

*Empire of Sin: A Story of Sex, Jazz, Murder, and the Battle for Modern New Orleans.* By Gary Krist. (New York: Crown Publishers, 2014. Pp. [xiv], 436. \$26.00, ISBN 978-0-7704-3706-0.)

Gary Krist's most recent work is popular history at its best, weaving together vice culture, the birth of jazz, Italian immigration and discrimination, and the spirit of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Progressive reform to create a portrait of New Orleans from the birth of Jim Crow to the birth of Prohibition, using infamous unsolved ax murders as a thread to tie those parts together.

New Orleans politics was controlled by a group known as The Ring, a political machine led by Mayor Martin Behrman. In an effort to bow to reformers hoping to purify the city while maintaining the economic and cultural base of saloons and prostitutes that kept visitors coming, officials decided in 1898 to cordon off vice into one district, Storyville, which they hoped would quarantine risqué behavior while still allowing it to occur. But there was also a movement to prohibit vice altogether in Louisiana, a reform effort with a harder edge that was not satisfied with the red-light district and its attendant crime.

During much of the twentieth century's first two decades, the Storyville crowd largely won those battles, led by businessman, Ring politician, and vice lord Thomas C. Anderson. Countering him were reformers like sisters Kate and Jean Gordon, who combined a movement against vice with a push for segregation and eugenics, making the case that the interracialism of Storyville was a creature of its other sins. The combination of racism and reform ultimately had its way, and in 1917 Storyville was shuttered, pushing vice underground and cauterizing segregation in the name of good government. One of the groups most negatively affected by the change was the coterie of jazz musicians who had developed a new art form in the bordellos and bars of the district. Those musicians, who went on to fundamentally alter the national soundtrack, began their exodus from the city as anti-vice reformers eliminated their venues.

The other watchwords hovering over Storyville were immigration and crime. The influx of business in the vice district came from out of town, and the area often became violent. Krist uses the ax murders of local Italian grocers as a symbol of that violence and of the mistrust of immigrants. The grocers were not killed in Storyville, but the attacks, which were feared to be tied to the Mafia, only pushed a community already prone to anti-Italian sentiment to new heights of bigotry, all while allowing reformers to tie the violence to the city's sex, liquor, and jazz trades.

The stories in Krist's account will not be new to academic historians of New Orleans. The connections between prostitution and segregation are far more helpfully examined by Alecia P. Long. There is groundbreaking work on the city's Italian immigrant culture being done by Justin A. Nystrom. Examinations of the turn-of-the-century New Orleans political machine are legion, written by Eric Arnesen, William Ivy Hair, and others. And then, of course, there are the many academic histories of early jazz and even several earnest (if less academic) true crime tales of the New Orleans ax murders. What Krist is able to do so well, however, and what makes his account valuable, is that he is able to tie these elements together to chronicle one of the city's most fascinating rebirths (in a city with many rebirths). It is popular

history, but it is strong history, finding the intricate connections between race, class, and gender, between vice and cultural production, between crime and the impetus for reform.

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*El Paso's Muckraker: The Life of Owen Payne White.* By Garna L. Christian. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015. Pp. [x], 192. \$45.00, ISBN 978-0-8263-5545-4.)

The strength of Garna L. Christian's biography of Owen Payne White is its deft placement of the journalist-historian amid the tumult of his time. The story begins in 1879 in the raucous, violent frontier town of El Paso, Texas, where, as Christian notes, "In one isolated village one might find as many of the seven sins in such combination as one could afford" (p. 27). It ends with White's death in post-World War II New York, a city far removed from the legendary West he celebrated in numerous histories and memoirs. White's life and career spanned wars, the rise of industrialism and urbanization, and the lingering reform efforts of the Progressive era. His work for some of the early twentieth century's most influential magazines put him in the center of movements that shaped modern America.

Christian has rescued from obscurity the story of a muckraking journalist who wrote prolifically between the world wars. White has not been celebrated historically alongside muckrakers like Ida M. Tarbell and Lincoln Steffens, yet he is worth remembering—not just for the quality of his journalism, but also for how the story of his career takes us behind the scenes in a golden era of reportage. White wrote about topics as wide-ranging as the Texas Rangers, Prohibition, corruption in the oil industry, and government scandal. He once narrowly escaped arrest after purchasing machine guns to show how easy they were to obtain, a fact that surprised even the police.

Discovered by *American Mercury* editor H. L. Mencken and known as "Rattlesnake Pete," White was successful because of his knack for humor, his thorough research, his clean writing style, and his interesting story ideas. He was at once surprisingly progressive and also a man of his era. A libertarian idealist, he opposed the Ku Klux Klan and Prohibition yet was criticized for seeing the history of Texas and Mexico through an Anglo-American prism. He wrote about the West with an advantage over other writers, according to Christian, because he had lived there.

*El Paso's Muckraker: The Life of Owen Payne White* is organized chronologically and includes rich context about both journalism and American history. Christian mined archival materials at the University of Texas at El Paso, the University of Texas at Austin, and the El Paso Public Library. He also included materials from the *Congressional Record*, the United States census, and newspapers and magazines from the era, as well as White's papers, published articles, and books. *El Paso's Muckraker* is well grounded in primary sources and is a pleasure to read. It will be of interest to media historians because of the insight it offers about the relationship between writers and editors at a critical time in the history of investigative and "saleable" journalism. Others will find White's involvement in a myriad of

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