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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Telling Our Stories: Museum of Mississippi History and Mississippi Civil Rights Museum

By Mississippi Department of Archives and History

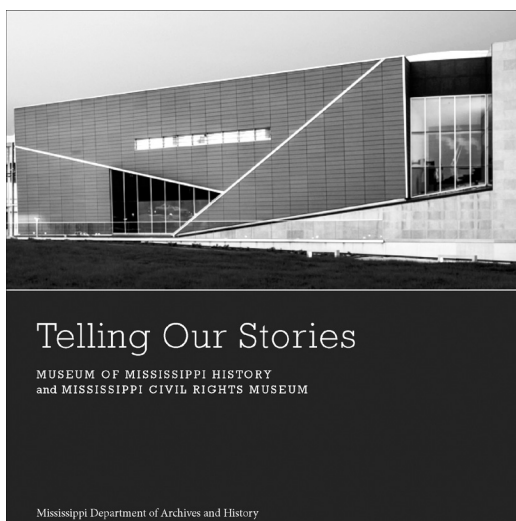
Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017. Acknowledgments, foreword, introduction, illustrations, index. 200 pages (approx.), \$25.00 cloth.

ISBN: 9781496813480.

Telling Our Stories is the companion volume to the Museum of Mississippi History and the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum, which opened in December of 2017 as to culminate the state's bicentennial celebration. Overall, the book is a perfect example of an effective interpretive companion to a museum, or in this case, two museums. The book outlines the history of the state of Mississippi, supported by images of items on display in those museums. Reflecting the different but related foci of the two museums, the book is divided into two major sections, one a general history of the state, from prehistoric times to the present, and the second addressing the history of

slavery, the civil rights movement, and continuing race relations. Throughout the book, but especially in the second half, the authors do not attempt to gloss over or excuse the state's sad history of race relations. Instead, they strive to give the state and its residents an opportunity to reconsider its collective memory that is marred by racism, bigotry, and white supremacy. Unpleasant stories are told unflinchingly, but with the aim of telling the truth instead of assigning blame.

Anyone reading the volume should keep in mind that the book is intended to accompany a visit to the museums. As a history of the state, it is woefully inadequate. As



a rough outline to allow visitors to contextualize the artifacts that they are seeing, it is much better. The fact that it can present as much information as it does in a way that the general public will appreciate, in as few pages as it does, is impressive.

As befitting a book with a large corporate sponsor, the book has great production value. It has heavy duty binding and is printed on heavy paper. It is replete with high-quality color images that have been thoughtfully selected to illustrate the narrative. Though somewhat small for the purpose, the book is a thoroughly satisfying coffee table book, drawing in the casual reader with its graphics.

Unfortunately, poor editing and unabashed boosterism at the very beginning of the book almost put this reader off for the entire book. The introduction by two former governors asserts that “no state has more stories to tell than we do” (xi). Assertions of exceptionalism crop up in other places as well. The first chapter is particularly egregious. It claims that the Jaketown site was the center of Poverty Point culture despite its being less than half the size of the Poverty Point site in Louisiana. Ancient Mississippians are also credited with the development of bows, arrows, and the atlatl as well as the methods used to create ceremonial mounds. The chapter also presents modern suppositions about historical mound usage as fact. The first chapter stands out so glaringly because the rest of the book, other than a few minor issues, is so much better.

The state of Mississippi is rightly proud of its efforts to both confront and present its history with its two

new museums. The book did its job, as it made this reader want to visit those museums and learn more.

Aaron McArthur
Arkansas Tech University

A Chance for Change: Head Start and Mississippi's Black Freedom Struggle. By Crystal R. Sanders. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016. Acknowledgements, illustrations, map, notes, bibl., index. Pp. xi, 266. \$27.95 paper. ISBN: 978-1-4696-2780-9.)

