

BOOK REVIEWS

Mississippi in the Civil War: The Home Front

By Timothy B. Smith

(Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010. Preface, illustrations, maps, notes, index. Pp. xiii, 260. \$40 cloth. *Heritage of Mississippi Series*.)

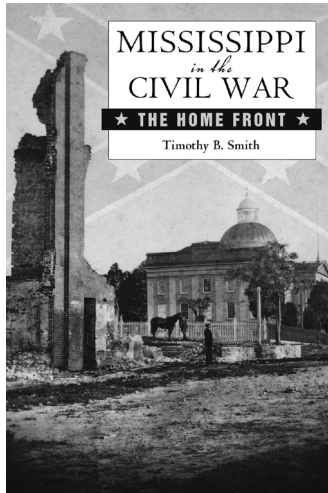
With regard to Civil War history, much has been written about battles, battlefields, and larger-than-life leaders who steered the course of the conflict. In Mississippi for instance, there has always been an emphasis on the Vicksburg Campaign as the centerpiece of the state's actual physical involvement in the war. A number of books currently in print dissect the campaign, and there is still a great deal of interest in what happened during the war at the Mississippi River port. However, this continued emphasis on the state's military history sometimes discounts other very important aspects of Mississippi's Civil War experience, namely the plight of those suffering on the home front and their attitudes as the war progressed.

In his book *Mississippi in the Civil War: The Home Front*, Timothy B. Smith offers readers an interesting glimpse into the wartime experiences of the state's entire population, men and women, black and white, who were forced to react to stark events

going on around them. Smith attacks long-held myths that all whites in Mississippi were united in support of the Confederacy and that their loyalty never wavered even after the echoes of the war's final shots faded. He emphasizes that while there was certainly a

great deal of support for the Confederacy in the state at the war's outset, the course of the war steered the loyalty of many Mississippians. While many whites in the state strongly favored the Confederacy in 1861, Smith points out that in 1864 anti-Confederate sentiment "was in epidemic proportion" in Mississippi (141).

The book is divided into two parts, each containing five chapters. The first part is a story of slow decay beginning with a treatment of the Mississippi Secession Convention, which for Smith is the only jumping off point for any discussions related to Mississippi and the Civil War. Once secession became a reality it quickly became apparent that in Mississippi withdrawal from the Union created innumerable prob-



lems and solved very few. Unstable from the beginning, the state's fiscal, political, and military infrastructures were under steadily increasing strain as the war progressed and Federal success became more frequent. Soldiers and citizens alike were forced to watch helplessly and in dismay as the world they had known crumbled around them.

According to Smith, the second half of the war was particularly brutal on the state's population as "Mississippi was increasingly unable to feed either its armies or its people, and destitution became rampant" (6). The second part of the book looks at various segments of the state's population—whites loyal to the Confederacy, Unionists, slaves, women—and how they reacted to events going on around them. For many of Mississippi's white civilians, male and female, the progress of the war was a story of wavering loyalty in the face of defeat and increasing deprivation. White Unionists in the state undermined the war effort from the beginning by ignoring Confederate civil authority, trading with the Federals, or actively working to hinder Confederate military activities.

Smith devotes an entire chapter to the actions of Mississippi's slaves, who were quick to aid the Federal war effort in the state whenever they could. Thousands of slaves flocked to the Federal lines at the first opportunity, and former slaves served Federal armies as guides and messengers during the war's earlier stages. Once the United States government began accepting former slaves as soldiers, thousands of former Mississippi slaves clamored to serve. The presence

of black soldiers in the state during the war's latter stages terrified much of the white community and dealt a death blow to the morale of Mississippi's Confederates.

Timothy B. Smith has produced a book that is a fine addition to scholarship on Mississippi's involvement in the Civil War. By concentrating on the home front, Smith tells a story that is sometimes overlooked, or at least overshadowed, by works that concentrate on the bugles and bullets of the battlefield. Anyone interested in Civil War history or Mississippi history would do well to add this volume to their library.

BEN WYNNE
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Jury Discrimination: The Supreme Court, Public Opinion, and a Grassroots Fight for Racial Equality in Mississippi. By Christopher Waldrep. (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2010. Acknowledgements, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. Pp. ix, 325. \$44.95 cloth.)

Of all the institutions that might have successfully challenged Mississippi's deeply entrenched Jim Crow social system a century ago, racially integrated juries, had they existed, would have been particularly threatening. Jury members almost by definition have to listen to and trust one another. They must recognize their commonality of purpose and decide as a group. They have to be sequestered together, sometimes overnight. They have to serve as equals. Moreover, had this hypothetical scenario ever

come to pass, African American jurors would have had the power to deliberate on the fairness of segregation law and the legal treatment of blacks, and in turn black defendants would have been judged by their "peers." Over time, it is likely the "Southern way of life" would have been unsustainable had black people ever had such access and authority. Historically speaking, it is not surprising, therefore, that, realizing this truism, the white hierarchy in states like Mississippi went to great lengths to prevent blacks from sitting in the jury box.

