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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

A Brutal Reckoning: Andrew Jackson, the Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South

By Peter Cozzens

(Knopf, 2023. Acknowledgements, maps, notes, index. Pp. 464.

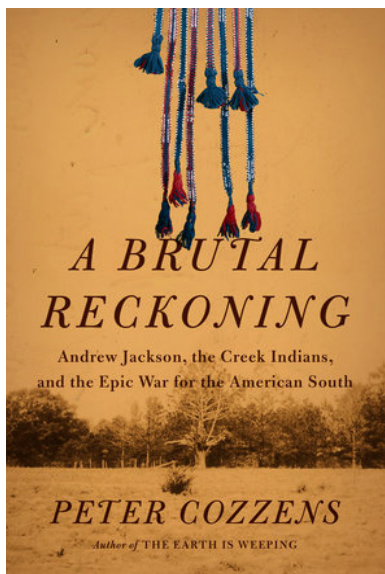
\$35.00 hardback. ISBN: 9780525659457.)

Southern historiography of the nineteenth century is dominated by the Civil War. Although few could argue against that conflict as the seminal point in Southern history, the Creek War of 1813-1814 had dramatic repercussions as well. The war and its results eventually laid the groundwork for Native American removal in the Southeast, spurred mass American immigration into the region (which led directly to the establishment of the states of Mississippi and Alabama), helped bring about entrenchment of cotton agriculture and its reliance on slave labor in the Deep South, and made Andrew Jackson a national hero. Jackson eventually leveraged that notoriety into two terms as president and wield an incredible amount of political influence both before and after his term in office. Thankfully, this much lesser-known struggle has received more attention from

historians in recent years. Peter Cozzens (a retired U.S. Foreign Service Officer and author/editor of seventeen books) has entered the fray in a small but growing body of scholarship on the war with *A Brutal Reckoning*, Andrew Jackson, the Creek Indians, and the Epic War for the American South.

Cozzens, whose previous books discussed Civil War battles in the western theater, designates this work as the third volume of his trilogy of works on Indian Wars (along with *Tecumseh and the Prophet: The Shawnee Brothers who Defied a Nation and The Earth is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars*

for the American West.) His stated goal is to provide a gripping and balanced account of the process of dispossessing Indians of their lands and explaining how the actions of one man, Andrew Jackson, charted the course of the nation in winning



“arguably the most consequential Indian war in U.S. history.” In these regards, Cozzens has succeeded admirably.

Cozzens opens with a narrative of Hernando DeSoto’s entrada across the Southeast. He obviously is making a comparison between the Spaniard’s horrific trek and the actions of Andrew Jackson against the Creeks, which these reviewers found to be too much of a stretch. Entirely different circumstances, motivations, tactical situations—not to mention the diversity of allied native forces with which he worked—renders such a connection to provide little more than shock value. Cozzens then transitions to an excellent overview of Creek culture and the impact of increasing influence of the growing United States government and American settlers on native lands, which had altered traditional Creek lifeways. By not only settling on their lands, but actively assimilating Creeks into Euro-American agricultural, economic, and political systems, Americans played a role in irrevocably altering Creek society. The resulting slow-growing but deep schism in Creek society between those who believed they should return to traditional ways and those who insisted they could remain fully Creek (while adapted to new realities) eventually erupted into civil war. In discussion of this complicated and little-understood conflict, Cozzens shines by providing the best account of this affair that these reviewers have ever read. Most books on the Creek War gloss over this internal strife

as prologue to the larger war with American and allied native forces, but Cozzens gives it its just due.

Cozzens then proceeds to cover the war itself, beginnings at Burnt Corn Creek and then describing the horrific affair at Fort Mims. The campaigns of the Mississippi Territorial militia as well as units from the state of Georgia are described in detail, but these take a back seat to the actions of the Tennesseans under the leadership of Andrew Jackson. His determination and perseverance overcame chronic supply shortages and enlistment problems to eventually break the backbone of the Red Stick faction of the Creeks at Horseshoe Bend. During the narrative, Cozzens presents the war’s iconic moments and personalities in vivid fashion. These include riveting tales of the exploits of Sam Dale and the famous Canoe Fight, William Weatherford’s legendary escape from American forces at the Holy Ground, and the deeds of David Crockett and Sam Houston. Cozzens presents an especially thorough and grisly account of the pivotal Battle of Horseshoe Bend, shedding light on the true strategies and the realities of combat for both the Redsticks and their assailants. Because these events make the Creek War such a powerful, epic chapter in Southern history, we were thrilled to see Cozzens deliver some of his most engrossing writing in chronicling these people and events.

