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Surfing the South: The Search for Waves and the People Who Ride Them

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leading motive behind the manufacture of baskets, other functions would emerge, such as using them for “African American babies sunning in blanket-padded ‘fanner baskets’, supervised by ‘mauma or nurse’ or used as a head tote basket to carry heavy loads or used as sewing, vegetable, and bread baskets, and work baskets” (pp.13-14). “The crafting of baskets also contributed to the economic opportunities and independence of enslaved men, as well as helping women’s mental health through avenues of expression with one sewer stating it’s enjoyed because it’s a relaxing kind of therapy” (p.33).

Explanations of the techniques such as coiling, materials used called the foundation, and stitching elements called the binder or weaver are described in detail. The book provides several illustrations of the tools handled, the labor involved, and the completed creations. In this latest edition, Rosengarten’s expertise in African American basketry is evident from years of fieldwork and investigation, which continues to this day revealing the challenges that are being confronted. “Challenges such as imported knock-offs, scarce sweetgrass, highway development, and the opposition met with trying to convince the newer generations to carry on the tradition threaten the future of the trade” (p.51). The author’s ability to continue the research to include up-to-date information is notable and an indicator of the commitment to South Carolina Lowcountry basketry promotion and education.

The book is clear, concise, and easy to understand, and for readers with no previous knowledge about Lowcountry basket making, African American folk art, or Gullah/Geechee culture, it is exceedingly informative. Rosengarten includes numerous sewers’ experiences that enhance interest, adds authenticity, and gives the reader a glimpse into this traditional craft’s past and present. The limited documentation on Lowcountry basket making, the methods used, the artists’ stories, and the impact these elements had on rice cultivation make this book even more special and valued. It is apparent that the author’s purpose in writing the book is to highlight the tradition and to ensure that history is preserved.

Row Upon Row: Sea Grass Baskets of the South Carolina Lowcountry’s greatest worth is the contribution it has to the safeguarding of Lowcountry African American culture. The content

reveals a crucial part of southern history. If readers are drawn to learning about the historical significance of Lowcountry basketry, the specific creation process, and African American art, this book is recommended. It is also a pertinent addition to any public or academic library collection.

Rosengarten is a historian and curator at the College of Charleston whose research of coiled basketry spans three decades. In the early 1980s, McKissick Museum employed Rosengarten to interview basket makers in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, purchase baskets, and curate an exhibition showcasing the artistry of basketry. Rosengarten has authored a number of publications centered on the African American tradition of coiled basketry and continues to conduct work in this area of study establishing her as an authoritative expert in the field. Additional Rosengarten titles include *Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art* and *Lowcountry Basketry: Folk Arts in the Marketplace*.

Samantha Duncan, Coastal Carolina University

Surfing the South: The Search for Waves and the People Who Ride Them

Steve Estes
Chapel Hill: University of
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214 p. \$23.00 (Pbk)



In *Surfing the South*, author Mark Estes, a native southerner, history professor, and devoted surfer, documents the region’s little-known surf culture along the Gulf Coast and Eastern Seaboard while chronicling the road trips he embarked on with his adolescent daughter, Zinnia, to learn more about this culture. The result is a unique mashup between a popular history of surfing in the American South and a travelogue that explores the author’s personal reflections on surfing, his identity as a southern transplant, and as a father bonding with his daughter through travel and recreation.

Over the course of two consecutive summers, Estes traveled along the coastal South from Houston, Texas to Ocean City, Maryland interviewing more than 40 individuals previously or

currently engaged in various facets of southern surf culture: recreational and professional/competitive surfing, surfboard “shaping” or crafting, surf shop ownership and employment, surf club participation, surf journalism and writing, surf coaching, local museum exhibit curation, and surf documentary production. States represented include Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. Estes’ surf history is largely informed by his interviews and supplemented with secondary and additional primary sources. Significantly, this volume also examines how the rise and evolution of surfing in the coastal South during the 20th century intersected with broader social movements and developments:

These stories chronicle not only the history of southern surfing but, in a sense, the modern South. They reflect many of the major trends that shaped the region and nation since World War II: Cold War militarization, civil rights, the counterculture, the women’s movement, environmentalism, and coastal development (p. 3).

Some of these themes appear in multiple chapters whereas others are featured discussions of a single chapter. The women’s movement and adjacent topics, for instance, emerge with every female surfer interviewee’s experiences. Environmentalism, on the other hand, looms large in the Grand Isle, Louisiana chapter given the Pelican State’s extensive relationship with offshore drilling. The book is divided into 12 chapters, one for each city or destination along Estes’ coastline journey. For those interested in learning more, the “Notes on Sources” section provides a brief, but useful essay highlighting essential texts in surfing history, southern history, and oral history.

In the 21st century, our society recognizes that an individual’s demographic makeup (particularly race, gender, and sexual orientation) helps shape their identity, influences their perspective, and often impacts their walk of life. One aspect rarely considered, however, is the role that regional culture plays in molding our identities. Estes’ travelogue writing demonstrates the potential for studying how this neglected dynamic adds another layer to a person’s worldview. As a South Carolina native-turned longtime Californian, Estes has developed a hybrid regional identity between

his southern heritage and his adopted West Coast ways. As a result, readers will notice that his outlook is occasionally conflicted throughout the book. An even more compelling example is his daughter. Estes reveals that Zinnia, who has never lived in the South, conceptualizes her identity as Jewish by her mother and “half southern” by her father. As anyone living in the southeastern United States can attest, this father and daughter pair are not unique in this regard. The author’s reflections on southern identity shines a spotlight on a phenomenon that warrants more attention, both among academics and the public.

There is one minor criticism of *Surfing the South*. As with any sport or pastime, the surfing community uses a unique lexicon. Estes recognizes that many readers are unfamiliar with this insider terminology and occasionally provides definitions for clarity. Regrettably, he is not consistent with this support throughout. In the opening story of the book, for instance, he describes a missed wave opportunity as a “beautiful little left that could have been my best ride of the day” (p. 2). A “left” is apparently any wave that breaks left from the surfer’s perspective. For surf enthusiasts like Estes, this term may seem self-evident. For inland readers (particularly those residing in landlocked states), however, it is not. Consistent use of in-text definitions or the inclusion of a glossary with surfing terms and phrases employed throughout the volume would better serve the readership. This minor critique notwithstanding, Steve Estes’ book and oral history project are important resources for documenting and raising awareness about the coastal South’s little-known surf culture. While academic libraries located along the Gulf Coast and Eastern Seaboard near featured destinations should consider adding this title to their main collection and special collections stacks, public libraries throughout the southeast are encouraged to provide copies for their communities. As both a popular history and travelogue written in an engaging narrative prose, *Surfing the South: The Search for Waves and the People Who Ride Them* is a natural fit for patrons interested in educational pleasure reading.

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