Scholars of the Mississippi civil rights movement have been prolific in recent years, generating a number of worthy studies of the movement's peak in the 1960s and the years following. Crystal Sanders adds to this growing body of literature in her study of the Magnolia state's first Head Start program, the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM). The story of the CDGM is nothing new, as John Dittmer already covered the political narrative in his landmark book *Local People*. What Sanders provides is a bottom-up study of how the program was conceived and operated in the state focusing on the women who served as its teachers. She shows how CDGM teaching was just as much activism for poor black Mississippians as voter registration and other forms of political participation were to movement organizers. In fact, all of these forms of activism overlapped, as women who took part in the CDGM often then registered to vote and/or

tried to enroll their children in all-white schools.

The main focus of Sanders's study is the participatory democracy that black women created for black children through the CDGM. Because the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEOE) had been mandated to include "maximum feasible participation" by the poor, CDGM used women who lacked proper credentials to teach in the public school system. Ignoring teachers' lack of education standards opened CDGM to criticism from white supremacists and even middle-class black Mississippians, but Sanders argues that the program fostered positive self-esteem and racial pride in black children, which was at least as important to them as proper grammar and reading skills. In a state school system that promoted memorization and conformity at the expense of critical thinking and nontraditional learning, CDGM teachers promoted democratic participation at a very early age and challenged both racism and class prejudice.

Sanders also recounts the more familiar story of the CDGM's demise, in which white supremacist politicians like Senator John Stennis charged that the program, which empowered black Mississippians by bypassing the white power structure, was mismanaged. This became part of the racially motivated discourse that emerged in the late 1960s – the charge that black-run programs were incompetent and corrupt. This development foreshadowed the similar charges made against black elected officials in later years, as this rhetoric became a powerful way to discredit black accomplishments

without using overtly racist language.

It would be easy to romanticize the CDGM and the women who worked in it, as celebratory studies of the civil rights movement have not completely disappeared. While clearly sympathetic to the women who labored in the CDGM, Sanders does not hesitate to point out legitimate administrative and managerial problems in the program, while pointing out that Stennis greatly exaggerated them for political benefit. She also mentions the tensions between white activists in leadership positions, who chafed under federal directives, and black Mississippians who wanted the CDGM to operate, even if meant stricter OEO oversight.

The author's chronicling of these differences highlights one of the strengths of her study. All too often, federal programs have been portrayed as co-opting civil rights activism and essentially buying off the grassroots activists to bring in middle-class black people with more conservative attitudes. Although that did happen with Mississippi Action for Progress (MAP), the Head Start agency that received support from white supremacists as a counter to the CDGM, the original CDGM was enthusiastically supported by poor black Mississippians. This was despite Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organizers viewing any federal action with deep suspicion after the bitter events of the 1964 Atlantic City Democratic Convention and that year's Freedom Summer. As Sanders deftly shows, for Mississippi's black and mostly female teachers, who taught in the CDGM, educating

their children was just as much an act of political activism as voter registration. Her book will likely be the landmark study of the Head Start movement and its role in the Mississippi freedom struggle for years to come.

Chris Danielson
Montana Tech University

Brown v. Board and the Transformation of American Culture: Education and the South in the Age of Desegregation. By Ben Keppel. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016. Acknowledgements, notes, index. Pp. vii, 215. \$45.00 cloth. ISBN: 978-0-8071-6132-6.)

University of Oklahoma historian Ben Keppel's *Brown v. Board and the Transformation of American Culture* scans the cultural legacy of what he terms "the Age of *Brown*" following the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision (4-5). To tell his story, Keppel focuses on three racial reformers—Harvard psychiatrist Robert Coles, comedian Bill Cosby, and television producer Joan Ganz Cooney—the respective creators of the *Children of Crisis* series, *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* (and later *The Cosby Show*), and *Sesame Street*. Coles, Cosby, and Cooney acted as cultural "first responders," or mediators, who facilitated the American polity's acceptance of the *Brown* ruling (2). Each individual sought "to bring new tools, ideas, and technologies to bear in an effort to close a racial divide between Americans . . .