Ending the war, Jackson eventually took charge of treaty negotiations and set the stage for future compacts with Southeastern tribes

with the Treaty of Fort Jackson. He forced the forfeiture of more than twenty-two million acres, most of which came from friendly Creek allies, who were astonished at the harsh terms imposed by Jackson. Jackson felt he was securing the nation's southern border and opening areas to white American settlement in an unproductively used expanse of territory, which could play a pivotal role in the growth of the United States. He would forever be known as Sharp Knife for his treatment of the Creeks, as over the next twenty years they endured hardship, poverty, exploitation and eventual removal in a Creek Trail of Tears which they dated to their first altercation with Jackson.

A Brutal Reckoning serves as a superb account of a monumental struggle, which led to remarkable change in the Southeast and to consequences, which reverberated across the nation. Cozzens is an excellent writer, whose narrative captures the reader's attention. There are a few minor errors such as one mislabeled image (John Coffee is listed as John Cocks), an incorrect spelling on a map (Hinson and Kennedy's Mill), and a reference to Jett Thomas as Jeff Thomas. He also identifies Fort Jackson as being built in Tuskegee (it is in present-day Wetumpka). But these minor quibbles aside, Cozzens has provided an excellent account of a consequential but understudied war suitable for the general public, which promises to help give this conflict the attention it so richly deserves.

CLAY WILLIAMS AND MIKE BUNN
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Resident Strangers: Immigrant Laborers in New South Alabama. By Jennifer E. Brooks. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2022. Acknowledgements, illustrations, map, notes, bibliography, index. Pp. xii, 239. \$45 cloth, \$19.95 ebook. ISBN: 0807176658)

Though the research for this book likely began many years ago, it speaks directly to our current debate surrounding immigration, refugees, and illegal border crossings in the United States. Though Jennifer Brooks, associate professor of history at Auburn University, did not research other Southern states and therefore can offer no firm conclusions about them, she presumes, probably correctly, that immigrant laborers' experience in post-Civil War Alabama was similar to that in the rest of the Jim Crow South. Her conclusion is that, while immigrants suffered mightily under the weight of an oppressive, exploitative system, those that survived it helped to build the modern South, and the lighter-skinned among them, over the course of a generation or two, went on to prosper. Darker-skinned immigrants from places like China and Mexico remained at the bottom of the racial hierarchy.

Resident Strangers is a welcome addition to the vast historiography on nineteenth-century

immigration that has privileged the Northeast, the Midwest, and the Pacific Coast. Scholars have assumed, incorrectly, that Southern states' recruitment campaigns after the Civil War were ineffective. While their totals were smaller than the millions who settled outside the South, Chinese, Italians, Austro-Hungarian nationals, and a sprinkling of others came in numbers significant enough to shape communities across the region, if Alabama's experience is any guide. The author's purpose is "to restore immigrant laborers from around the world to their place in the New South project, considering not only the campaigns to recruit them to Alabama but especially how various immigrant groups and individuals experienced their sojourns in Alabama" (5).

Resident Strangers focuses primarily on the years after the Civil War through the early twentieth century, relying on manuscript census records, immigration documents, local newspapers, oral histories (conducted by others), convict lease system artifacts, and trial records. Brooks uses those sources to explore family structures, living and working arrangements, entrepreneurial activity, participation in labor disputes, and union activity (notably the United Mine Workers). Additionally, she provides heart-breaking accounts of immigrants "ensnared by the state's capricious legal system" (10). The horrific convict lease system, which lasted until well into the twentieth century in Alabama, generated tremendous profits for the state and the in-

dustries it supported, particularly the Pratt mines, Sloss Furnaces, and the Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company (TCI). The men who ran these enterprises are not household names like the robber barons of the North, but their power and wealth, at least regionally, was equally as vast.

The lies told by the state's immigration recruiters hid the reality of life in Alabama—the poverty, harsh conditions, labor conflict, and the serfdom-like system of debt peonage. Having arrived and finding themselves physically abused by their employers, seldom paid, and the targets of White violence, many immigrants fled, sending word back to the home country not to come to a region where patterns formed under slavery continued under different circumstances. Chinese immigrants, the subject of Chapter 2, were subjected to economic exploitation and targeted racial violence even though their numbers were tiny, they offered desperately needed services, and they posed absolutely no threat. One agent who went to China found that he could not recruit anyone because the Chinese considered the South "a destination they dreaded even worse than Cuba or Peru" (150).

