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Book Review - Signposts: New Directions in Southern Legal History

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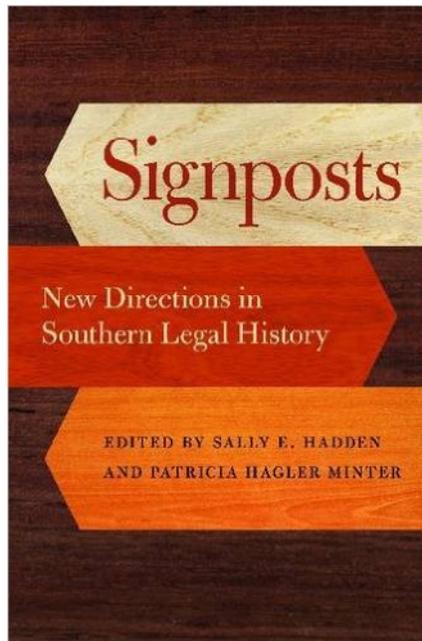
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Off the SHELF

Signposts: New Directions in Southern Legal History edited by Sally E. Hadden & Patricia Hagler Minter (University of Georgia Press, 2013: ISBN 978-0-8203-4499-7, \$26.95.)

The study of Southern legal history was in its infancy in 1984 when *Ambivalent Legacy: A Legal History of the South* was published. Thirty years later, the study of legal history in the South has flourished, helped in no small part by the founding of the *Journal of Southern Legal History*. It is fitting, then, that a book "intended as a long-delayed successor to *Ambivalent Legacy*" seeks not only to celebrate the strides made in the field of Southern legal history but also to inspire future scholars to explore relatively untrodden paths.

The essays in *Signposts* illustrate the potential for diversity in Southern legal history by ranging across the length and breadth of the South. The earliest essays address the colonial period while the latest reach the latter half of the twentieth century and beyond. Equally expansive is the book's geographical coverage, which includes Louisiana, Florida, South Carolina, and Kentucky, and highlights the South's cultural diversity. A chapter on manumission in New Orleans, for example, shows the difference made by transition from French to Spanish rule in that city. A later chapter provides a character study of Elisha Chester, a lawyer involved in the fight over Cherokee removal.



The scope of the essays is similarly varied. Some chapters, such as James W. Ely Jr.'s exploration of the homestead exemption, cover decades over several states. Others focus on one specific place and time. Patricia Hagler Minter delves into the local history behind *Buchanan v. Warley*. Sally E. Hadden's essay explores grand jury presentments in Charleston, South Carolina, in which grand jurors—often the wealthier members of society—could accuse others by name or complain about the state of the roads.

While the subjects of some of the essays are familiar, they are presented in fresh ways. Law students learn *Ex Parte McCardle* and *Ex Parte Milligan* for their main points of law, largely divorced from their historical context; Cynthia Nicoletti's chapter reseats these seminal cases as volleys in a coordinated legal battle against military Reconstruction. Lisa Lindquist Dorr's essay examines Prohibition through the eyes of Southern women, both those who drank (and were arrested) and those who did not.

In the introduction to *Signposts*, Hadden and Minter set out to "demonstrate [Southern legal history's] dynamism and diversity." The essays they have chosen do just that. Hopefully they will also inspire others to continue to study the legal history of the South from new angles and directions.

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