." (26). In the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, reimagined standards about race relations, public education, and national identity represented "a mood, a temperament, and a frame surrounding a people's historical experiences" (24). Keppel interprets the era after *Brown* as a watershed. The long-term impact of *Brown v. Board* not only specifically invalidated state-sanctioned school segregation but also broadly instilled a societal obligation to educate all students, white and black, equally and equitably.

Coles, Cosby, and Cooney, through separate projects, utilized popular culture to promulgate *Brown* and racial equality among ordinary citizens. In his four decades researching the effects of school integration on children, Robert Coles's Pulitzer Prize-winning fieldwork taught the public about the challenges and benefits of the desegregation experiment. Keppel refers to Coles as a "goodwill diplomat" in the epoch of school desegregation (88). The now-disgraced Bill Cosby, whose sexual misconduct is referenced by Keppel, is presented with a sad touch of irony as a "Victorian reformer" (93). Serving as a "cultural politician," Cosby's fatherly demeanor and good humor broke down racial barriers and invited white television viewers into the inner world of black family life through educational programming and a sitcom (94). Keppel notes Cosby's ability to wield the "integrative power of laughter" to "facilitate debate and dissent" and upend the racial hierarchy of white over black (96). Cosby's greatest hit, *The Cosby Show*, portrayed a stable, upwardly

mobile, African-American family and celebrated the success of integration. Joan Ganz Cooney was another media innovator. Her production of *Sesame Street*, like Cosby's *Fat Albert*, provided a safe and democratic urban setting where people of all races and classes and "from different nations and cultures might be able to live as neighbors" (141). Cooney's vision of "social reconstruction through television" aimed to rebuild American social relations after the divisive 1960s and bring people together (144). *Sesame Street* served "as an effective middle ground" for children to gather virtually (147-48). Throughout the trim book, Keppel argues that Cooney, Cosby, and Coles worked as "participant symbols" who influenced the American public to embrace racial change and inclusivity (169).

Precisely how the public absorbed the new values and notions of citizenship is explained less clearly. Keppel never insists that all Americans responded favorably to the "age of desegregation," but he does not explore viewer reactions, of either race, or any social and political opposition. Another problem with the book is that Keppel's examination of his subjects occasionally succumbs to vague or overwrought characterizations of "participant symbols," "cultural politicians," and "first responders." Keppel, in fact, does not fully begin the first biography, his exploration of Robert Coles, until page 64 after a lengthy discussion on Detroit's school tax system, Freedom Summer in 1964, Septima Clark's voting rights boot camp in the South Carolina Sea Islands, and Marcus Foster's controversial and tragic

tenure as Oakland's superintendent of schools. *Brown v. Board and the Transformation of American Culture*, nevertheless, is a well-written and fitting sequel to Keppel's 1995 study, *The Work of Democracy*. He provides intriguing portraits of three important figures who furthered the goals of the civil rights movement and advanced ideas about justice and citizenship in creative ways.

William P. Hustwit
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Joe T. Patterson and the White South's Dilemma: Evolving Resistance to Black Advancement.

By Robert E. Luckett, Jr. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015. Acknowledgements, notes, bibliography, index. Pp. ix, 274. \$65 hardback. ISBN: 9781496802699.)

Historian Robert E. Luckett's first monograph, built from extensive government records, interviews, and the author-collected papers of former Mississippi attorney general Joe T. Patterson, explores the ideological evolution of a segregationist who advocated that some black advancement was acceptable as long as it preserved white hegemony. This was the segregationists' and the white South's dilemma: how should former Confederate states abide by the Constitution's supremacy clause and continue disfranchisement and discrimination without resorting to nullification, secession, and violence? Patterson, we learn, battled hardline segregationists, civil rights proponents, and the federal

government during his multiple terms in office that coincided with the most famous challenges to Mississippi's white supremacy. Patterson's segregation was designed "to bend but not break," applying "practical segregation" ideology to many events he encountered, such as an integrated Veterans Affairs hospital, the *Brown* decision, university-level desegregation attempts, private schools for blacks, the Freedom Rides, the Citizens' Councils of America, Ross Barnett, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), and the federal government (216).

