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## Book Reviews

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## Book Reviews

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### *Civil Rights, Culture Wars: The Fight over a Mississippi Textbook*

By Charles W. Eagles

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. Illustrations, acknowledgments, essay on sources, notes, index. Pp. 298. \$34.95 cloth, \$33.99 eBook. ISBN: 978-1-4696-3115-8.)

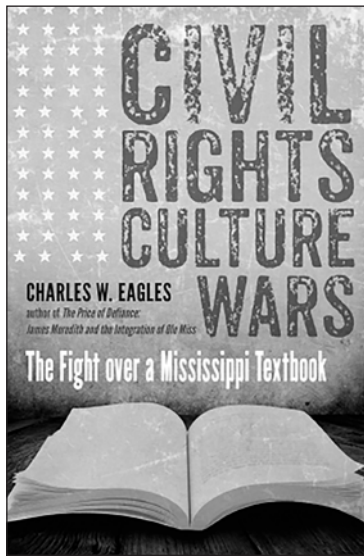
In *Civil Rights, Culture Wars*, historian Charles Eagles focuses on the controversy surrounding a groundbreaking Mississippi history textbook. He presents a well-written, meticulously-researched study proving textbooks' importance in shaping historical memory, ideas regarding race and identity, and Mississippi's efforts to maintain the status quo. For nearly a century, Eagles argues, students learned from texts ignoring (or at best marginalizing) everyone but elite white males. According to state-approved histories, slavery (if discussed at all) was benign and necessary; Confederates fought for honor (not slavery); and patriotic whites resisted the oppressive federal government during Reconstruction. Students internalized this mythology

that shielded them from their state's turbulent record of oppression and discrimination, and therefore struggled to understand why anyone would want to change their way of life. Most white Mississippians believed

race relations were good, blacks were happy, and their state was fair for all. Textbooks taught them these myths and "also played a major role in shaping students' attitudes, values, and interests" (3).

In 1970, sociologist James Loewen and historian Charles Sallis began working on a Mississippi history textbook to "combat [the] ignorance"

in existing texts (2). Mississippi schools were forcibly integrated the previous year and therefore needed "an integrated Mississippi history that included blacks just



as the classroom would” (88). Four years later, *Mississippi: Conflict and Change* was published for required ninth grade Mississippi history courses. This “boldly revisionist textbook” met opposition since it embraced controversial topics like race, class, and gender that had been neglected by other books (2).

Eagles’ first several chapters establish how *Conflict and Change* differed from other texts, chronicling public education and textbooks through the 1950s. This background is interesting but excessive, and Eagles loses track of his argument. He examines approved textbooks preceding *Conflict and Change* to establish a baseline narrative, reviewing almost a century’s-worth of pro-southern textbooks. Eagles sets texts into historical context, but overlooks prevailing historiography. If scholarship was pro-southern and all-white, textbooks would follow suit. If Eagles addressed this, readers would see how textbooks mirrored scholarship for some time, but as trends shifted starting in the 1950s, state histories (mostly written by John Bettersworth) did not. Despite new scholarship, Bettersworth’s *Your Mississippi* (1975) was a typical, pre-revisionist narrative ignoring black history. It is critical to Eagles’s argument since the state approved its outdated, biased history and rejected *Conflict and Change*’s multi-racial, comprehensive version. Given this, one hopes for more extensive analysis of Bettersworth’s text, but Eagles does not deliver, ignoring a 2010 *Journal of Mississippi History* article analyzing Mississippi textbooks and these two in particular.

Beginning with Chapter Four, Eagles moves to a discussion of *Conflict and Change* where his originality and significance shine through. Loewen and Sallis considered Bettersworth’s text “antiquated historically, biased racially, [and] inadequate” and wanted a “remedy to correct the racial imbalance in traditional Mississippi texts” by incorporating recent historiography and events (88, 206). Eagles skillfully assesses *Conflict and Change*’s revisionist approach and explains the process of writing, publication, and adoption challenges. The book met the Mississippi Textbook Purchasing Board’s criteria for being “accurate, valid, and up-to-date,” but was rejected in favor of *Your Mississippi* (151). The reasons for rejecting *Conflict and Change* varied but focused mostly on its candid attention to race. Eagles’s analysis is strongest in detailing both books’ ratings reports and the resulting court case. Board members’ thin justifications for rejection relied on personal bias rather than actual history, proving Eagles’s argument that the dismissal of *Conflict and Change* was a decision rooted in maintaining historical myth. Many defendants argued that the book would hinder students’ ability to “take pride in our state history” and should not emphasize oppression “when so many good things happened in our state” (184, 217). In 1980, a federal judge ordered *Conflict and Change*’s approval, but despite winning in court, Loewen and Sallis ultimately lost because few districts adopted it. Though it did not reach many students, Eagles argues that the textbook promoted change and

pressured others to improve, resulting in a new Betterworth edition with more (but token) black history, as well as new, significantly better texts. This claim by Eagles, however, needs more support to prove causation. *Conflict and Change*, Eagles concludes, was a precursor to the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s that tested traditional narratives and encouraged students to critically evaluate a flawed past and see how to “change their state for the better” (242).