Another theme Brooks explores is the idea of racial fluidity or "racial transiency," meaning "whiteness" was a malleable category. The White power structure treated immigrants as "white" when it suited them but subjected them to extreme Jim Crow-type punishments when immigrants sought to improve their conditions. Immigrant laborers

therefore occupied a precarious position between African Americans—fellow exploited laborers—and White employers. Immigrant peddlers and grocers “faced not only resentful and competitive white merchants but sometimes hostile African Americans as well” (93), caught, in other words, between the proverbial rock and a hard place.

Brooks’ readable and interesting study, well-researched and well-argued, shows that the New South had more in common with the rest of the US than we have commonly understood. Adding significantly to our understanding of New South, labor and immigrant history, this volume should be required reading not only for historians seeking to learn more about the modern South but also for anyone interested in how immigration benefited the country in myriad ways, even while immigrants themselves suffered unspeakable horrors. The perpetrators of violence were not those who came to the United States looking for a better life but instead, then and now, were the White power mongers and capitalists who abused them at every turn.

JANET ALLURED
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Bloody Flag of Anarchy: Unionism in South Carolina during the Nullification Crisis. By **Brian C. Neumann.** (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2022. Acknowledgements, maps, notes, index. Pp. ix, 216. \$45 hard-cover. ISBN: 0807176900.

Brian C. Neumann’s *Bloody Flag of Anarchy* reframes the nullification crisis by emphasizing “the partisan conflict within South Carolina” and by restoring the “state’s Union Party to the center of the story” (4). Neumann reminds his readers that 40 percent of South Carolinians opposed nullification. The “restraint and resolve” of Unionist statesmen and their belief that the Union itself stood as a “fragile experiment in self-government—the last hope of liberty in a world dominated by despotism,” enabled them to counter the disunionist impulses of radical nullifiers (4). This perspective allows Neumann to expand our historiographic outlook on nullification and the coming Civil War, highlighting the ideological power of Unionism, the transnational context of the sectional debates, and the importance of idealized gendered conceptions of Southern manhood during the antebellum period.

Focusing on Unionism and documenting its political importance in South Carolina from 1822 until its eventual demise in 1860-61 offers a welcome addition to the study of nullification and antebellum South Carolina. Neumann’s fresh outlook on Unionist pleas for moderation complements the

radicalism documented by Manisha Sinha's *The Counter-Revolution of Slavery*. While moderates decried the Tariff of 1828, they still held true to the cause of Union, arguing that disunionist action on the tariff issue would not only undermine the slave regime, but instigate all the horrors of St. Domingue and the French Revolution. The "wave of liberal revolutions" in Europe and elsewhere made the crisis in South Carolina one of "global significance" (8). Radicals embraced a global perspective as well, believing subjugation to the tariff would unleash the same transnational horrors invoked by the Unionist party.

Where these global expressions differed, however, were in their gendered appeals. Expanding on the gender analysis of Stephanie McCurry and Amy S. Greenburg, Neumann illustrates that "for Union men, manhood demanded moderation, and honor required reason and restraint" (35). For nullifiers, on the other hand, submission to a tariff favoring Northern industry diminished their manhood. Nullifiers thus mocked Unionist claims of manhood, which often resulted in affairs of honor on dueling grounds. In fact, Neuman effectively illustrates how the centrality of gendered rhetoric during nullification increased violence in "pace and scale" (58). Despite the heightened atmosphere of violence, Union men between the winter of 1832-33 succeeded in keeping the state together. Ultimately, the perseverance of Unionists and the Compromise Tariff of 1833 enabled radicals to not only retain their

sense of masculinity by interpreting the compromise as a vindication of their martial manhood, but it also allowed Unionists—at least for a brief moment—to take solace in the fact that they avoided disunion and retained their "dual sovereignty" to their state and the federal government (94).