Luckett's chronology of Patterson's life begins in the 1930s when the mentor-protégé relationship developed with Senator Pat Harrison, the U. S. senator from Mississippi who endured a rocky relationship with the other Mississippi senator of that era, Theodore Bilbo. From the inception of Patterson's political career we learn about his keen acumen in remaining above the fray when politics became nasty as segregationists tried to one-up each other through racist rhetoric and appeals. Like J. P. Coleman, Patterson had learned that "hard-line resistance" was a failed strategy and sought to keep "white power long after the angry voices of diehard racists had faded away" (26).

Luckett's book closes with analysis of the activism that challenged Patterson's evolving segregationist ideology. The attorney general, for example, turned his back on the hardliners and Governor Ross Barnett's theatrics, allowing James Meredith's enrollment at the University of Mississippi.

Patterson secretly informed the Kennedy administration that Barnett and his inner circle, including Citizens' Councils president William J. Simmons, planned to renege on agreements made with U. S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. Afterwards, Patterson worked to revoke state subsidies to the Citizens' Council, a private organization. In contrast, Patterson battled the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's challenges to the Regular Democratic Party delegates at the 1964 Democratic National Convention.

Luckett shines in the final two chapters as he shows Patterson's full evolution from a hardliner member of the reactionary Citizens' Councils to a savvy segregationist, concocting coded language crafted to avoid explicit defenses of racial discrimination. Covering the implementation of the Voting Rights Act as well as the Housing, Education, and Welfare (HEW) agency's refusal to accept Mississippi's Freedom of Choice and tuition voucher programs as legitimate school desegregation, Luckett uncovers topics vitally important for readers seeking a better understanding of segregationist politics and its relationship with New Right ascendancy. As the federal government considered withholding federal assistance to recalcitrant states, a new political ethos emerged in Mississippi, and here Luckett hammers home his thesis. Patterson acted on a more malleable form of segregation, allowing some black advancement, thereby retaining a more respectable white hegemony

without violence and explicit racist language. Lockett therefore joins a chorus of scholars, Joseph Crespino, Matthew Lassiter, and Kevin Kruse, just to name a few, who have explored the white South's cunning as voters realigned from solidly Democrat to staunchly Republican.

Future researchers might want to explore a few questions remaining unanswered in this well-researched study. Throughout the book, Lockett shows that Patterson and the hardliners insisted that the civil rights movement was part of some fifth-column, communistic plan. For Lockett, he characterizes segregationists' anticommunism as part and parcel of the Cold War era. Historians of southern anticommunism might wish for a more hearty analysis, and Lockett had the opportunity to develop one as his narrative includes Patterson's return to Mississippi as the Cold War developed. Yet this section of the book is far too sparse on information that might have explained Patterson's thinking about civil rights organizations and its relationship with communist subversives. Perhaps the documentation does not exist or fails to address the ideological development of Patterson who used anticommunism as just another tool to sully the reputations of civil rights proponents (to paraphrase historian George Lewis). Regardless, Lockett's work demonstrates that the South, and Mississippi especially, was not quite so solid when it came to preserving segregation and for that reason this book adds a significant contribution to a growing literature

on segregationists.

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Southern Water, Southern Power: How the Politics of Cheap Energy and Water Scarcity Shaped a Region. By Christopher J. Manganiello. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015. Acknowledgements, illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. Pp ix, 306. \$39.95 cloth, \$27.95 paper. ISBN: 9781469620053.)

