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## Thomas Jefferson's Lives: Biographers and the Battle for History

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Opening this book, I asked myself, “What will I learn about Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935)?”

In my personal life, education and career journey, I heard or read about Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s advocacy for women. Learning about her life, I was encouraged to ask many questions of myself.

*“What is a woman’s place? What is a woman’s right to voice personal opinions? What right does a woman have to choose a non-traditional career? Must a woman marry, bear children and be a house/home keeper for her life’s work?”*

Little did I know of Gilman’s long and dedicated life of challenging women to seek meaning for their lives beyond traditional marriage, children, and house-keeping. I was to learn from the selections in Bergman’s book, Gilman raised awareness of differing perceptions of women’s roles in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, by her writings, speaking and travels in the United States and abroad.

Jill Bergmann presents a collection of essays that explain Gilman’s work and her struggles toward a life of meaning for herself, “A Woman’s Place is Not in the Home” (p.1), “Geography and Biography: Places in and of Gilman’s Life” (p. 13), “Know Your Place: Limits on Women’s Freedom and Power”(p.97) and “Reclaiming and Defining A Women’s Place” (p. 131).

The text is enhanced with photographs, paintings, street scenes, busts of Gilman, and places of Gilman’s travels. Though Charlotte Perkins Gilman committed suicide in 1935, her work can live on in the pages of Bergman’s book. I recommend it for any women’s studies faculty, students, and women’s college libraries. Bergman’s book contains 220 pages, a list of the credentials of the contributors, and an Index on page 223.

An interesting article may be found online: “The utopian ‘feminist apartment hotels’ of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Her idea was regarded as “the most dangerous enemy American domesticity has yet had to encounter.”  
<https://www.curbed.com/2019/7/24/20697836/charlotte-perkins-gilman-feminist-theorist-utopian-architecture>

Carol Walker Jordan, Ph.D. MLIS

**Thomas Jefferson’s Lives: Biographers and the Battle for History.** Edited by Robert M.S. McDonald. Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2019. ISBN 978-0-8139-4291-9 (Cloth); 978-0-8139-4292-6 (Ebook). 344 p. \$35.00



As with other authors of our times, it is optional to attend a major academic conference and come away with the presentations in hand to form a book such as *Thomas Jefferson’s Lives: Biographers and the Battle for History*. In this selection for review, Robert M.S. McDonald says he attended a conference, “Jefferson’s Lives”. This conference “featured papers on major nineteenth-and twentieth-century biographers of Jefferson, by major twentieth-and twenty-first-century scholars of Jefferson” (p. Foreward 1).

In the Section, “Contributors”, we can see the names and credentials of 12+ presenters. Of great interest to me is the Contribution by Annette Gordon-Reed’s “Section 12 That Woman Fawn Brodie and Thomas Jefferson’s Intimate History”. Gordon-Reed is “Charles Warren Professor of American Legal History at Harvard Law School and Professor of History in Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Gordon-Reed gained distinction by having won the 2009 Pulitzer Prize in History and the 2008 National Book Award for Non-Fiction, plus 12 other awards including “The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family (2008)”. Noted also is that in the Index, credits are shown that link the writings of the contributors to the topic “Hemings, Sally and the TJ relationships”.

While many topics surrounding the life and times of Jefferson grab our attention and warrant inclusion in biographical writings, the “Hemingses” and Thomas Jefferson present a fascination to which we are drawn and from which we emerge to hold personal opinions. This may be a crucial insight into the writing of biography.

It is said in the leaf of the cover: “The contributors to this book explore how individual biographers have shaped history—as well as how the interests and preoccupations of the times in which they wrote helped to shape their portrayals of Jefferson.” After reading Gordon-Reed’s

contribution, we may ask ourselves if this is true of her writing?

Recommend this book for academic libraries and historical societies. There are no illustrations. There are 3 parts to the collection of submissions: Part I Memory, Part II Rivalry, Part III History, pages, 25-280, An afterword: a Tribute to Peter Onuf p. 281, Notes on Contributors p. 289 to 294, and Index 294 to 311.

*Carol Walker Jordan, Ph.D., MLIS*

**They Stole Him Out of Jail: Willie Earle, South Carolina's Last Lynching Victim.** William B. Gravely, Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2019. ISBN 978-1-61117-937-8. 336 p. \$29.99.



As I read the cover of the book, I was fascinated by the story of how on February 27, 1947, 24 year old Willie Earle an African American man was arrested for the murder of a Greenville, SC, taxi driver named T. W. Brown

The story goes that Earle was abducted from his jail cell by a mob, and then beaten, stabbed and shot to death. The author says “this lynching of Willie Earle led to the most outrageous trial of 31 suspects, most of them cabbies, and twenty-one confessions--a nine day trial in May that attracted national press attention that ended in acquittal by an all-white jury” (cover leaf).

[The Lynching Of Willie Earle Historical Marker](https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=40503)  
<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=40503>

William B. Gravely provides a comprehensive account of all the happenings in this major trial that included

- 1) the arrest of Willie,
- 2) the background of the trial proceedings,
- 3) the trial,
- 4) the complex political and legal issues that emerged over the trial,
- 5) its impact on white and black relations in South Carolina and the nation.

Gravely also provides in depth information on the topic of “lynching” (see Index, p. 302).

Lynching in the United States

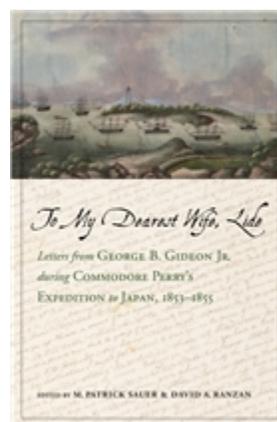


Lynching is the practice of murder by a group of people by extrajudicial action. Lynching in the United States rose in number after the American Civil War in the late 19th century, following the emancipation of slaves; they declined in the 1930s. Most lynchings were of African-American men in the Southern United States,

Recommended for public and academic libraries. A comprehensive research document that brings into the criminal justice system a model for others to follow. Illustrations random pages 2-207. List of defendants pg. 231, Notes page 235, Bibliography p. 182, Index 293.

*Carol Walker Jordan, PhD. MLIS*

**To My Dearest Wife, Lide: Letters from George B. Gideon, Jr., during Commodore Perry's Expedition to Japan, 1853-1855.** Edited by M. Patrick Sauer and David A. Ranzan. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2019. ISBN 978-0-8173-2023-2 (Cloth); 978-0-8173-9237-6 (E Book). 272 p. \$49.95.



George Gideon's “letters had been in the possession of Gideon's great grandniece. Discovered after her death, the collection of 51 letters resided in her attic wrapped in manila paper like a badly wrapped paper”.