Of course, as Neumann is quick to note, most Unionist men framed their moderation in a proslavery defense. The Constitution and the federal Union protected Southern rights and the peculiar institution; nullification and disunion threatened to unravel both. This reframing mirrors the work of Elizabeth R. Varon by underscoring the persistence of Unionism during sectional animosities. Still, the Unionism in South Carolina, and in the South more generally, centered on a proslavery worldview. Radical nullifiers and Unionists both agreed on the need to protect slavery, they merely differed on how to do so. This changed with the onset of the abolitionist mail campaign of 1835-36. Unionists, endeavoring to hold "the middle ground between northern and southern radicalism," eventually came to see Northern radicalism as the greatest threat (117). What followed was the deterioration of Unionism in South Carolina, with the last holdouts being men such as Benjamin Perry and James Petigru. The success of Unionist loyalty during the nullification years thus broke down, leading John C. Calhoun to declare that "Unionism is extinct in our state" (135). Neumann eloquently documents this shift in 1835. Despite

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Unionist mobilization early on, the divisive question of slavery led most to denounce the American Union in defense of the peculiar institution.

Superbly researched and accessible to all audiences, Neumann's *Bloody Flag of Anarchy* offers an insightful and complex look into nullification, Southern radicalism, and the nature of Unionism. This book presents both scholars and general readers with a comprehensive yet concise examination of political dynamics, underscoring the strength and ultimate fragility of Unionism in the secessionist hotbed of South Carolina.

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A Day I Ain't Never Seen Before: Remembering the Civil Rights Movement in Marks, Mississippi.
By Joe Bateman and Cheryl Lynn Greenberg. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2023. Pp. xi, 310. ISBN: 0820363035)

In *A Day I Ain't Never Seen Before*, Joe Bateman, a White former Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) worker in Marks, Mississippi, explores the Civil Rights Movement in Marks and its legacy. Bateman uses the stories of Marks to localize the struggle for civil rights as it was fought by ordinary people in towns across the nation, often outside of the glare of the national media. Bateman convincingly argues that it was local Black Mississippians, especially the working class, in places like

Marks, who fought for an expansive vision of Black freedom in Mississippi. As a Black resident of Marks told Bateman years later, "Folks that got the books written up, they say Martin Luther King or some big folks did such and such. . . It was poor people like me in every place done it. Where you got their names?" (176). Bateman's work is a roll call of their names, stories, and efforts.

A Day I Ain't Never Seen Before brings together the story of the movement in Marks as Bateman experienced it with the perspectives of local Blacks and other Black and White activists through insightful quotations and stories that reflect everyday life and struggle in Marks. The story told here adds another important volume to the growing historiography on local and regional Black freedom movements in Mississippi. While the 1990s saw the rise of significant statewide studies of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement, the first two decades of the twenty-first century have seen a turn towards the study of local and regional movements in Mississippi. Although Marks has received less scholarly attention than its neighbor, Clarksdale, Marks once served as the starting location for the 1968 Poor People's Campaign precisely because of its known status as a movement town.

Bateman argues that Black activists, along with some White allies, operated in national obscurity and were essential in bringing a new day to Marks. He shows the movement as it was experienced by a wide array of Black locals, activ-

ists, and White civil right workers like himself. The book is divided chronologically into three sections. The first section, "Before the Movement," profiles Marks during the Jim Crow era. This section draws primarily on stories collected during Bateman's 1960s work with COFO. It is supplemented with scholarly sources, emphasizing the early, often underground, civil rights activity in Marks. The second section, "The Movement in Marks and Beyond," spans from the 1950s to the 1970s and chronicles activism in Marks before, during, and after Bateman's own involvement. Notably, this section chronicles the intersection of local and national civil rights activity, while also offering additional insight on topics like the breakdown of the COFO coalition and the later years of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) in Quitman County. The third section, "Ten Years Later," chronicles the aftermath of the movement in Marks and includes reflections by residents on Black progress. This section offers powerful insights on the progress made and hopes unrealized, as well as the economic and class implications of Black advancement as reflected by the testimony of former activists in Marks.

Bateman draws on traditional sources, including recent works on the civil rights struggle in Mississippi, large archival collections such as the Wisconsin Historical Society's Freedom Summer Collection, and contemporaneous newspaper accounts. But it is Bateman's private interview collection that gives

the book its power. In the 1970s, Bateman visited Marks again to record the stories of locals and movement participants. These accounts allow the voices of local Black residents of Marks to be heard in the work, while also offering a lasting meditation on the value of their struggle and its implications for later generations aiming to continue the long march to freedom in Marks and beyond.