Christopher Waldrep's *Jury Discrimination* aims to highlight what he sees as an overlooked area of civil rights historiography, namely the crucial role exclusionary jury service has played in upholding racial inequality. Those who pay attention to the history of race in Mississippi have long been aware of the importance of jury makeup, from the all-white (and all-male) "Anglo-Saxon" jury that acquitted Emmett Till's accused killers in 1955 to the integrated group that finally convicted Byron de la Beckwith in 1994. Jury eligibility has been a front in America's civil rights struggle because of its relation to voting, full citizenship, and political power.

To frame his narrative, Waldrep reaches back into the bleakest period of Jim Crow—the first decades post-Redemption. He cites an unusual 1906 Mississippi Supreme Court case that challenged state law and precedent, which had long restricted jury service to white men. This case and its compelling tale of race and Mississippi feature a handful of colorful and extraordinary legal heroes. But that treatment of "a grassroots fight

for racial equality" notwithstanding, the bulk of *Jury Discrimination* is actually quite far afield.

Part of a series of works published by the University of Georgia Press exploring legal history, Waldrep's book in fact is primarily concerned with legal context and how trial-by-jury became recognized not only by the United States Constitution but by common law tradition. Intertwined in Waldrep's story is the development of the concept of a "jury of one's peers." He has an extensive discussion of the contentious evolution of the right in America to a jury trial, and how that argument fits into struggles between centralized government and local powers.

Waldrep employs a broad sweep. He begins with the Magna Carta and early English law and then moves forward to the U.S. Constitution—the Sixth Amendment of which guarantees the right to a trial by an impartial jury. He goes on to explore a wide array of topics such as the arguments between Federalists and anti-Federalists, questions of "natural law" versus politics in a democracy, the history of the voting franchise, slavery and abolitionism, fugitive slave laws, and the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause. The contributions of early American figures ranging from James Madison and Daniel Webster to Ralph Waldo Emerson and various United States Supreme Court justices are treated at some length. His sourcing—in case law, articles in various periodicals, political statements like the *Federalist Papers*, writings of the Transcendentalists, and government documents, among other things—is wide-ranging.

The point of the detailed lead-up to 1906 is that trial-by-jury became a well-established right in America. The conundrum for blacks was that it was a right enforced by the states, which in places like Mississippi meant strict segregation and exclusion from juries. Waldrep's book is a helpful addition to civil rights historiography not only because it underscores the unique circumstances and importance of the 1906 case, but also because the federal power versus states' rights dialectic, which long characterized the issue of rights to a jury trial, was a recurring battleground up through the post-World War II civil rights movement and beyond. The irony in the 1906 situation is painfully clear. The right to a trial by a fair jury was ostensibly protected by the states as a bulwark against federal power. But black defendants in Mississippi looking to secure that elusive right had to challenge their state's racially exclusionary laws and longstanding tradition with a long-shot appeal to federal court.

Today in America, when all-white juries are still meeting to deliberate on the guilt or innocence of minority defendants, including some facing capital punishment, Waldrep reminds us how much progress has been made, but also how much things have stayed the same.

BENJAMIN O. SPERRY
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Reluctant Rebels: The Confederates Who Joined the Army after 1861. By Kenneth W. Noe. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. Acknowledgements, il-

lustrations, appendix, notes, index. Pp. xiv, 317. \$35 cloth.)

Previous studies on Civil War soldiers and why they volunteered focused on "the boys of '61," those enlisting in the initial wave of enthusiasm. Rarely studied were the so-called later enlistees, those who came in the army after January 1862, who tended to be either conscripts, those who joined seeking to avoid the onus of conscription, or paid volunteers and substitutes. Kenneth W. Noe, in a monumental study that examines 320 later-enlisting soldiers, goes far in closing the gap. The result is a first-rate study that analyzes the motivations of those more reluctant, but not necessarily less patriotic, men, and how they performed once in the army.

Who were these later enlistees? According to Noe, they were not significantly unlike the early volunteers in many ways; certainly they valued their comrades. Nonetheless, they did tend to be older, slightly more likely to be married, less nationalistic, and less motivated by the sexual intimidation of women. Their reluctance in coming forward can usually be traced to other factors, including sickness—to put it bluntly, they were a sickly lot. They also possessed a more parochial view of the war, seeing issues from a local focus. Later enlistees were not found to be less religious than the early volunteers, but they tended less to become involved in the great religious revivals of the spring of 1864. Challenging established stereotypes, Noe suggests that later enlistees performed similarly to earlier volunteers.