Despite some faults, Eagles’s book provides students and scholars of education and history an important, highly-readable, and engaging story about memory, censorship, and attempts to open Mississippi’s “closed society.” He shows that resisting change goes beyond violent protests or voter suppression and can be as simple as rejecting a ninth-grade textbook.

Rebecca Miller Davis

*University of Missouri-Kansas City*

***Emmett Till: The Murder That Shocked the World and Propelled the Civil Rights Movement.*** By Devery S. Anderson. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015. Paperback reprint with new preface, 2017. 552 pages. \$25.00.)

This work is an important and exhaustive study of the 1955 murder in the Mississippi Delta of an African American boy from Chicago. The author cites and acknowledges the many works that have been published on this murder case, which became a lightning rod for the Jim Crow South in the 1950s and 1960s. The name

Emmett Till continues to smolder in the national consciousness. He was murdered for having the temerity to whistle at a white woman. Julian Bond, the well-known civil rights activist leader penned a foreword to the 2015 edition of this work stating, just months before his own death: “You may think, as I did, that you know the totality of this tale, but you will learn much that is new, as I did” (xiv). In essence, that is what this work accomplishes. Anderson spent over ten years of his life researching this history, first hearing about the case as a student at the University of Utah in 1994 while watching the first episode of *Eyes on the Prize* in the Salt Lake City Library. He began serious research on the case in 2004, though his contacts with Till’s mother had begun years before.

Anderson lays out his intent in his first preface. He seeks to “write a truly comprehensive narrative of the case, with all of the details that are, in many respects, stranger than fiction” (xxliii). In reading *Emmett Till*, what truly emerges is the depth of the author’s knowledge of the details, the persons involved, and the twists and turns of their lives following the murder.

Part One is divided into ten chapters. Part Two consists of three chapters followed by an epilogue and an essential appendix that contains frequently asked questions about the case, as well as more detailed notes from Anderson’s research. Within his notes, Anderson analyzes the contradictory sources he met on the research trail. A lengthy bibliography also makes for required reading (485-527).

In Part One, Anderson discusses Till's family history and his close relationship with his mother before moving on to explain the trip to Mississippi that resulted in Till's murder and the subsequent arrests and trial of J. W. Milam and Roy Bryant. Anderson is clear to note that the trial likely occurred in the wrong county. The murderers were arrested and jailed in Leflore County, where the initial kidnapping took place, and then tried in Sumner in Tallahatchie County where Till's body was found. The murder, though, most likely occurred on a plantation near Drew in Sunflower County. This section also recounts the protests and rumors that followed the acquittal of Milam and Bryant, Till's mother's speaking engagements around the country, and the murderers' confession in *Look* magazine. Anderson then spends time on the lives of those involved in this tragedy in the years that followed, with the chapter for this discussion entitled, "Never the Same."

Part Two deals with the "Revival" of the case, in particular, the books and documentary films produced and various queries about reopening the case during the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. The FBI reopened the case with a detailed study of the events of 1955 and even considered bringing charges against Carolyn Bryant Donham, the woman at the center of the "whistling" story who had kept a low profile following the murder. In February 2007, a multiracial grand jury of nineteen men and women in Leflore County refused to offer indictments in the case, which was, at that point, effectively over. Anderson acknowledges Alvin

Sykes, whose advocacy resulted in Congress's passage of the *Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act*. Anderson's book also highlights the 2014 Tallahatchie County apology to the Till family in front of the Sumner courthouse. This work is the definitive study of the Emmett Till murder. The bibliography and endnotes present a trail that any interested reader can follow. This book will also be useful in the teaching of research methods for university history students.

Kathryn Green

*Mississippi Valley State University*

***Panting for Glory: The Mississippi Rifles in the Mexican War.*** By Richard Bruce Winders. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2016. Acknowledgements, Notes, Bibliography, Index. Pp. x, 192. \$45 cloth. ISBN: 9781623494162.)

