

Book Reviews

Edited by Rebecca Tolley-Stokes

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[Bearden, William. *Cotton: From Southern Fields to the Memphis Market.*](#) Mt. Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005. 128pp. ISBN 073851781X.

Imagine a museum exhibit on the history of cotton production in the American South that you want to visit but cannot. Reading William Bearden's *Cotton: From Southern Fields to the Memphis Market* is similar to a museum visit except that you can experience it from an easy chair in your living room. Bearden tells cotton's story in one hundred seventeen pages of captioned drawings and photographs. And while it is not the complete story, it is a fascinating look at a product that dominated the agricultural, business and cultural life of the Deep South for many years.

According to Bearden, "The business of cotton is a fine art, an intricate combination of technological innovations, business stratagem, decades-old experience, fear, and simple, unadulterated luck (9)." The five chapters of this book illustrate this statement. Chapter 1 focuses on the cotton industry through the period of Reconstruction when most of the work was done by

hand. Chapter 2 chronicles cotton technology from Eli Whitney's cotton gin to today's use of crop dusters and cotton pickers that can pick six rows at one time. Chapter 3 tells how the Memphis Cotton Exchange conducted the cotton business, while Chapter 4 details how cotton production created a privileged social group that was best exemplified in Memphis 's Cotton Carnival. Chapter 5, "Field to Fabric," gives information on the development of the cotton plant from seed to fiber, cottonseed oil, or animal feed. Among the interesting facts that Bearden relates is that one bale of cotton "can make 325 pairs of denim jeans, 609 terry bath towels, 1,217 men's t-shirts, 3,085 diapers, 6,436 women's knit briefs, or 313,600 hundred-dollar bills" (126).

Cotton: From Southern Fields to the Memphis Market does a good job of showing how "King Cotton" ruled the lives of people from the Deep South—whether they were slave or plantation owner, sharecropper or socialite, child or adult, small farmer or business man. But times change and cotton no longer has the same hold on the South as it once did. Bearden's book does a service in chronicling a vanishing way of life.

The back cover describes Bearden as a " Memphis historian." He is also the CEO of William Bearden Company, a Memphis-based video and event production company. His experience with video and event production helped him to create a visually arresting book that has a place in any library or archive with collections in business or cotton industry culture.

Kathy Campbell
Sherrod Library
East Tennessee State University

[Bigham](#), Darrel E. *On Jordan 's Banks: Emancipation and Its Aftermath in the Ohio River Valley*. Lexington : UP of Kentucky , 2006. 330 pp. ISBN 0813123666.

In this enjoyable book, Bigham compares African-American communities on the north and south banks of the Ohio River in the border states of Kentucky, Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana . The book is divided into three parts: before, during, and after the Civil War, with the most attention given to the Postwar years when border communities on both sides of the river

experienced tremendous demographic, social, political, and economic changes.

On the south bank, antebellum Kentucky was dependent on slavery to support its rural and agrarian economy. Slaves in Kentucky 's border counties were so close to freedom, yet so far away. Many tried to escape, and if they overcame the almost insurmountable obstacles, including slave-catchers supported by the Fugitive Slave Law, they still faced an uncertain future in north-bank communities. Labor was free, so African-Americans could hope for a better life, but prejudice and the color line still reigned.

The Emancipation Proclamation, which did not legally apply to Unionist Kentucky, nevertheless began the migration northward or to urban areas on the south bank, such as Louisville . The steady stream of blacks to the cities and across the river continued for the next couple of decades, often resulting in increased racial tension and violence in north-bank communities transformed by such dramatic and swift changes. With emancipation came the fight for citizenship, the vote, and civil rights. Other more immediate challenges included finding lost family members and finding a job. This work is so compelling because Bigham is able to show broad trends using personal histories.

Bigham is professor of history and director of the Historic Southern Indiana organization at the University of Southern Indiana. He does an excellent job of comparing communities and demonstrating their transformations through meticulous scholarship that relies on primary and secondary sources. He uses maps, photographs, and invaluable statistical tables to illustrate his arguments. Although it is appropriate for academics in the field, this book will also be appreciated by laypeople. Bigham's strength is in his storytelling. This story is told through the words and actions of countless individuals, whose life-stories help us understand the evolution of race relations in the Ohio River Valley. I would highly recommend this work for all academic and public libraries.

