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Book Review: River of Hope: Black Politics and the Memphis Freedom Movement, 1865 to 1954

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conflicts, some of which continue into the present. He speaks to his grandmother about the local bird life, family quilts, and accounts of his own relatives who settled in the mountains. It is obvious that he listened closely and these stories gave him the perspective he needed to write his own story of the regional connectivity that he had experienced since his youth.

Jones learned early that “mountain folk” were different. His accent and dialect gave him away, and he soon realized that outsiders formed opinions that were not easily shaken. As the story of his family unfolds, he explores the stereotype of mountain people; deconstructing it in every anecdote, proving that the history of the Appalachia is varied, complex, and not easily pigeonholed. Jones’ own regional history reaches back to his Dutch ancestor, Abraham Kuykendall, who settled in the wilderness of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the mid-eighteenth century. It is Abraham, one of the early settlers, who becomes the first outsider, the first land developer.

Isolated, wild, rural, and wise, Jones adeptly describes the Southerness of his Blue Ridge home, but points out that the mountain culture was unique in its independence of thought and diverse political ideologies. This is demonstrated particularly well in his description of the mountain region torn apart by the Civil War. Jones uses Civil War folk tunes, plucked out on banjo strings, to illustrate the independent temperament and complex loyalties of the mountain people as each was forced to choose a side. The Appalachia was interspersed with both Unionists and Confederates, and Jones’ own family has its roots in both.

Jones leads the reader into discovering the history of the mountains but he quickly pulls the reader back from the struggles of the past to his own experiences with independent and ever-changing mountain cultures. Jones and his wife spent a year teaching in the small town of Gracias a Dios in Honduras and the book is peppered with many anecdotes about his time there. Geographical similarities between the mountain towns of Honduras and the Blue Ridge reminded him of home, and he eventually finds himself back in his former elementary school in the mountains of North Carolina teaching immigrant children to comfortably assimilate into their new culture.

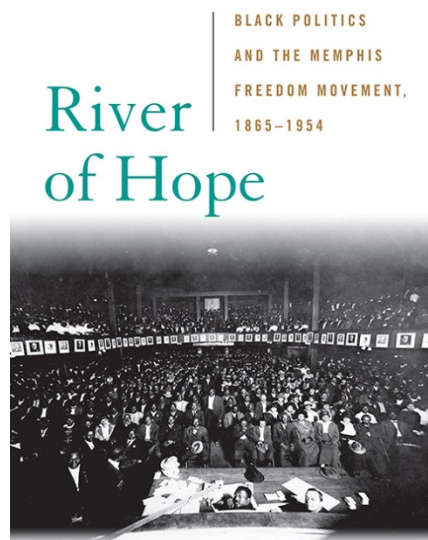
Yet change is inevitable, even in the formerly isolated landscape of the mountains, a new wave of outsiders threatens to physically transform the region. This threat comes in the form of builders and developers of large upscale communities, which could alter the mountain forever.

Bearwallow: A Personal History of a Mountain Homeland is a compelling journey, and Jones successfully weaves the language, music, food, faith, and geography of the mountain area into a multi-layered narrative. While capturing the deep and haunting regional history and culture of the mountains, he does not over-romanticize or sentimentalize his topic. His fluid writing style allows the reader to travel with him, and in the process, find themselves pulled back to their own roots, questioning if

they too find their past irrevocably imprinted on their present life.

Kathelene McCarty Smith
The Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and
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River of Hope: Black Politics and the Memphis Freedom Movement, 1865 to 1954. Elizabeth Gritter. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2014. ISBN 978-0-8131-4450-4. 380p. \$40.



Elizabeth Gritter

In “River of Hope: Black Politics and the Memphis Freedom Movement”, Elizabeth Gritter shows the reader the political landscape of Memphis, Tennessee, between 1865 and 1954.

Gritter introduces the reader to the Lincoln League (1916), to prominent black citizens such as Robert R. Church, Jr. and Dr. Joseph E. Walker, and to Edward H. Crump, “leader of the white political machine in Memphis between 1910 and 1954” (p.6). “ Her carefully woven stories of the political activities of important movements and their leaders reveal Memphis to be a center for the “river of hope” for black Americans.