The outbreak of the Mexican War in 1846 offered Americans from across the United States an opportunity for military service in regular or volunteer regiments. Richard Bruce Winders' *Panting for Glory* contrasts the military service experiences of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Mississippi Infantry regiments during the Mexican War. In examining these two regiments, Winders notes that "the experiences of both regiments, although very different, present a complete picture of volunteers at war" (x). The contrasting realities of military life experienced by these two regiments demonstrates why some regiments were successful in Mexico while others were not.

Throughout *Panting for Glory*, Winders persuasively argues that success and failure for volunteer regiments in Mexico had more to do with opportunity than anything else. The opportunity for active battlefield service presented itself to the 1<sup>st</sup> Mississippi due to their early arrival in an active theater of operations and the personal connections between Jefferson Davis and Zachary Taylor. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Mississippi, however, arrived later to an area no longer considered the primary theater of the war. By skillfully examining the multiple personalities comprising the officer corps of the two regiments, Winders further argues that the 1<sup>st</sup> Mississippi benefitted from a superior leadership that helped place the regiment in a position to achieve its goals. Winders further notes that the men comprising these regiments possessed the same character, motivations, and social background, leaving only opportunity as the differing factor between the two regiments. Because of the relative uniformity of these regiments, the 1<sup>st</sup> Mississippi benefitted from a combination of better opportunities and better internal leadership. The lack of these same attributes served to deny the same glory to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mississippi.

Many of the volunteers who served in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Mississippi Rifles enlisted in the hope that military service would translate into battlefield glory, which they could then use as a force of social uplift back home. Others simply signed on for patriotic reasons or because service in Mexico provided a tantalizing promise of excitement and adventure. In *Panting for Glory*, Winders examines the service history of both of these regiments in

detail and draws upon the letters and diaries of numerous members of these regiments. Some, such as Jefferson Davis, are familiar while other names are not as easily recognizable. The inclusion of so many personalities from these two regiments reinforces the argument that personal relationships could shape the service experience of volunteer regiments. As Winders notes, "bickering between the officers within each regiment occurred, but in-fighting had less harmful effects on the 1<sup>st</sup> Mississippi Rifles than on its sister regiment" (122). Winders's dual coverage of both regiments makes the book unique among unit histories which generally examine one regiment. The juxtaposition of both regiments in the book offers a much more complete view of military service for volunteer regiments in the Mexican War. While many regiments sought the same battlefield distinctions won by the 1<sup>st</sup> Mississippi, most regiments instead found the garrison duty experienced by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mississippi.

*Panting for Glory* provides scholars and average readers alike with a much more complete view of the realities of service in Mexico than previous unit-based studies. This work builds upon a growing Mexican War historiography, which is increasingly more concerned with the war's participants than with the traditional battlefield narrative. In so doing, Winders not only provides a glimpse into military life within these volunteer regiments, but also delivers a state-level view of the war.

Brady L Holley  
*Middle Tennessee State University*

***The Sacred Mirror: Evangelicalism, Honor, and Identity in the Deep South, 1790-1860.*** By Robert Elder. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016. Notes, Bibliography, Index. Pp. 288. \$34.95 cloth. ISBN: 978-1-4696-2756-4.)

Evangelical ministers in the antebellum South occupied a strange space, responsible for upholding their religious tenets while also navigating the broader culture and mores of a society that often did not align with those beliefs. Some historians have argued that these ministers gradually adopted southern honor culture, developing spiritual foundations for secular practices and adapting the rhetoric of honor to their denominational teachings. In *The Sacred Mirror: Evangelicalism, Honor, and Identity in the Deep South, 1790-1860*, Robert Elder complicates this narrative by positing a dichotomy: evangelical ministers were modernizing influences for their faiths at the same time that they operated within premodern customs. Although they succumbed to premodern institutions (their eventual acceptance of slavery is the most obvious and egregious example), Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist preachers also engaged in a professionalization of their occupation. Along this path, they shifted away from discipline and incorporated notions of self-improvement into their sermons.

Elder borrows from historian Beth Barton Schweiger's thesis on modernity in the antebellum period and centers his study on Georgia and South Carolina in the early-

nineteenth century. Focusing on these two states, he explains, helps to narrow the scope of the study while also providing what he argues are representative examples of the change over time that would apply to other southern states. The chapters are thematic and loosely chronological, addressing the interplay between honor and shame in evangelical congregations; how church discipline reflected communal authority; the concept of female honor in churches; honor culture, discipline, and belief for the enslaved; the practice of oratory as an indicator of a ministers' perceived honor; and the connections among honor, fame, and legacy in a minister's later years.