In tracing the history of our country's water, much attention has been paid to the American West where drought, scarcity, and competition for resources has been central to that region's identity and development. But this is also the complex story of southern states, argues Christopher Manganiello in his well-researched and very readable *Southern Water, Southern Power: How the Politics of Cheap Energy and Water Scarcity Shaped a Region*.

Focusing on the Piedmont region of Georgia and South Carolina – particularly the watershed of the Savannah River – Manganiello, and environmental historian and water policy director for the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, traces efforts to manipulate the water and energy resources of the area, beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing today. Despite the construction of dams, levees, canals, and reservoirs, that struggle for control continues

today, igniting multi-state water wars that have yet to be resolved. In many ways this is a humid version of the western water saga.

The book is divided into three main sections, following a chronological order with some overlap. The first part highlights projects during the rise of the New South (up to 1930) and notes that, long before the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) existed, boosters and businessmen in this coal-poor area had been damming rivers for transportation and to power textile mills. Augusta, Georgia, was dubbed the “Lowell of the South” – an optimistic reference to the booming textile area of Massachusetts, and the Augusta Canal diversion dam on the Savannah River “signaled the beginning of a new relationship between water and power—and a new organic energy regime—in the Piedmont” (29). In this period “corporate executives and engineers consciously replaced free-flowing rivers with artificial reservoirs,” which “consolidated economic power” and created “a modern hydraulic waterscape as their counterparts did in locales across the globe (44).”

This “white coal” of energy, however, had its problems. The vagaries of weather—long drought periods followed by abundant rainfall—did not make for steady water supplies that could evenly sustain mills’ energy needs, companies and, eventually, urban residential customers. Rivers could not be counted on to stay within their banks, which led to more and more control structures that provided mostly short-term solutions. Manganiello labels this “water insecurity” and

notes how it influenced decisions up to the present day. “Twin risks—flooding and drought—have been present and persistent across the region for some time” and “generated economic uncertainty and social conflict” along the way (7). The second section examines the “big dam consensus” period from 1930 to 1944 in which New Deal liberalism shaped waterways across the U. S., including the launch of the TVA to “limit monopoly power in the energy sector and to improve southern social and environmental conditions” (14). The Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) emerged as the main water agency in the country, and the third section of the book (post-1945) notes the post-World War II leadership of the Corps as the “Sun Belt’s primary water and power broker” and the modernization of the region. (14). At the same time, local and state boosters, politicians, and energy companies were often at odds with the Corps, as was a rising grassroots environmental movement. Changing ideas about rivers were evidenced in the 1974 decision to designate the Chattooga River as a federal wild and scenic river, which brought special protections and kept it mostly free-flowing, unlike the rest of the area’s rivers that had long since been dammed and controlled.

Manganiello keeps his subject lively through compelling anecdotes and tales of personalities who shaped the water systems. He explores how politics intersected with issues of segregation, public access to water, and states’ rights, all concerns that arose inevitably as a result of local and then federal manipulation of water and energy.

Although Manganiello repeatedly states that this book is about southern waters in the Southeast, it largely ignores the experiences of any states but Georgia and South Carolina. He makes mention of the devastating Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, but defers to others for that story. There is no mention of Florida's experiences with the ill-fated Cross Florida Barge Canal or the unwise manipulations of the Everglades that were equally immense but vastly different. Also missing is another important aspect—the environmental degradation and loss of vast riverine habitat and dependent species caused by these human controls.

That aside, *Southern Water, Southern Power* offers excellent insight into how water manipulation, infrastructure, and policy in the Piedmont region shaped its landscape, development, and politics.

Leslie K. Poole
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The Limits of Loyalty: Ordinary People in Civil War Mississippi. By Jarret Ruminski. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017. ISBN: 9781496813961.)

