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Review of Jim Crow's Counterculture: The Blues and Black Southerners, 1890-1945

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His employer was Marcus M. "Brick" Pomeroy, a publisher who had gained notoriety during the Civil War for his opposition to President Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party. A decade after the war, that same publisher became a founder of the Greenback Party.

Influenced by his boss's political rebelliousness and by an 1881 lumbermen's strike in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, Taylor embraced a succession of third-party movements while emerging as a "race man" during the 1890s. Mouser is at his best describing the frustration that Taylor and a minority of other African Americans felt toward both Republicans and Democrats during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the myriad ways that frustration manifested itself.

Two unfortunate tendencies, reflecting the paucity of sources the author had to work with, appear throughout the book. The first is Mouser's inclination to overstate what his research reveals. This reviewer found himself asking far too often, "Where is the proof for that conclusion?" The second tendency, understandable but regrettable, is the author's frequent use of long, block quotations from newspapers that sometimes extend over two and even three pages.

Those shortcomings aside, Mouser's book adds to an understanding of late-nineteenth-century racial politics and the role played by marginalized African Americans such as George Edwin Taylor.

State Historical Society of Missouri

GARY R. KREMER

Jim Crow's Counterculture: The Blues and Black Southerners, 1890–1945. By R. A. Lawson. Making the Modern South. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010. Pp. [xvi], 275. \$45.00, ISBN 978-0-8071-3680-5.)

R. A. Lawson uses the blues as a body of evidence to write a working-class black history of the lower Mississippi River Valley from the late nineteenth century through World War II that attempts to tease out the complex "dualities" inherent to blues culture and the black experience (p. 17). He deftly integrates analysis of the music, lyrics, and culture of this frequently studied but often romanticized and mythologized story, while keeping it grounded firmly in historical realities. His study of bluesmen's changing attitudes, values, movements, and musical choices provides access to a new thread of African American history that more traditional written sources are less willing to reveal. His work is a creative cultural history that situates bluesmen and their music in a countercultural space. Along the way, Lawson engages changes in the African American experience over time by describing how these changes were expressed in blues music and in the lives of its creators.

Three main themes emerge in this work: the blues as countercultural, the blues as a dynamic art form, and the blues as a window into black history. The "essence" of the blues as countercultural is its "willful disregard of social convention, propriety, and deference in favor of expressing the self, even in self-destructive ways." In this way, "blues musicians provided the vocabulary and cultural space for resistance," not only to Jim Crow social reality but also to both white and black middle-class cultures (p. 79). According to Lawson, the blues was originally for those who held out little hope for better opportunities, but because of the dynamism and responsiveness of the blues, the music

became mobile and able to express much more. Its very nature as an elastic art form, ever responding to audiences' desires, means that blues lyrics can be used to interrogate the attitudes and values of not only the musicians but also their listeners. The bluesmen expressed a message of personal freedom that by the very necessity of changing historical forces during these decades resulted in new ways of expressing their freedom. This shift moved the blues from the highly "me'-centered mentality" of the earliest bluesmen, who tried to assert their autonomy by "preach[ing] an antiwork ethic and peddl[ing] a culture of individual escapism and hedonism," to a "we'-centered" perspective that "praise[d] hard work, national unity, and patriotism" (pp. x-xi). Thus, historical developments that affected working-class blacks in the Mississippi River Valley—Jim Crow, the Great Migration, the experiences of both world wars, and the rising commercial recording industry—found expression through blues music precisely because it was *not* a static form mired in an unchanging folk body of song. The traditionally dynamic expression of the blues allowed the music to speak of changing realities.

Lawson's deft engagement with historical scholarship and convincing argument based in a historically grounded reading of song lyrics place his study within the conversation about the meaning of blues music in America. Throughout the book, Lawson shows how the traditional framework for African American cultural history that pits resistance against accommodation is not as useful as seeing African American culture, and the blues specifically, as simultaneously resistant and accommodative. *Jim Crow's Counterculture: The Blues and Black Southerners, 1890-1945* is an innovative and creative cultural history that will be of interest to anyone studying the African American experience, culture as a means of resistance and accommodation, or the relationship between individual cultural producers and the consumers of their products.

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Living with Jim Crow: African American Women and Memories of the Segregated South. By Anne Valk and Leslie Brown. Palgrave Studies in Oral History. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Pp. [xiv], 209. Paper, \$29.00, ISBN 978-0-230-62152-7; cloth, \$95.00, ISBN 978-0-230-61962-3.)

The comedian Chris Rock remarks that a "black man gotta fly to get to somethin' that a white man can walk to." Marie Fort, born in 1904 in Memphis, Tennessee, heard a similar message as a child. "You are a black girl," her mother told her. "You've got to do . . . twenty times more than the brown girl, seventy-five times more than the yellow girl, and a hundred times more than the white girl to make it and you'd better make it" (p. 22). Fort's mother captured the combination of systemic racism and dogged resistance that has long defined the black experience in the United States. She spoke to the simultaneous sense of pride and resentment that defined life in a racially fractured nation.

Fort is one of the many interviewees in this outstanding new volume on African American women in the Jim Crow South. The authors, Anne Valk and Leslie Brown, define the Jim Crow era as that period falling between the Supreme Court decisions *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). As the authors point out, these boundaries are somewhat