Elder draws upon church records, sermons, correspondence, eulogies, diaries, and biographies to discover how ministers' religious beliefs interacted with southern honor; and simultaneously, how they pushed modernization of church and community through an emphasis on the individual and institutions. Describing this nebulous space is no easy task and the author captures subtleties that are not regularly present in the historiography. Referencing historians such as Anthony Rotundo, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, and Christine Heyerman, Elder places his study within the larger debate over the tensions between Christian principles and southern practices. He offers a nuanced perspective that does not dismiss the contributions of clergymen to progressive views even as they sometimes succumbed to regressive social structures. Ultimately, as Elder notes, these religious lights existed in



two worlds, the “City of Man and the City of God,” and their influences in both could not always be reconciled (205).

This work is recommended for students of religious and southern history and to anyone interested in reconsidering the reality and influence of evangelical ministers in the slave South. At times, the author’s voice adopts a tone similar to that of his sources, which can perhaps cloud the argument. In describing the importance of oratorical skills to the honor of the preacher, for instance, Elder states that a “successful sermon was a complex interplay between the oratorical skills of the preacher and the enlivening influence of the Holy Spirit, who imbued a speaker’s words with power and moved the audience to hear and accept the message of salvation” (160). In examining the problem of “smooth-tongued preachers,” he describes them as being “susceptible to the sin of pride” (161). Although it might have detracted from the artfulness of the prose, couching terms like “Holy Spirit” and “sin” in the context of ministerial rhetoric would have better distanced the author’s voice from his subjects’ beliefs, at times. This minor criticism aside, *The Sacred Mirror* offers additional insight into a subject that is oft-studied, multi-layered, and still not entirely understood. Elder has gotten us one step closer to that understanding.

Charity Wait Rakestraw  
*Western Governors University*

***Right to Revolt: The Crusade for Racial Justice in Mississippi’s Central Piney Woods.*** By Patricia Michelle Boyett. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015. Acknowledgements, notes, bibliography, index. Pp. viii, 244. \$65 hardback. ISBN 978-1-4968-0430-3.)

Patricia Michelle Boyett’s *Right to Revolt* is an arresting account of the struggle for racial freedom in Mississippi’s Central Piney Woods. Principally focused on Forrest and Jones counties, Boyett describes a movement for black liberation over three phases of time: post-World War II, when many black veterans returned home to persistent inequality; the revolution of the 1960s; and the post-civil rights stage in which “blacks and their progressive white allies, launched a second movement” to rectify the wrongs of history and to secure authoritative positions for African American community leaders (243). Boyett’s narrative of the area’s racial history, starting from its roots as a wilderness mired in an inevitable survival struggle and ending in an examination of the region’s racial successes and shortcomings, is captivating, illuminating, and, at times, awe-inspiring.

Early on, Boyett describes an irony of the Central Piney Woods region—that in its youngest days as an inhospitable site for settlement, it was home to flourishing mixed-race societies. Descendants of these societies, such as Vernon Dahmer, are present throughout the work, their activism no doubt inspired by their heritage. Additionally, a consistent theme in this narrative is the depiction of the region as deeply

resistant to authority. Opposition to centralized authority was not unique to the Central Piney Woods because beginning in the nineteenth century, all southern states considered themselves champions of states' rights. Boyett says that, as elsewhere in the South, in Mississippi's Pine Belt, "states' rights" meant maintaining the status quo of white supremacy.

Boyett is thorough in her descriptions of both the white and black struggles in Forrest and Jones counties. For whites, resisting authority meant keeping federal intervention to a minimum as the national political landscape moved toward supporting racial equality. White resistance to change often generated public dismay for the violent actions of radical whites who attracted federal attention that sometimes resulted in the prosecution of offending whites, even if only for show. African Americans confronted Mississippi's political representatives who sought to disfranchise them - including those in Forrest and Jones counties - and waded through the terror inflicted by Klansmen. Boyett makes it clear that few inhabitants were untouched by the events that unfolded in the Central Piney Woods. Whites and blacks each had a crucial role to play. Boyett carefully weaves their stories together, shining a light on the intersections.

One such intersection is the attack by Samuel Bowers' White Knights on Vernon Dahmer's home and his subsequent death in January 1966. Boyett's research into this attack and the trials of the Klan that followed is exhaustive. More than a mere retelling of FBI accounts on DABURN, as the ensuing investigation was called,

Boyett provides a vivid interpretation of the events surrounding the eventual trials and retrials of the attackers. The humanization of the White Knights involved in the monstrous Dahmer attack is skillfully and thoughtfully done; their miscalculation of the new world and political climate in which they lived eventually brought them down.

