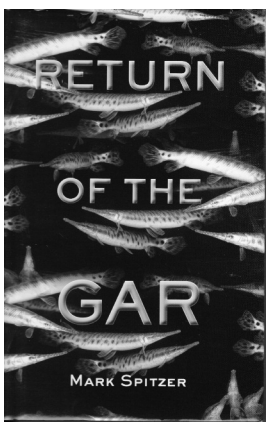
Return of the Gar. By Mark Spitzer. (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2015. Pp. 230, appendix. $24.95, hardcover)

Anyone who has been fishing knows how it works: you cast your line out into the water, aiming at some promising patch of water, then a whole bunch of not catching fish ensues. Sometimes the line catches in a branch and you have to balance on a rickety outcropping to free the filament and avoid a ragged nesting of nylon. Sometimes you think you have a big hulking monster when, instead, all you caught is a snag against some mighty sodden log, its weight pulling the rod over on itself while you curse your own stupidity and optimism. And, every now and again, you haul out a slippery gleaming fish (sometimes even the kind you meant to get) and swap out hours of not getting for the exhilaration of the one you've now got. Then you start over.



In the best way, Mark Spitzer's *Return of the Gar* works exactly like that. Fishing is his subject and his structure, specifically fishing for the rare, prehistoric-looking, fighting-to-re-

cover Alligator Gar of the American South. Along the way, Spitzer tosses back a healthy dose of gar puns, and lots of tales of fishing for gar (and other species), and plenty of natural history of the fish. Best of he all, he hauls out rare but glimmering metaphorical lyricisms.

Human relationships to natural spaces are the heart of this book, ultimately, which is itself a follow-up to his previous work of gar-based nonfiction (*Season of the Gar*, U Arkansas P, 2010). Spitzer writers about gar both because he cares about the literal animal and because the fate of it and its waterways demonstrates our perspective toward the environment. Part of his affection for fishing is aesthetic, when he writes about "co-existing with the richest type of quality of life possible," about fishing with children, and about "preserving our natural world as part of our history and our future, because we respect its mysteries" (p. 23).

But the best part of Spitzer's writing is when he spins toward the figurative, using the gar as a way to examine what humans are capable of. He writes notably about the gar he keeps in a fish tank at home, and how that isn't always easy:

> My gar has a tendency to thrash around, sometimes busting under-gravel filter tubes. . . . Filter stones need constant updating, and sometimes the water turns brown or green, and then I have to treat it with algae-eradicating chemicals, or add lake water with healthier micro-organisms.
>
> But that's what you have to do if you want to keep fish. Fisheries equal maintenance. Sure, fish used to maintain themselves on their own, but now that people are part of the equation—adding and subtracting to the water quality and bio-mass of virtually all populations—the equation has irreversibly changed. (p. 182)

In this passage, Spitzer makes it clear that just as he makes it work with his aquarium fish, so too are human making it work with wild gar, which he notes throughout the book as having made a clear, if tenuous, recovery. His point is that we can repair our relationship with the environment, can do things to protect the gar and the waterways in which they live, and that in fact we need to notice that we very much are. There are yahoos in his book who disrespect the fish, and whom Spitzer somehow still treats with respect, but through gestures he shows their behavior to be an anomaly, a relic, a throwback in the worst way, that animus to sling arrows into breeding gar, or wantonly kill and waste gar because it isn't immediately evident how to value the fish's position in the ecosystem, just as it's easy to stick with an antiquated and faulty notion of what counts as a trash fish and what counts at all.

"Because the true bottom line is this," Spitzer writes. "If you choose to ignore the obvious signs of a system in distress—when pipelines can burst at any instant—you can end up crushed and alone on a toxic lake." (p. 219)

More metaphor occurs there, linking with Spitzer's own literal adventures searching for gar in the United States and abroad. It's a soft and effective way of reeling in the truth of this book, that our system is in distress, very much because we fail to recognize how we need to act as stewards over the landscape, because we are affecting it whether we want to or not. By paying attention to the gar, Spitzer encourages readers to pay attention to the parts of our world easily ignored, to understand how we can scrub away the much that befouls the system so easily. That's the antidote to yahoos, and the hopeful future of the fish, and the great mystery he casts into our waters. All we have to do is fish.

--Matthew Ferrence

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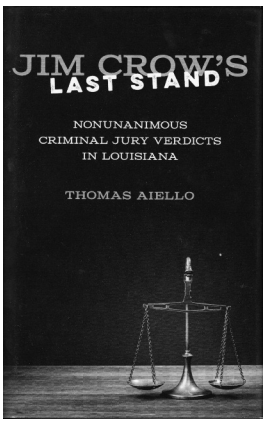
Jim Crow's Last Stand: Nonunanimous Criminal Jury Verdicts in Louisiana. **By Jim Aiello. (Baton Rouge: LA: LSU Press 2015. Pp. ix-xi + 169, preface, appendices,**

notes, bibliography, index. $40, hardcover)

In 1955 C. Vann Woodward's seminal *Strange Career of Jim Crow* disproved southerners' justification for segregation that claimed legal separation of blacks and whites had always existed, was natural and therefore should continue. Woodward, however, showed that segregation laws were relatively new and were enacted for reasons of white supremacy and African-American suppression. Likewise, Thomas Aiello's *Jim Crow's Last Stand* demonstrates that Louisiana's nonunanimous conviction was created because of racist motives. Despite changes in other Jim Crow era discriminatory laws, this system has withstood all legal challenges. Only one other state, Oregon, has nonunamimous convictions and that system was established in the 1930s because of racial prejudice.



