

nineteenth century. The place of the Roman Catholic church, its demands of men who sought to speak for and about the Irish community, and changes in its stance on various issues receive plenty of attention. The transatlantic politics of Irish identity, too, allow Shott to examine the ways the Irish press confronted the complexities of the era.

In its second half, the book turns to the black press. In two chapters devoted to the ideas and writing of T. Thomas Fortune and J. Samuel Stemons, Shott interprets the role of the black press as a whole and uses these two prominent editors to demonstrate how difficult it could be to parse the politics of the time. Whether at the local level—in Philadelphia—or the international one—in American foreign policy related to the Philippines—these men attempted to balance ideas about race, questions of labor, an emerging American imperialism, and the constant threat of violence implicit in Jim Crow.

Though he builds a narrative structure that divides the book among the four editors on whom he has trained his gaze, Shott allows currents to run throughout the book. The role of the Philippines offers the most obvious such connector. Whether it was Yorke defending Catholic worship and Catholic church spaces or Fortune advocating the importation of black labor into the Philippines, Shott demonstrates newspaper editors' nuanced engagement with imperial affairs.

In the same vein, he allows the question of race to flow from one chapter to another. Here, Shott manages to acknowledge fluctuations in the positions taken by editors. Sometimes, Shott shows, Ford asserted Irish identity and accepted a pannational whiteness. At other times, Ford and Yorke recognized the virulence of a racialized social structure damaging to both Irish and black Americans. Fortune fought Jim Crow but also seemed to accept the idea of a racial hierarchy in his statements about the value of black American labor in the Philippines. Shott acknowledges all of these contradictions and complexities, offering explanations where possible and permitting them simply to exist where he cannot.

In his introduction, Shott poses a number of important, interesting questions. Not all of them are answered in *Mediating America*, but

Shott's thoughtful observations deserve praise for their contribution to the greater body of knowledge regarding the Gilded Age press.

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*Crime and Punishment in the Jim Crow South*. Ed. by Amy Louise Wood and Natalie J. Ring. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019. 228 pp. Cloth, \$99.00. Paper, \$26.00.)

*Crime and Punishment in the Jim Crow South*, a new collection curated by Amy Louise Wood and Natalie J. Ring, complicates broader narratives of mass incarceration that have captured the popular imagination because those narratives have largely centered on urban industrial hubs outside of the South. James Forman Jr.'s *Locking Up Our Own* (2017) managed a similar complication by evaluating the role of the black electorate and the problem of good intentions in the carceral state. Now *Crime and Punishment in the Jim Crow South* provides a regional corrective that adds nuance to that larger discussion by using the southern experience to reveal holes in the convenient timeline that tracks a direct and unbroken trajectory from slavery to the sins of modern law enforcement.

But the collection does more than that. While many historians have rightly pushed back against claims of southern exceptionalism, particularly in relation to bigotry and racial violence, none deny that the demographic, economic, and political realities of the South resulted in unique challenges and a higher body count for African Americans. The region was particularly vulnerable to the consequences of the Jim Crow era, as responsibility for criminal justice made a slow transition from the 1890s to the 1950s from local municipalities and private entities into centralized state hands. Modernization, however, did not fix what was broken in local justice. Convict leasing, lynching, and profiteering remained in various forms even as the process of crime and punishment was institutionalized at the state level, making "the development of a modern criminal justice

system in the South,” as this collection shows, “part and parcel of Jim Crow” (p. 6).

To explore the broad range of racial realities associated with policing, incarceration, and capital punishment in the era of segregation, the collection casts a wide net. The book’s first section evaluates the relationship between police departments and black communities, from large cities such as New Orleans, Atlanta, and Memphis, to more rural locations such as Scooba, Mississippi. Tammy Ingram’s study of Phenix City, Alabama, describes a hub of vice, with mafia-controlled gambling and prostitution forming the bedrock of the local economy, aided by corrupt officials who cooperated in the trades. Decriminalizing such white behavior, Ingram argues, only exacerbated the consequences for black residents, as “immunity from prosecution was one of the rewards of white supremacy” (p. 82).

The book’s second section deals with penitentiaries and capital punishment. Pippa Holloway explains how southern states used criminal conviction to bar testimonies on a defendant’s own behalf. Tabitha LeFlouria describes the experiences of black female prisoners in Alabama and Tennessee. Vivien Miller and Seth Kotch contribute two fascinating essays on the transition from hangings to electrocutions in the early twentieth century and the racial implications of that change. As a whole, these essays provide a nuanced and necessary picture of the racialized nature of southern law enforcement in the Jim Crow era beyond the common tropes of convict lease, the chain gang, and police complicity in local lynchings.

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*The Original Blues: The Emergence of the Blues in African American Vaudeville, 1889–1926.* By Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2019. viii, 420 pp. Paper, \$40.00.) Heavily illustrated.

With *The Original Blues* Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff have completed an indispensable trilogy of works about the ascendance

of African American popular entertainments from the 1890s to the 1920s. As with their two earlier books—*Out of Sight: The Rise of African American Popular Music, 1889–1895* (2003) and *Ragged but Right: Black Traveling Shows, “Coon Songs,” and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz* (2007)—this richly illustrated volume is based on decades of painstaking research in the black press begun long before the availability of searchable newspaper databases. And like its predecessors, the result is more chronicle than synthesis, stringing together detailed descriptions of the careers and achievements of mostly forgotten artists and entrepreneurs. Together, these profiles and biographies offer a broad survey of the development and organization of the black entertainment business and its leading exponents in its formative years.

The core argument, suggested by the subtitle, is that the blues as a distinct musical designation and genre emerged not from some rural folk culture but from the commercial entertainment world of African American vaudeville, which took shape in the first decade of the twentieth century through a fusion of music (ragtime, “coon” songs), comedy, and dance. At the center of this argument stands a performer named Butler “String Beans” May, the subject of an entire chapter but referred to throughout the book. Almost entirely unknown today, String Beans left behind no sound recordings before his untimely death in 1917, but Abbott and Seroff contend he was the best-known, most influential black vaudeville artist of the 1910s and the one who can most rightfully be called the first popularizer of the blues, beginning around 1910. With an act combining singing, piano playing, comedy, and dance, he was the “first national blues star” and a major force in bringing the cultural power of southern black vaudeville to the north (p. 115).

In building this argument, the authors’ close reading of the entertainment pages of the *Indianapolis Freeman* (and, to a lesser degree, other black newspapers) yields a new periodization of blues history, based not on now-familiar breakthrough developments in big cities (e.g., Mamie Smith’s landmark recordings made in New York City in 1920) but on the incremental, workaday happenings