Interpretations of the Civil War defy simple explanations. Sweeping analyses that once filled the pages of scholarly works have been replaced by an ever increasingly complicated assessment that provides a better accounting of humanity's complexities. *The Limits of Loyalty* successfully explores human nature's collective impact on the population

during a period of enormous external and internal pressure. According to Jarret Ruminski, Civil War historians have created a false dichotomy when examining Confederate nationalism. Most scholars have divided ordinary Confederates into loyal and disloyal camps. Ruminski, however, argues "that loyalty during the Civil War can seldom be understood in absolute terms" (4). *The Limits of Loyalty* argues that Confederate nationalism failed to unify Civil War-era Mississippians because the demands of the state conflicted with Mississippians' complex "micro loyalties."

The Limits of Loyalty begins with an in-depth exploration of what Ruminski and others have termed "protective nationalism." Protective nationalism was an extreme concept adopted by Confederate partisans to inspire Mississippians to endure enormous sacrifices in pursuit of national independence and to protect the newly formed government from a wide range of internal and external enemies. Protective nationalists tried to mold the Confederate state into a proactive tool capable of carrying out a zealous nationalism. However, as Ruminski points out, the Confederate state had limited powers to force Mississippians to abandon their micro loyalties in favor of sacrificing all for independence. Micro loyalties included connections to kin, ethnicity, community, religion, and other concerns that Mississippians at times pledged a higher allegiance to than the state. A disconnect evolved as Mississippians acted in ways that they believed served both their interests and the needs of the

state while protective nationalists increasingly defined micro loyalties as a direct threat to Confederate independence.

The arrival of Union military forces heightened tensions between ordinary Mississippians and the Confederate state. Zealous nationalists urged Mississippians to resist their Union occupiers despite the enormous risks associated with such actions. Much to the government's chagrin, Mississippians developed a complicated relationship with the enemy. Sometimes Mississippians signed Union loyalty oaths to access trade networks. Others swore allegiance to the Union to protect their family and property. Some used the oath to conceal their continued support for the Confederate government passing along news items and trade goods to the rebel state. Protective nationalists interpreted this behavior as disloyal and devised schemes to punish those who collaborated with the enemy. Meanwhile, tensions heated between protective nationalists and planters who denied that the state had the power to reallocate the latter's property, primarily slaves, for the good of the nation. The growing power of the central state alienated many planters who saw impressment, confiscation, and taxation as an enigma in the secession revolution. According to Ruminski, a broad range of Mississippians, rich and poor, black and white, male and female, proved unwilling to make the kinds of sacrifices that protective nationalists, and by extension the Confederate state, demanded. Yet ordinary Mississippians, by and

large did not see their adherence to their own micro loyalties as a direct rejection of the Confederate state. Most people failed to see their world in such binary terms.

The actions of the Union government further complicated local loyalties. Like its Confederate counterparts, the Union government demanded loyalty in absolute terms and interpreted a broad range of actions as treasonous. Mississippians thus found themselves trapped between two sides in a conflict with both demanding that individuals make enormous personal sacrifices as a symbol of their partisan zeal. In such an environment, Mississippians used claims of loyalty and disloyalty as weapons that could be wielded, with great effect, against personal enemies to resolve conflicts often having little to do with the war. Claims of loyalty and accusations of disloyalty were used to settle personal scores or to curry favor with one side or the other according to Ruminski.

The actions of slaves further complicated Mississippi's wartime loyalties. Slaves struggled to divorce themselves from white dominance. Masters interpreted slave resistance in familial terms that failed to connect the institution's demise to the failures of Confederate nationalism. The end of slavery and "the collapse of the Confederate government did not signal an end to the racial hierarchy that was its cornerstone" (177). Ultimately, while both slavery and the Confederacy failed to survive the war, white Mississippians' loyalties to race and to white supremacy helped tie together antebellum, wartime, and postbellum life.

The Limits of Loyalty provides an excellent look into the complexities found on the Confederate home front. While the study focuses on Mississippi, Ruminski's conclusions will be of interest to scholars of Confederate nationalism. This book would be a welcome addition to any Civil War scholar's library.

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