Sensing there was a deep meaning to Dr. Gritter’s title “River of Hope: Black Politics and the Memphis Freedom Movement 1865 -1954”, I wrote to her to ask about the meaning of “river of hope”. She kindly responded and gave permission for me to share her comments in this review:

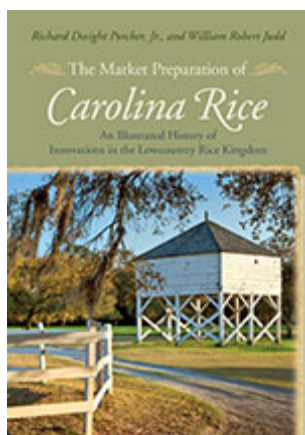
“River of Hope: I see, as many artists and writers have, the river as a metaphor for life. In my case, it stands for the black freedom struggle more specifically,

and hope is what drives activists—hope for a better future, hope that a better future can be possible, hope that injustices can be changed. A river is a good metaphor because it is long and continuous—the black freedom struggle has been long but one of hope. And a river is alive—as I say in my conclusion African Americans today still are not in an equal social position compared to whites, the struggle like the river continues. A river metaphor is also especially pertinent to Memphis given its sits on the banks of the Mississippi River.” (email 8/10/14)

I recommend you add this book to your reference library. It contains political events and personal histories of individuals that made significant impacts in the struggle for civil rights in Memphis, There are excellent end notes, a bibliography, an index (pgs. 327-355) and a selection of photographs (p.136-) of prominent black citizens who were highlighted in the text.

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The Market Preparation of Carolina Rice: An Illustrated History of Innovation in the Lowcountry Rice Kingdom. Richard Dwight Porcher, Jr., and William Robert Judd. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014 ISBN 978-1-61117-351-2. 408 p. \$49.95.



As I open and turn the pages of this 379 page historical scholarly tome, I am constantly surprised with the documentary writing, the black and white machine and equipment drawings, the beautiful color plates, and pages of charts, lists and data.

The title of this research, “The Market Preparation of Carolina Rice: An illustrated History of Innovations in the Lowcountry Rice Kingdom”, appealed to me on a very personal level: I love rice! I love South Carolina’s restored rice plantations.

My travels to rice plantations located along the South Carolina coast on summer and winter travels and on visits

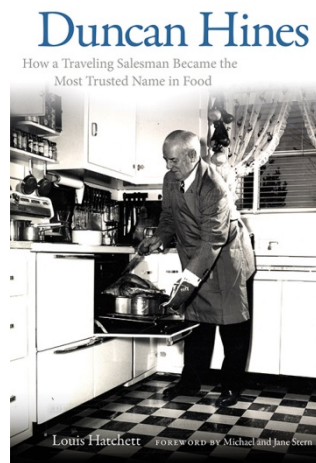
to family and friends did not prepare me for the depth and dedication that Richard Dwight Porcher, Jr., and William Robert Judd poured into this priceless work. I expected to see some steaming bowls of rice or some beautifully laden southern dinner tables as that is how I glorify rice. I did not expect to see machinery, storage bins, steam engines and water wheels, threshing barns and rolling screens. Nor did I expect to read of the socio-economic and political scars of the Civil War upon the rice culture and the rise and demise of labor and poverty among the people involved in the industry that comprised the rice culture.

Through words, ideas, visual representations and emotional descriptions, I gained a new impression of my favorite food. I also gained a sense of the importance of the rice culture in our South Carolina Lowcountry history. My husband tells me that his Mother’s family home in Pamplico, S.C., served rice with every meal and to him, now 75 years old, rice is a distinct staple in our house. To me, It is a joyful gift brought to us over the years by the people who worked to develop and where possible sustain the rice culture in our Lowcountry rice kingdom.

Anyone interested in pursuing research into the economic, cultural and historical development of the lowcountry of Carolina rice must consider this a required research tome.

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Duncan Hines: How a Traveling Salesman Became the Most Trusted Name in Food. Hatchett, Louis. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2014. ISBN 978-0-8131-4459-7 (pbk.: alk. paper); ISBN 978-0-8131-4484-9 (pdf); ISBN 978-0-8131-4483-2 (epub). 325 p. \$19.95.



This entertaining book recounts the life and remarkable career of Duncan Hines, a native of Bowling Green, KY. Unlike Betty Crocker, a fictional identity crafted by General Mills to symbolize the company’s “helpfulness, trustworthiness, and quality,” (“General Mills History of Innovation: the History of Betty Crocker,”