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Book Review: Bloody Breathitt: Politics and Violence in the Appalachian South

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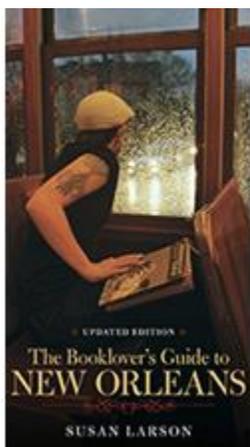
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Bernard LaFayette's explication of his nonviolent organizing tactics is both fascinating and illuminating. Far from being a spontaneous action, the Alabama Voter Registration Campaign was a carefully planned operation that entailed significant risk of life and limb. At the same time, it addressed a longstanding wrong during a time of national turmoil as the broader civil rights movement proceeded to break down racial barriers on many fronts at long last. Although Bernard LaFayette saw himself more as a catalyst who preferred to mobilize the population at large than as a charismatic leader such as Martin Luther King, his wise and brave actions in Selma, Alabama, based on an unwavering foundation of nonviolent action, were absolutely crucial to securing the right to vote for all citizens.

The history of the civil rights movement may be history but it is very relevant to the present day. On October 2, 2013 the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County, Ala. v. Holder* weakened enforcement of the preclearance provision required of states having a history of obstructing voter registration in Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act and is a reminder that liberty requires vigilance. LaFayette's book should be required reading for anyone who takes the right to vote for granted. LaFayette's book is recommended reading for those interested in the history of the civil rights movement, the history of Alabama and the South more generally, and African American history.

Tim Dodge
Auburn University

The Booklover's Guide to New Orleans. 2nd edition. Larson, Susan. Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-8071-5307-9 pbk. 312 p. \$24.95



Originally published in 1999, this updated edition of a well-loved guide book offers much more than a directory of tourist destinations for the literarily inclined. The book begins with a detailed historical overview divided into distinct time periods, which covers the writers, editors, publishers, booksellers, and other important figures who helped create and sustain the literary culture for which New Orleans has become famous. Well-written and full of

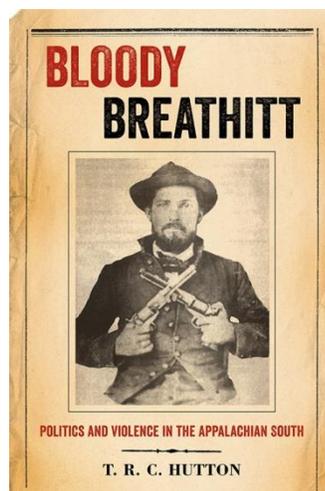
fascinating anecdotes throughout its pages, the updated introduction also includes an entirely new section covering the time period during and immediately following Hurricane Katrina, which details the history of how writers and publishers, both nationally and locally, responded to the disaster and the rebuilding that continues to this day.

The middle section of the book provides multiple directories to assist travelers planning to visit New Orleans, including a "Literary Address Book" describing essential landmarks and their significance, a "Literary Date Book" which provides a calendar of the many annual festivals and events the city offers, and a descriptive directory of New Orleans' numerous independent, specialty, and antiquarian bookstores. This is followed by a section of "New Orleans Reading Lists" compiled by the author, which recommend New Orleans literature in many different categories, including fiction, nonfiction, poetry, children's books, and books specifically dealing with Hurricane Katrina as well. These lists may be just as useful to librarians who want to build their libraries' Southern Literature collections as they will be to travelers who enjoy reading about places they are visiting. The book concludes with a unique section where New Orleans authors offer their own lists of favorite things about the city.

Though it is easy for travel guides to become outdated and because of this, librarians may hesitate to purchase them for their collections, the historical and cultural focus of this book will make it a worthwhile read even after the functional directory of addresses, phone numbers, and web site addresses listed for each location changes or becomes obsolete. It offers a snapshot of literary New Orleans which will continue to be of interest.

Allison Faix
Coastal Carolina University

Bloody Breathitt: Politics and Violence in the Appalachian South. Hutton, T.R.C. Lexington, KY : University Press of Kentucky, 2013. ISBN 978-0-8131-3646-2. 444 p. \$50.



In this impressive work, T.R.C. Hutton, a lecturer in history at the University of Tennessee, sheds light on the history of the very unique and interesting county of Breathitt, Kentucky and its reputation for “feuds”. After extensive research, Hutton has concluded that much of the violence associated with Breathitt County had little to do with “feuding” and more to do with the politics of the county. It all started during the Civil War when Breathitt County, in the eastern pro-union region of Kentucky, remained staunchly Confederate and Democrat in politics.

The book covers the period between 1860 and 1910 with emphasis on the bloodiest period during the Reconstruction years. It was during that period that the county began to be called “Bloody Breathitt” because of the large number of murders and other violence. The author’s research reveals that the majority of the so called “feuds” did not meet the conventional definition of a feud but had more to do with what was happening in the region during that time. Breathitt was a Democratic stronghold surrounded by equally fervent Republican counties. In order to remain in power, the leadership of the county, mostly the rich landowners and other powerful people, sometimes used violence to keep the small Republican faction (mostly the poor, the landless mountain men, workers, and the small number of African Americans) in compliance. Often

violent resistance by the weaker Republicans added to the conflict.

It suited the Democratic leadership in the state and federal governments and the newspapers to label the violence in Breathitt as “feuds” to hide the political nature of the bloody savagery. During election related violence, the newspapers reminded their readers of the bloody history of the county and again labeled it as a “feud”. Although the writing style is sometimes difficult to follow, the author adequately makes his point and convinces his audience that most of the violence in “Bloody Breathitt” was not really caused by “feuds” but more because of money, power, and politics.

Close to half of the book consists of Notes, almost fifty pages of references, and an index. It was thoroughly researched and is of historical interest, covering the history of Breathitt County and also some Kentucky history from the Civil War through Reconstruction. Historians and citizens of Kentucky and the Appalachian region would find this interesting and informative.

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