Jenny Cole
Reference Librarian
Belmont University

Gordon, Robert and Nemerov, Bruce (eds). *Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University- Library of Congress Coahoma County Study, 1941-1942*. Nashville : Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 2005. 343 p. ISBN 0-8265-1485-5.

This book concerns three manuscripts describing the music and culture of the Mississippi Delta area during the 1940s. The study was done in Coahoma county Mississippi during the years 1941-1942. Collaborators were Lewis B. Jones, John Work, and Samuel C. Adams, of Fisk University, and Alan Lomax of the Library of Congress. Work's manuscript was filed at the Library of Congress, lost, found, lost again, then finally found. Lomax wrote his own book on the subject, which according to Gordon and Lemerov was inferior to the Fisk authors' work, but which, unlike the latter, was published. Gordon and Nemerov want to bring the original and, in their opinion, more accurate manuscripts to light.

The three manuscripts describe the black culture from post slavery days, during which the area was just being cleared for cultivation, to later times, when the church was the main cultural activity, to the era of the radio and the jukebox, the railroad and the concrete highway, during which church life became less important. Work categorizes the various types of black expression, including songs and sermons. Many amusing stories are included, involving subjects from the diminishing respect for the clergy, to an elderly woman's complaint that "these young girls nowadays hop in the car and go to a picture show." Work's examples of the music of the time includes church music, the sermon, the folk-quartet, secular music, instruments played, social songs, ballads, work songs, children's game songs, and the holler (a three line song chanted by the men working on the levees).

The most famous product of the region was the blues. Muddy Waters came from the region, and is one of the musicians studied. In the beginning church people did not approve of new genre. One boy said,

Yes sir! I thinks the blues is wrong to sing, especially for a Christian. No folks around here who calls themselves Christians sing the blues. Dancing is all right if it is just a sociable thing, [round and square dancing]; but it ain't right if it's at the juke ... (p. 80)

This book is quite interesting in its excellent description of the culture of the time, and of the conflicts between the old and the new ways. Parts of it are meant for those with a musical background, as Work often uses the technical language of musicology, and there are transcriptions of many songs and sermons on the musical staff. The book is of historical value, preserving a culture which, until modern times, was largely illiterate. It is suitable for the history or music collection any public or university library, especially in the South; it is also suitable for those institutions wishing to enlarge their collections on African American culture.

Chris Langer
User Services Librarian
Tennessee State University Downtown Campus

[Montell](#), William Lynwood. *Tales From Tennessee Lawyers*. Lexington : U P of Kentucky , 2005. 225 pp. ISBN: 0813123690 .

Tales From Tennessee Lawyers is a collection of stories from lawyers from all over the state about their personal experiences with the legal world in Tennessee. The book is divided into 17 chapters that each focus on a specific topic with the topics ranging anywhere from lighter subjects, such as courtroom blunders and bad words used in court, to more serious subjects like homicides and sexual and physical abuse. Interestingly, the author is not a Tennessean, nor is he in the legal profession. Rather, Mr. Montell is an emeritus professor of folk studies at Western Kentucky University and is also the author of the book *Tales From Kentucky Lawyers*, as well as several folklore books. His folklore background provided his access to colorful and lively tales from his storytellers that he included in this readable collection.

While Montell's background in collecting oral folk stories was invaluable in writing this book, consultation with a legal expert could better explain the legal terms used as punch lines in several stories. Having a legal background is not essential for enjoying the book, yet some stories leave the readers wondering. Another limitation of this book is the lack of variety of storytellers; the same people tell all of their stories. For example, stories from lawyers specializing in various areas, as well as younger lawyers just starting out, would round out the collection. Mr. Montell outlined the

collection's scope in his introduction, but more diversity would increase readers' enjoyment. Still, *Tales From Tennessee Lawyers* is an entertaining read. Contributor biographies at the end of the book shed light on their personal reminiscences. Reading brief biographies of the storytellers helped to make the stories more personable, like you were listening to an old friend or beloved relative tell about the "good ole days".

This book is not intended for any kind of research purposes. It is just what the title of the book says it is and was written to entertain, give a little flavor to a perceived dry profession, and show the human side of the legal profession. I recommend this book for public libraries, particularly those that are located near a law school; high school libraries, for students interested in a legal career; and law school libraries, for students to read personal stories the human interest side of the profession they are about to enter.

Julie Caudle
Spring Hill Public Library
Spring Hill, Tennessee

[Rafuse](#), Ethan S. *McClellan's War: The Failure of Modernization in the Struggle for the Union*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2005. 525 pp. ISBN: 0253345324.