Justice for Vernon Dahmer and others murdered or terrorized at the hands of the Klan was anything but swift. Some did not see justice while they lived and many never will. In the study's final pages, Boyett acknowledges that progress is undeniable yet there is still much to be accomplished. Primarily, Boyett argues, even after all the legal and social achievements by and for African Americans, their acceptance into American civil life has not brought about a wholesale change in white attitudes on race.

While some pages offer a deluge of names that easily run together, the index and notes are the reader's savior. Boyett's work is an important contribution to the story of the civil rights movement and to Mississippi's history. She breathes new life into the conversation surrounding the racial battles and victories that have marked the landscape of the Mississippi Pine Belt. *Right to Revolt* is timely and provides students and scholars alike with a fresh perspective on the ongoing dilemma of race in Mississippi.

Morgan Ricks  
*Northeast Mississippi Community*  
 College

***Senator James Eastland: Mississippi's Jim Crow Democrat.*** By Maarten Zwiwers. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015. Acknowledgements, notes, bibliography, index. Pp. vii, 293. ISBN: 978-0-8071-60010-5.)

*The New York Times*, on February 20, 1986, announced the death of former U.S. Senator James O. Eastland with the headline, "James O. Eastland is Dead at 81; Leading Senate Foe of Integration." After serving nearly four decades in the U.S. Senate and over two decades as chair of the powerful Senate Judiciary Committee, Eastland's legacy, as seen in the *Times* obituary, rested on his resistance to civil rights reform. Historians have leaned heavily on this image of Eastland and, with little deviation, profiled his efforts to promote the South's segregationist cause to the exclusion of other aspects of his life and career. Maarten Zwiwers's contribution on Eastland's life in the U.S. Senate attempts another look, one that sees Eastland not as the ultimate example of southern intractability during the civil rights years. Instead, Zwiwers explores Eastland's career as a way to demonstrate the "Janus-faced quality of southern Democrats" and how that quality enabled outspoken segregationists like Eastland to not only maintain powerful positions within their party structure, but to broker nominations, deliver political patronage, and provide presidential counsel.

Zwiwers's book is not a biography of Eastland, as the title implies. This book places Eastland within a

complex matrix of political crises, grassroots activism, and party shifts. Through deftly-maneuvered turns through committee minutes, party conventions, and state fractures within Mississippi's Democratic Party, this profile of Eastland's work puts the senator into a much wider context. Attention to Eastland's interactions with Democratic Party leaders like Pat McCarran, Lyndon Johnson, and John Kennedy, raises Eastland's profile on the national political landscape. Set next to his home state's radical turn away from practical segregation and toward the crowd-pleasing speechifying of Governor Ross Barnett, Eastland, while not a moderate by any definition, appears pliable. Zwiwers goes as far as to suggest that Eastland's absence within negotiations between Barnett and the Kennedy administration in the days leading up to James Meredith's entrance to the University of Mississippi was a critical misstep on the part of Attorney General Robert Kennedy. Given Eastland's successful intervention in the previous deal struck with Barnett during the Freedom Rides in 1961, the point is well-made.

Zwiwers's work undoubtedly contributes a new lens for viewing Eastland. His coverage of Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, James P. Coleman of Mississippi, and Lister Hill of Alabama helps situate Eastland among a wide variety of southern statesmen—all of them located along different points on the pole of segregation's defense. In this widely-framed delivery, however, the reader may struggle to see Eastland at times. Zwiwers's research is deep

and wide and is not wholly dependent on Eastland as a central character. Navigating through the different moments of Eastland's career, it seems at times that one is watching events develop through Eastland's eyes, rather than evaluating the senator himself. Zwiers does not, as most historians have done, quote Eastland liberally. His voice is muted among a larger conversation about the future of the Democratic Party. Very few personal revelations from Eastland's life appear in the text. A few strokes of Eastland's ideology bookend the monograph, with Zwiers pinning the senator to a defense of white supremacy infused with "laissez-faire capitalism, strict immigration laws, and state sovereignty" (2). In truth, however, much of the book is devoted to an understanding of the intersecting strands of region, nation, race, and power within the Democratic Party.

With these reflections in mind, the reader should expect to encounter a wealth of information about the inner-workings of Washington, the complex alliances built within party structures, and a few notable insights into Mississippi politics. The information is complex, but delivered in a way that gradually builds into a narrative that firms up an understanding of just what was at stake politically during the civil rights years. Zwiers's book reminds us of the value in challenging one-dimensional profiles and grand narratives that cast good and bad characters in the struggle for racial equality. James O. Eastland's work and influence during some of the most critical decades of American history is a profile best

understood within the context of the unique circumstances within which he worked.

Stephanie R. Rolph  
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