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Book Review - Destination Dixie: Tourism & Southern History

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Off the SHELF

Destination Dixie: Tourism & Southern History

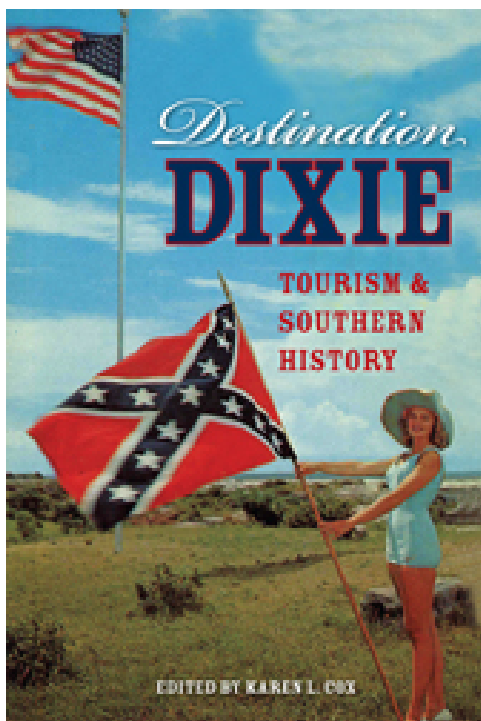
edited by Karen L. Cox (University Press of Florida, 2012: ISBN 9780813042374, \$74.95)

The southern states have been referred to as the wild, red-headed stepchild of America. Independent, and at times rebellious, the South possesses a unique culture within the American melting pot, as well its own distinctive natural landscape. It should come as no surprise that visitors from within and without the region would want to explore the remnants of historical southern culture and the natural environs.

Perhaps more than any other region of the United States, tourism is intertwined with history in the south. How best to portray this history, if at all, and to do so considering the context of slavery and racial tensions is the central theme of *Destination Dixie: Tourism & Southern History*, edited by Karen Cox. The book is presented as a series of chapters, each one dealing with a specific place or aspect of southern tourism. A wide variety of topics on southern tourism are presented, ranging from the presentation of Seminole culture in the Everglades, to the difficulties in how best to portray the fictional worlds of Mark Twain within the real Hannibal, Missouri.

Many of the chapters in the book deal with that most southern of social issues, race relations. This tension is portrayed as being compounded by the historical institution of slavery and its long legacy. Readers will learn that southern

history has at times been presented in a way that glorifies the antebellum culture of the region while seeking to confine slavery to small notations. This hesitance to present slavery in portrayals of the pre-Civil War south is discussed in chapters focusing on tourism in Charleston and the restoration of a plantation home in North Carolina.



Several chapters in the book portray the difficulty in presenting southern tourism as a series of conflicts at the local municipal level. Tupelo, Mississippi, birthplace of Elvis Presley, has often kept the singer's connection at an arm's length, for fear of attracting throngs of undesirable Presley fans. There is a discussion of the hesitance of many black Atlantans to restore the Margaret Mitchell home due to the portrayal of plantation life in *Gone with the Wind*. The gem of the book is a chapter dealing with attempts, by members of the white and black community

alike, to honor Olympian Jesse Owens in his native Alabama County. This chapter is written by Barclay Key, a professor at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and he unfolds the disagreements between local leaders over how, where, and if at all to build a monument to Owens. This type of maneuvering may remind readers of the ethnic politics of northern cities, only in the south this is shown as distilled down to just two ethnic groups, black and white.

There are chapters on the portrayal of the "Lost Cause" of southern independence. And readers

looking for information on southern tourism beyond the frames of the Civil War and race will enjoy the chapter on tourism in the Great Smoky Mountains. The book is recommended for those with a passion for southern history and will also be of interest to students and

scholars in political science courses as well as hospitality and tourism majors.

*Jeff Fisher is Librarian at
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