Aggression and Sufferings: Settler Violence, Native Resistance, and the Coalescence of the Old South

Tim Dodge

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Reviewer: D. Evan Nooe

Title: Aggression and Sufferings: Settler Violence, Native Resistance, and the Coalescence of the Old South

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This well-written and informative book might make the reader angry. Aggression and Sufferings makes the case that white Southerners successfully changed the narrative of their aggression against and dispossession of Native Americans, making themselves instead appear to be the victims of aggression and thus creating a regional identity that justified the expulsion of Native Americans from the South. To do this, D. Evan Nooe provides numerous examples from the 1770s through the 1840s. Along with a fascinating and disturbing historical account of individual acts of violence and more organized acts of violence via wars, Nooe also develops the concept of “coalescence” to explain the social process of unifying groups of people into identifiable regional groups or societies, such as “Native American Southerners” and “white Southerners.” Nooe sees violence and dispossession as central to the coalescence of what we now know as the South—especially the white South.

The precipitating factor in nearly all of the violence committed by Native Americans (Nooe uses this term plus “Indigenous” and “Indians”; to keep things simple and consistent, the term “Native American” will be used here) was the unauthorized and often illegal encroachment of white settlers onto Native American land. In other words, it was white provocation, sometimes intentional and other times through ignorance or arrogance, that resulted in Native American retaliation. These “massacres” would then be publicized and valorized, often through newspaper stories that inevitably portrayed the white settlers as victims and Native Americans as aggressors.

An important point made by Nooe is that many of these violent incidents became the basis for white Southern grievance and justification for the larger expulsion of Native Americans from the region. An early example was the murder of several members of the family of Anthony Hampton by Cherokees in South Carolina in 1776. The Hamptonsons were just one of many white settler families that ignored the colonial border established by the British. Remaining members of the Hampton family joined with the South Carolina militia and the newly-formed Continental Army of the brand-new United States to raid and destroy Cherokee homes and property in the short-lived Cherokee War of 1776. As Nooe describes it, “memory of the 1776 Cherokee War resonated among white South Carolinians for generations” (p. 5).

After the American Revolution, efforts by the federal government to limit white settlement to areas agreed upon with Native American tribes by treaty were often ineffective and came too late. In Georgia, Tennessee, and the Mississippi Territory, “white communities in southern states leveraged their position as victims to sound alarms of an impending Indian war” (p. 34). These settlers criticized the federal government for a lack of protection despite themselves being the precipitating agents of Native American reprisals as settlers continued their encroachment. Such understandings among white Southerners helped precipitate major Indian wars in the early 19th century, including the Creek Indian War of 1813-1814 and the Seminole Wars of 1817 and 1835-42.

Nooe relates both the white Southern sense of grievance against Native Americans and the sense of taking part in a justified and heroic action, demonstrated by the great enthusiasm of volunteers to form militias and/or to join the federal forces organized by General (and future President) Andrew Jackson. By no means were the Native Americans who were being hounded out of their own lands simply hapless, passive victims, but this reader felt a growing sense of outrage at the provocations of the white settlers backed up by the military action of the militias and federal forces. The settlers essentially flipped the narrative and made aggression and violence of Native Americans the justification for displacement, military conflict, and—starting in 1830 with the Indian
Removal Act—the mass displacement of the Trail of Tears.

There were some atrocities committed by Native Americans too, and it is possible to feel some sympathy for some of the white victims. One of the most sympathetic is Jane Johns. She and her husband, Clement, were attacked in their home near Jacksonville, Florida, by Seminoles in 1836 who were resisting removal to the West. Her husband was killed, but Jane survived being shot, slashed by a blade (the precise weapon is not specified), scalped, and left for dead. While she recovered from her horrendous wounds, her ordeal was publicized by newspaper accounts, a book, and speaking tours throughout the eastern coastal South, with Johns becoming somewhat of a celebrity (pp. 146-148). The unfortunate woman lived until 1874. Not surprisingly, the story of Jane Johns was used to mobilize action against the remaining Seminoles of Florida.

Aggression and Sufferings provides thorough documentation via numerous endnotes. The bibliography of primary sources—such as manuscript collections, federal government documents, and a truly large listing of historical newspapers and periodicals—and the extensive listing of secondary sources by scholars is impressive and indicates considerable research went into the writing of this book.

Aggression and Sufferings is strongly recommended to academic libraries and public libraries collecting in the areas of Southern and Native American history. White persons of conscience might find themselves both angered and informed by this work. D. Evan Nooe makes a convincing case as to how the South coalesced into identifiable Native American Southerner and white Southerner social and political entities with implications for the present day.

Tim Dodge, Auburn University

Charleston Horse Power: Equine Culture in the Palmetto City

Christina Rae Butler
Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2023
ISBN: 9781643364025
248 p. $27.99 (Pbk)

In this work of social history, author and historic preservationist Christina Rae Butler recounts the lived experiences and contributions of Charleston’s urban horse and mule populations from the colonial era to the 2020s. Diverse topics explored include equine apparel, animal cruelty and welfare, and the emergence of carriage tourism. Using Charleston as a case study, Butler ultimately wrote this monograph to “help residents and visitors understand that equines played a key role in building the city, bringing supplies into and out of the city, and conveying humans through it daily for hundreds of years” (p. 172).

The book is organized thematically into 10 chapters devoted to various facets of Charleston’s equine past, including streetscapes, occupations, and architecture. In their heyday, horses entertained residents at local races, and beloved fire horses like Russia kept the city safe by deploying fire engines so that their human counterparts could extinguish the flames. Though less celebrated, mules also provided essential services, hauling raw materials or carting off the city’s waste. More than a mere mode of transportation, equines once touched virtually all aspects of everyday life in the Palmetto State’s capital. By the end of the book, readers will gain a greater understanding of and appreciation for how ubiquitous horses and mules once were in Charleston and how thoroughly the city’s past human population depended on them.

Though not the first monograph to explore urban equine history, Charleston Horse Power builds on the foundation established by earlier works such as Clay McShane and Joel A. Tarr’s The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century (2007), which primarily focused on developments in Northern cities. In chronicling Charleston’s urban equine history, for instance, Butler not only expands the geographical scope of the literature, but also sheds light on unique regional dynamics, such as Southern dependence on mules and how Jim Crow era segregation affected African Americans employed in equine occupations.

Arguably the greatest attribute of Charleston Horse Power is the author’s enthusiasm for the subject. The author consulted a surprisingly long list of primary and secondary sources to inform the study. Though this corpus of textual sources alone provides an ample foundation for the book, Butler enriches this research by incorpo-