A Day I Ain't Never Seen Before will appeal to anyone with an interest in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement, local Black freedom movements, or more broadly in the American Civil Rights Movement. General readers will find an education in movement organizing and grassroots politics in this work. For educators at the high school and college/university level, this work provides an informed memoir that conveys everyday realities, the promise and peril of grassroots organizing, and the intersection of local and national organizing in Mississippi. Scholars of the Civil Rights Movement will find Bateman's work an illuminating addition to the growing historiography of local movements in the state. Thanks to Bateman's work, the names of those who brought a new day to Marks will not soon be forgotten.

JUSTIN MARTIN
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The Last Fire-Eater: Roger A. Pryor and the Search for a Southern Identity. By William A. Link. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2023. Acknowledgements, illustrations, notes, index. Pp. 1, 123. ISBN: 0807178935.)

In *The Last Fire-Eater*, William A. Link traces the political career of Virginian Roger Pryor from his rise to prominence as an ardent defender of states' rights through his eventual support of sectional reconciliation. Drawing on Pryor's speeches, contemporary newspaper coverage, and his wife's memoirs, Link explores Pryor's evolution from secessionist to "reconstructed southern white man" (3). Rather than just another biography, however, Link argues that Pryor's evolving views on sectionalism and race make him a "central, perhaps representative figure in southern history" (3). Link clearly demonstrates the change in Pryor's rhetoric after the war and his move to New York City, but it is unclear if the change reflected a true shift in his thinking, or if it was another example of the self-interested pragmatic politics that Pryor so deftly practiced throughout his life. As Link notes, Pryor left no papers to document his private feelings, so we are only left with his public persona as evidence. Regardless, *The Last Fire-Eater* provides students of Southern history with a succinct account of the way in which an ex-Confederate navigated his changed circumstances to maintain his economic, political, and social status.

In the first chapter, Link focuses on Pryor's entry into politics, culminating in his election to the 36th Congress of the United States as a representative of Virginia. He paints a vivid picture of a handsome young man, obsessed with honor—his own and that of the South's—gifted in oratory and the rhetorical flourishes usually associated with better known Fire-Eaters like Alabama's William Lowndes Yancey or Mississippi's Albert G. Brown. He describes Pryor's involvement in several duels and his public employment of "aggressive language" to push for the right to expand slavery to the western territories. Ultimately, though, Link asserts that the bellicose rhetoric and talk of disunion that Pryor and other Fire-Eaters employed was "more bark than bite," (16) a claim not especially well supported throughout the book.

Pryor's role in the Civil War, the conflict he claimed was necessary to defend Southern honor, is covered in the second chapter. Shortly after the conflict began, Pryor used his political clout to secure command of a brigade, but his poor performance on the battlefield, especially during the Peninsular Campaign and at the Battle of Antietam resulted in his assignment to remote posts in southeastern Virginia. Link argues that the brutality that Pryor and others like him experienced firsthand during the war had a profound impact on his postwar politics, asserting that the violence he witnessed moderated his bluster.

Postwar, Pryor's reinvention

of himself into a prominent New York City lawyer and advocate of sectional reconciliation forms the basis of the third and final chapter. Link points to speeches he made at the Long Island Historical Society in 1873 and a gathering of Northern veterans in New Jersey two years later as examples of Pryor's progressive views on everything from race to conceptions of manhood and honor. In the former speech, Pryor struck a paternalistic tone when speaking about African Americans, claiming their faithfulness to their prior masters and stating that they presented the nation with a common problem. In the latter remarks, he told the audience that the South had fought in defense of states' rights, claimed that divine providence ended the "folly of the southern people," and asserted that he, as a Southerner, "had nothing to apologize for and, under the same circumstances, before God, would do it again" (89). Such language struck a similar note to the message that ex-Confederate officers, newly elected to statehouses in the so-called "redeemed" states like Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina, proclaimed to their White Line constituents around this same time.

Through the 1880s until his retirement from public life in 1899, Pryor maintained his life-long allegiance to the Democratic Party, using his connections to New York's Tammany machine to secure a position as a judge on the state's Supreme Court. In conclusion, Pryor does seem to be a representative figure in Southern history as Link contends, removing slavery as the

primary cause of the war, equally honoring veterans from both sides of the struggle, and asking for divine forgiveness for the shared sin of the conflict, just as his unreconstructed contemporaries throughout the South did in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

ANDREW SALAMONE
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