When slavery ended, white Louisianans still wanted cheap labor. Louisiana, like other Southern states, developed a system of convict labor. During the post-war decades African American men could be arrested for a number of crimes, would not receive due process and were then sentenced to prison where companies and landowners could pay the state for their labor. Convict laborers were held in conditions that rivaled the brutality of slavery. This system of conviction for noncapital criminal cases with a 9 to 3 majority is not a legacy of the Napoleonic Code but was created in 1880 and became part of the state constitution in 1898.

After the war, Louisiana privatized the prison system by awarding a twenty-one year contract to a Confederate veteran, S. L. James, who leased a large plantation on the Mississippi River named Angola. The prison site was conveniently away from public scrutiny and was strategically located as a good staging area to ship convicts to other plantations whose owners wanted cheap labor. Three-quarters of convicts were African American and conditions under which they toiled were so horrendous that death rates were exorbitant; twenty percent of the convicts died in 1882. The nonunanimous system made for easier convictions because of the lower guilt standard and provided a steady supply of convicts for the penal system. Prosecutors often sought lower criminal charges to ensure high conviction rates.

This concise book is divided into ten short chapters, beginning with the challenge of Frank Johnson who was arrested for armed robbery in 1967. *Johnson v. Louisiana* (1972) made it to the Supreme Court which narrowly upheld nonunamimous juries and ruled that "consistency provided fairness, and fairness was the fundamental bedrock of due process" (p. 4). Aiello argues, "There is, after all, no necessary equivalence between consistency and fairness. Consistency provides process. Fairness provides people their due" (p. 4-5). The dissenting justices, not surprisingly, cited *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The following chapters are a type of historical flash back that chronicles the beginning and subsequent legal history of the maintaining the system. Following a short Epilogue are three useful Appendices that provide documents so readers can see the legal and constitutional decisions that have upheld the system: "Constitutional Jury Mandates," "The *Johnson* Decision," and "Louisiana Case Law."

Jim Crow's Last Stand should be required reading for every lawyer, law student, and judge in Louisiana because it provides vital historical context that is sorely absent in court cases and changes to the state constitution. It begs the question that if the people charging, defending, and sentencing Louisianans knew the history behind their state's legal system, would they

want nonunanimous juries to continue? This reviewer is left wanting a follow up study that falls outside the purview of a historian. Why does Louisiana not analyze the effect of this system on conviction rates? Oregon analyzed conviction rates and found they were much higher than they would be with unanimous juries. Would Louisiana find higher conviction rates similar to Oregon's study? What do prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, police officers, legislators, and not least, the people arrested think of this last legal vestige, the Redeemer movement? Civil rights activists managed to change disfranchisement and segregation laws. Nonunamious juries are just as much a part of the racist Jim Crow policies. Redeemers developed this system to provide ample convict labor for a for-profit prison system. So much for blindfolded Lady Justice holding her scales and sword. *Jim Crow's Last Stand* is an important book that provides activists with historical facts to make arguments for justice. Thomas Aiello could be the C. Vann Woodward of Louisiana today, providing historical context to a racially biased legal system.

--Minoa D. Uffelman

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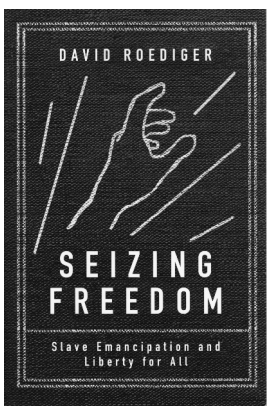
Seizing Freedom: Slave Emancipation and Liberty for All. By David Roediger. (New York: Verso, 2015. Pp. 230, afterword, list of illustrations, acknowledgments, index. $19.95, paper)

Seizing Freeedom is primarily concerned with the agency of slaves themselves. In it, historian David Roediger argues that contrary to many current readings of emancipation that locate the impetus for ending slavery in the political efforts of abolitionists and in the actions of President Lincoln, it was the work of enslaved people to self-emancipate that drove the politics of the Civil War era and ultimately resulted in Lincoln's Proclamation freeing them. Furthermore, the example set by the slaves inspired other groups to attempt their own seizures of human rights. Though perhaps not as indispensable to those interested in the cultural history of race and class in the United States as his groundbreaking *The Wages of Whiteness* (1993) or its tremendous follow-up, *Working Towards Whiteness* (2005), *Seizing Freedom* offers several new takes on this history with its connections of the formation of white working class identity to gender and disability, and its discussion of the brief post-Civil War moment in which "emancipation from whiteness" was politically possible for a wide range of formerly subordinate and marginal groups, led by previously free and newly freed persons of color. Although a Nineteenth Century "rainbow coalition" ultimately failed to materialize beyond the first years of Reconstruction, for a short time, radical rearrangements of social hierarchies, political power, and notions of private property were potentially possible.