If there is a disappointment in Noe's work, it comes in the small

sampling of actual draftees. It should be stated that comparable studies encountered a similar problem. Only eighty to a hundred of the sample group fell into this category. Perhaps they were more illiterate; perhaps they were simply too embarrassed to write about their status. Anecdotally at least, they seemed to be a more economically desperate group.

Noe successfully avoids the plodding style of a dissertation. He knows how to write, and what is at heart an academic study flows remarkably well. This is not a guns and bugles book. Nonetheless, for serious students of the war who desire to get into the minds of the men who fought it and at the same time read a truly provocative book, Noe's journey down a path less traveled will be a rewarding experience. We can all look forward to his next project.

LARRY J. DANIEL
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Give My Poor Heart Ease: Voices of the Mississippi Blues. By William Ferris. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. CD, DVD, 45 halftones, map, bibliography, index. Pp. 302. \$35 cloth.)

As the Mississippi blues continues to be heard around the world, many scholars have attempted to draw sociological conclusions about the origins, sounds, and instruments of the blues based on a select few artists who have become successful. Although stories of success are an important facet of history, they are not the complete history. William Ferris has chosen to highlight the lives of many in *Give My*

Poor Heart Ease: Voices of the Mississippi Blues, which looks at the routine life and background of the blues in Mississippi.

Although both Willie Dixon from Crawfish Creek Bottom in Vicksburg and B.B. King from Indianola have prominent sections, their stories simply enhance the premise that the blues is not just the music, it is a way of life. An in-depth chapter on the lesser-known blues artist and sculptor, James "Son Ford" Thomas, gives his insight into the blues as well as a very entertaining description of how to make an effective clay skull sculpture, including why one must not use corn for teeth in a clay skull sculpture.

The included DVD features films shot by Ferris using his Super 8 camera during his exploration of many geographic areas of Mississippi, and exhibit a genuine curiosity of the life of the blues and the land from which it came. Although primitive in production, these movies have captured what life in the Mississippi Delta was like in the 1960s. How to make a diddley bow is shown on film as are other improvised rhythmic instruments such as a razor and leather strap.

Although some of the later chapters focus on extended song lyrics, in the chapter "House Party," it is clear that many of the improvisational pianists, such as Wallace "Pine Top" Johnson, drew from a variety of sources for their repertoire. While many of these songs are copyrighted, who really knows how many Saturday nights and house rent parties they went through before being waxed into immortality? Even more interesting than the lyrics is Ferris's careful annotation of the discography including

the artist and dates of recording.

The community church as a central beacon of hope in the African American community is highlighted in a section of the book titled "Sacred and Secular Worlds." Ferris eloquently states: "The church and the blues joint are pivotal worlds within the black community. Each weekend the preacher and the blues singer gather their followers together to celebrate with familiar rituals that have much in common" (203). With a particular emphasis on the Rose Hill Church, this spiritual world is comprehended more clearly.

This publication provides a rare glimpse into the geography, the community, and the lives from which the blues came. Ferris shows that not one person or adverse situation is the source of the blues; it is more a part of the entire sociological picture.

J. WOODY SISTRUNK
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The Songs of Jimmie Rodgers: A Legacy in Country Music. By Jocelyn R. Neal. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009. Acknowledgements, introduction, photos, illustrations, appendix, notes, selected bibliography, index. Pp. ix, 318. \$21.95 paper.)

Being a reference librarian, I assumed Jocelyn Neal's *The Songs of Jimmie Rodgers: A Legacy in Country Music* was an annotated bibliography of Jimmie Rodgers songs. After I started reading it, I found that this wasn't the case at all. Instead, it is an overview of the career and music of the man considered to be the "Father of

Country Music." Jimmie Rodgers was not heralded or considered a great musical icon in his day, but since his death is considered to be the founding father of country music as we know it. I found the book to be an in-depth study of both how Jimmie Rodgers was influenced by the music and songs he heard in the fields and railroad yards where he worked as well as how his music has influenced musical artists over the years since his death. This intrigued me, because not only do I live in Meridian, Mississippi, Jimmie Rodgers's hometown, but I also research southern rock music and its artists, such as Lynyrd Skynyrd. One can hear the influence of country music on southern rock when you listen to the songs of Lynyrd Skynyrd, Molly Hatchet, Blackfoot and others. When I hear Lynyrd Skynyrd perform a Jimmie Rodgers song, like "T for Texas," I wonder where it came from and why they selected it.