In his introduction to *McClellan's War*, Ethan Rafuse explains

The central premise upon which this study is based is that the political and cultural outlook that shaped McClellan's conduct during the Civil War is best understood if studied in the larger context of the transformation of American society during the antebellum period... (5).

Consequently, Rafuse spends a significant amount of time analyzing Whig politics and its effect on McClellan. Rafuse argues that Whig values helped impart in McClellan a conservative and enlightened reason that marked his generalship and profoundly influenced his strategy of conciliation toward the Confederates. Rafuse doggedly pursues this theme, arguing, for example,

On the Peninsula, McClellan had created a situation where he had the luxury of implementing an operational and tactical approach that reflected his Whig cultural outlook: advance deliberately, orderly, and methodically; use engineering and artillery to tightly control the operational and tactical situation, take and hold strong positions, minimize risk and casualties, and give the Confederates no room for maneuver; and discredit the Confederate leadership in the eyes of the Southern masses by capturing their capital (280).

It seems like quite a lot to squeeze out of McClellan's beginning his political experience as a Whig, but Rafuse is always passionate in his argument and often convincing.

Rafuse admires McClellan, and he confesses to having "a more sympathetic view of McClellan... than most students of the Civil War possess" (7). He advises, "I leave to readers and reviewers to determine whether I have crossed the line from explanation and analysis to rationalization and apologia" (7). Rafuse does indeed cross the line, but he does it so transparently that the reader knows exactly what he is getting into and there is certainly no harm done. It is a case of "forewarned is forearmed." Many, for example, will disagree with Rafuse's conclusion of the "irrefutable military logic of the Peninsula Campaign" (393) or his assertion that "McClellan brought a very modern approach to the conduct of war" (3). The contrast between McClellan and Grant and Sherman, two truly modern generals, is stark. Rafuse also states that after the Confederate success in the West Woods at Antietam, "McClellan did not collapse into a defensive mentality and surrender control of events" (317). In making this claim, Rafuse cites the Stephen Sears's biography of McClellan. However, on the page Rafuse cites, Sears in fact concludes, "With the rout of Sedgwick's division,... [McClellan] surrendered control of events and never regained it" (Sears, "McClellan," 310). Sears appears to be saying exactly the opposite of Rafuse.

But one does not read Rafuse for tactical analysis or to reinforce the standard McClellan-bashing. Rafuse tells the reader upfront where he is headed and if the reader wants the benefit of this perspective, he is going to accept the sympathetic treatment of McClellan that comes with it. It is a worthwhile tradeoff. Rafuse's explanation of the cultural forces that shaped McClellan is very fresh and insightful, and Rafuse's research is well-documented, allowing the reader to look up the references himself if he

would like to challenge the conclusions. Recommended for academic collections.

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[West](#), Michael Lee. *Mad Girls in Love*. NY: Harper Collins, 2005.

The follow-up to author Michael Lee West's first novel, *Crazy Ladies*, is the highly enjoyable *Mad Girls in Love*. Set in Crystal Falls, Tennessee, a town that “thrives on knowing the most intimate, embarrassing details of your life” (94), the novel begins in 1972 with the main character, Bitsy Wentworth, breaking her husband's nose with a frozen rack of ribs. *Mad Girls* hooks readers from the first page. With her husband out cold on the kitchen floor of their home, Bitsy hits the road with baby daughter Jennifer, taking all of husband Claude's credit cards and even his car. Along the way, she ends up taking care of a young girl who stowed away in the used car she bought. While on the lam, Bitsy wakes one morning to compose her day's to-do list. Along with barely managing to get out of bed and finding a cheap but smart lawyer, she is anxious to buy a bottle of Summer Blonde to touch up her roots.

Interspersed throughout the novel are letters and taped messages from Bitsy's mother, Dorothy McDougal, to various First Ladies. Dorothy, a patient in a Nashville mental institution, even includes some of her recipes, including one for baby back ribs, in her letters to First Lady Pat Nixon. The electric shock therapy Dorothy received at Central State has left her, in her own words, looking like Albert Einstein. West introduces readers to a host of other colorful and intriguing characters, making the book even more entertaining.

With chapters alternating between different characters, the novel takes readers on a wild journey, following the women through their respective love lives and problems they encounter over the years. At just over five hundred pages, *Mad Girls in Love* is a quick read. Recommended for public libraries.

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