Roediger seeks to revive W.E.B. DuBois's neglected interpretation of the war period as shaped by the "general strike of the slaves" comprised of "the massive defection . . . of perhaps a half a million slaves and daily mutiny by a far greater number who stayed but resisted plantation labor" (pp. 4-5). In a sudden burst of activity, an event that Roediger likens to "revolutionary time" (a concept formulated by historians of the French Revolution), they aimed to remake their lives through "Jubilee," the cyclical time of liberation and debt forgiveness described in Leviticus. Given the opportunity to gain freedom through Jubilee, those in bondage took it, and contra-



bands and the newly emancipated doggedly pursued literacy and education for themselves and their children, the rebuilding of family ties torn asunder during slavery, control over their own labor, and political suffrage—often for both men and women. In Arkansas, for example, former slaves "built organizations" that publically empowered women (p. 58). Above all, freedpeople sought self-sufficiency through attempts to gain land ownership and through participation in post-war era politics.

For nearly a decade, slaves inspired many other socially subordinate groups, and the effects of the violence of war on the bodies of soldiers challenged notions of white masculinity and male supremacy. The massive Federal pension program set up for disabled veterans "interrupted any firm connections between being a deserving citizen [a prerequisite for suffrage] and being white" or male (pp. 76-77). Disability itself was contradictory, celebrated as evidence of heroism (independence) yet also covered over because it represented infirmity (dependence). During the war, the rank and file Union troops' "practical relations with contrabands" began to change white soldiers' understanding of slaves and recruited them to abolitionism. Post war, being dependent called into question white masculinity itself: "ubiquitous encounters with unthinkable suffering [in the bodies of maimed soldiers] demonstrated how fragile and ordinary white male ability was" (p. 82).

In chapter three, Roediger shows how the general strike of the slaves impacted the labor and women's suffrage movements. For a time these groups tried "to build alliances among people who shared experiences of oppression" (p. 106). However, while there was a new consciousness of solidarity among them, whites were largely blind to the common class struggle they shared with ex-slaves, proving unable, for instance, to see the connections between localized plantation strikes in the South and their own industrial conditions in the North, or their shared concern for a shorter working day. Further, the labor reform movement was largely unconcerned with the land reform question central to freedpeople. Likewise Roediger considers the missed opportunity for a lasting alliance between the feminist movement and the black suffrage movement. Antebellum linkages between women's suffrage and abolition were strong, and the war brought new visibility and opportunity for women; yet the coalition between suffragettes and the newly emancipated did not survive the 1860s, splintered by the question of what should be prioritized as achievable: universal suffrage, black male suffrage, or (white) female suffrage?

The collapse of the alliance with the longest history—the feminists with the abolitionists turned black suffrage movement—presaged the lost opportunities for sweeping social change in the Reconstruction period. Chapter four describes how it all fell apart: "racialized and gendered class formations and the political system did not permit revolutionary time to continue" (p. 148). Half the women's suffrage movement collapsed into racist and anti-immigrant rhetorical strategies designed to win support from Democrats. Organized labor was unable to overcome racism and become a unified movement. Terror tactics by Southern white supremacist groups undermined and literally killed off support for Republican-led radical Reconstruction efforts in the south, specifically targeting Union leagues formed to aid blacks and poor Southern whites. The Klan used sexual violence against freedwomen and the murder of anti-racist whites and politically active African Americans as tactics to demolish organized labor and black civil rights. And the Republican party itself ultimately failed as a source of political sustenance for any of the radical social movements it housed. Riven by factionalism, beholden to Northern capital, committed to property and order, and unwilling to upend social and economic relations in the South (such as through land redistribution) that might lead to any similar move in the North, Radical Republicans became anything but. By that point, the party offered no place for

those inspired by Jubilee.

Roediger cautions us in an Afterword not to see this turn of events as a foregone conclusion or utter defeat. The historical moment was alive with possibility; slavery did not return; unlikely interracial coalitions did endure for a time, and they prefigured much later partnerships. We should instead learn from the mistakes of those who undercut longer-term alliances by making apparently pragmatic decisions for themselves. It's not that apparently "utopian" efforts to build greater solidarity among oppressed people weren't worth it: seemingly "common sense alternatives . . . also offered no refuge from oppression" (p. 211). *Seizing Freedom* thus suggests that far more was possible with Jubilee than became reality, and that the politics of pragmatism actually demand more focus on the maintenance of alliances not easily formulated, ones that may well nigh seem impossible. While Roediger's thesis and conclusion might be mildly controversial to some contemporary historians, it will be well received by those in the field of cultural studies, especially those steeped in British and post-colonial cultural theories that seek to locate revolutionary social change in the everyday resistance of ordinary people to dominant hegemonies. I have been a huge fan of Roediger's work for over two decades, but even those new to his ideas, or those of other "new abolitionist" writers for that matter, should find this book intellectually rewarding and provocative.

--Marcus Charles Tribbett

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Contributors

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