One would think from the title, *The Songs of Jimmie Rodgers*, that this book would be an exhaustive look at all of his songs. However, Neal chose only three of his songs, which are probably his best-known and most frequently recorded. These are "Muleskinner Blues," "In the Jailhouse Now," and "T for Texas." Fans of Jimmie Rodgers consider the songs he performed to be "his songs," when in fact most of his songs were cover versions of songs he had heard someone perform or were available as early sheet music. This was a common practice of early performers of various music genres. Neal traces these songs to demonstrate how they changed from their original versions through time and became the "songs of Jimmie

Rodgers." The author then shows how these songs have been covered or interpreted by other musical artists and have been heard by people who don't even know who Jimmie Rodgers was.

I was very interested in the author's discussion of "T for Texas" since I had heard Lynyrd Skynyrd perform this song on recordings and live in concert. The author discusses how Lynyrd Skynyrd interpreted "T for Texas" and turned it into a twelve-bar rock song. The connection between southern rock and country music can be evidenced through such monographs as this one. One can clearly see how Jimmie Rodgers songs have been interpreted and have influenced music since his death. He may not have been the music icon of his day, but he has become an icon in both country music and rock music since his death. He is the "Father of Country Music," as evidenced by this book. I would recommend it for public and academic libraries, particularly those with special music collections

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Defying Disfranchisement: Black Voting Rights Activism in the Jim Crow South, 1890-1908. By R. Volney Riser. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010. Prologue, acknowledgements, notes, index. Pp. 326. \$40 cloth.)

With *Defying Disfranchisement*, R. Volney Riser situates himself somewhere between social and political historians and constitutional scholars to tell the hitherto-untold story of anti-disfranchisement efforts in the

southern United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Riser's sources, such as court records, unpublished court papers, the Booker T. Washington papers, and newspapers, help to construct a narrative of disfranchisement that has been, according to Riser, forgotten in the historical record. Riser's research is impeccable, bringing to light an era of history that is woefully under-studied. Yet *Defying Disfranchisement* does not close the book on this historical era but is a jumping off point for future research, as it brings up more questions than it answers.

Riser examines a number of court cases from the era, moving between South Carolina, Louisiana, North Carolina, Alabama, Virginia, and Mississippi. He begins with a discussion of Mississippi's 1890 constitution as the genesis of disfranchisement. Riser's strength is his ability to move deftly between cases and states, which, until now, had not been connected by historians. He weaves a narrative that allows for a better understanding of early efforts to challenge Jim Crow in the South and draws a straight line through cases involving Mississippi's constitution, cases in South Carolina, and *Mississippi v. Williams*. Riser argues that these cases constituted the first phase of disfranchisement.

Phase two, according to Riser, began with challenges to grandfather clauses, first in Louisiana and then later in Alabama. Within this era Riser begins dealing with Booker T. Washington. He writes that Washington "intended whites to perform their side of the contract, and, whenever he saw fit, he publicly chided and privately challenged them. Those

challenges are perhaps the least-known and least-understood aspect of Washington's career" (92). Later, Riser goes on to argue that Washington's naivety about the intentions of whites "arguably made things worse" (99). This complex analysis has been consistently missing in previous historiography and aids Riser in his understanding of the nuances of disfranchisement.

After introducing efforts to curtail the effects of grandfather clauses, Riser spends the majority of the book detailing disfranchisement efforts in Alabama. He argues that, by the time disfranchisement made it to Alabama, African American leaders were better prepared, based on the wins, losses, and lessons learned in other southern states. Further, Riser argues, the people in Alabama had a better understanding of what was going on, as mass meetings and registration efforts began in the state. Out of these efforts sprung groups such as the Afro-American Exodus Union and the Colored Men's Suffrage Association of Alabama, both of which represented early examples of mass organization that went on to define the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

With the last third of *Defying Disfranchisement*, Riser examines efforts in Virginia and then moves back into Alabama to discuss *Giles v. Harris*. With this case, the Supreme Court essentially upheld disfranchisement but began a tradition of leaving the question in legal limbo. The precedent set by the court with *Giles* and other cases, according to Riser, helped to close and define that era as a failure. Throughout the book Riser goes to great lengths to show that this era of

black voting rights activism ended in defeat, with no tangible connections to the future of civil rights struggles in the South.

Riser finishes *Defying Disfranchisement* by reiterating this argument: "Because Montgomery, Alabama, was the stage for so many of the modern civil rights movement's epochal events, it is tempting to seek a connection to the anti-disfranchisement activists, but there is none" (252). It is with this statement and others like them throughout the book that Riser misses a chance to situate his narrative into the greater discourse on civil rights. For Riser, this era existed in a vacuum, with few implications for the struggles to come. A stringent adherence to this thesis causes Riser both to fail to make appropriate connections as well as ignore opportunities to critique the legal system that activists were up against. Instead, Riser critiques the lawyers themselves, without taking into account the ways that they were stymied by a corrupt system. For this reason, amongst others, *Defying Disfranchisement* is a proper introduction to the era, but further work should be done to help locate it within the broader spectrum of civil rights struggles in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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