MISSISSIPPI LIBRARIES

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Oral History:
Navigating the Challenges and Reaping the Benefits

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INTRODUCTION

The debate on oral history as a necessary and valuable tool in preserving social memory continues to challenge historians on both sides. But despite its critics, oral history has gained momentum during the twentieth century as more historians have envisioned its benefits and worked diligently to qualify it within the scholarly community. In an effort to promote oral history and the potential of its contributions to historical research, its proponents have labored to define it and explore its components.

More than three decades ago, Davis, Back, and Lean (1977) defined oral history as "nothing more than a branch of historical research. It's the offspring of history's most ancient technique and its most modern technology. Its technique is the collection of eyewitness accounts of history" (p. 1). Hoffman's (1984) more recent yet dated example claims "oral history is a process of collecting, usually by means of a tape-recorded interview, reminiscences, accounts, and interpretations of events from the recent past which are of historical significance" (p. 68).

Ross (2007) stated less than a decade ago that oral history is "the recording of the memories of people's lives" (p. 173). A modest summation of these definitions simply claims that oral history is a "systematic collection of living people's testimony about their own experiences" (George Mason University, 1999).

A HISTORY OF ORAL HISTORY

After several millennia of preserving the memory of cultures throughout the world, oral history was finally recognized as a credible historical process in 1948. The twentieth century's age of technology brought advances in documenting oral history, but also required resources to support new processes—equipment, media supplies, and training for interviewers.

Furthermore, in an effort to protect the dignity and privacy of interviewees, many institutions have mandated stringent procedures for oral historians to follow that must have seemed tedious and burdensome. So then after all this time and innovation, how has oral history avoided replacement by a new and revolutionary process? How has it survived alongside the written record? Why does oral history still matter?

Although many answers may suffice to address this, one continues to stand out, "because people matter." Oral history embodies the collective pride of a culture and everything that renders one group distinct from the others. It also manages to distinguish individuals within each group according to their accomplishments.

Writing a memoir may be intimidating for some, requiring a higher level of formal education and commitment than they are comfortable with. But those who will not write about their experiences can still speak about them. As a result, each culture can add to its collective memory using oral accounts, receiving contributions from individuals who might not otherwise participate in this community effort.

Another explanation for oral history's longevity may be its ability to fill a niche in recording history through the eyes of the average person, creating demand for his or her view of an event. Hirsch (2007) described the significance of oral history transcriptions in the Federal Writers Project during the early twentieth century: "They emphasize that people not usually heard from are gaining a chance to speak. They dignify the ordinary. They attach importance to the common person's view" (p. 11). Thus, by constructing social memory from other than affluent sources, oral history thrives from the power of individuality and value among those commonly overlooked by their own society.

INTERVIEWING

A closer analysis of the interviewer, narrative, and interviewee reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the interview that fuel the debate over the legitimacy of oral history. The interviewer can quite easily fall into a conflicting role of guiding the interview's direction, while also hindering the interviewee from giving

necessary or correct information. Common mistakes include failure to follow up by moving on too quickly, asking questions that are too broad, asking closed questions, and leading the interviewee to say or imply something that is not entirely accurate.

The interviewer should be knowledgeable enough of the interview process and the topic to ask specific open-ended questions, allow sufficient time for responses, and respect boundaries. According to Nevins (1984), "It's hard to define the best interviewer. He must have a combination of traits of personality and of intellect that is hard to obtain. He must have [what] the Germans call *gemutlichkeit*, obvious sympathy with the person whom he interviews, friendliness and tact, as well as courage" (p. 32). The interviewer must then embody both the antagonist and diplomat, possessing the ability to find a balance between each role in order to harvest the best results possible.

Hareven (1984) claims, "The interviewer is like a medium, whose own presence, interests, and questions conjure corresponding memories" (p. 254). Remaining poised throughout the dialogue, the successful interviewer patiently waits for opportune moments to guide the subject in completing the picture that both participants are collaborating to build. Ritchie (1995) continues, "Well-trained interviewers can coax interviewees into areas of concern to researchers that interviewees might never have thought of discussing otherwise" (p. 7).

RECORDING

Recording oral history requires a basic contract between the interviewer and the interviewee that involves an understanding both spoken and unspoken.

Upon granting consent for the interview, the subject trusts the interviewer to be respectful at each stage of the process, from collecting the story to editing and publishing it. The interviewer initially gains this trust by reassuring the interviewee that he or she will not be bombarded with insensitive and unduly embarrassing questions…at least not without advanced warning. This "sticking to the rules" is vital in recording oral accounts as it usually enables even nervous interviewees to relax and volunteer information that would otherwise never be heard.

The integrity of the interview's narrative remains the focal point of usability for research. The narrative cannot and should not be expected to stand completely alone. Therefore, the vetting process remains an important step in corroborating one account with another, written or oral. Guan (2008) points out, "The methodology for oral history is to interview a number of persons who have personal memories of an era or issue of our past. Using a generic interview outline enables the resulting interview to be cross checked for accuracy and admission as historical evidence" (p. 613). Ritchie (1995) agrees on this point, "Treat oral evidence as cautiously as any other form of evidence.

Documents written at the time have immediacy about them and are not influenced by subsequent events, and yet those documents can be incomplete, in error, or written to mislead. A statement is not necessarily truer if written down than if recalled later in testimony. Whether written or oral, evidence must be convincing and verifiable" (p. 92). It remains clear that oral historians, akin to historians who pen history, can never escape the responsibility for accuracy of their accounts.

ENTHUSIASM

As the final component of the oral process, interviewees illustrate the virtues of dissemblance in character that contribute to the essence of each interview. Hareven (1984) credits this to oral history's success, "Oral history is an expression of the personality of the interviewees, of their cultural values, and of the particular historical circumstances which shaped their point of view. But this is precisely its great value, rather than its limitation" (p. 254). This dissimilarity may indeed add excitement to each interview, but it can also easily rob interviewers of the control that they ultimately need to guide their sessions.

Despite the efforts of the most skilled interviewer, the narrative can wilt and fade in some instances, and move too quickly in others. This rests with the fact that the narrative's impact depends largely on the willingness of the interviewee to share, inevitably affecting the mood and timing of the session as a whole. Some enthusiastic narrators will press on at a frantic pace, thwarting efforts by the interviewer to pursue details that could outline emotions encountered or explain jargon used during the interview.

Interviewers can occasionally manage to interject follow up questions and slow the interview's pace. However, they are less likely

to retrieve information from interviewees who lose their enthusiasm to share after the interview has begun because concerns for privacy suddenly arise.
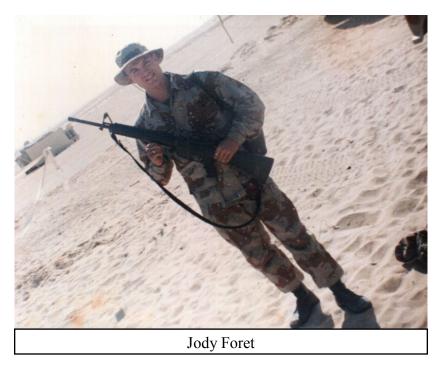
With a narrator who demonstrates a readiness to talk and follow the interviewer's lead, the potential for a successful interview increases dramatically. The interview transforms the storyteller from an ordinary person into someone larger than life. It turns accounts of mundane, everyday chores into events that stir the imagination of the listener.

Reassured by the interviewer, the properly motivated narrator can restore meaning to a narrative almost effete from repetition over time, accomplishing this with the sheer power of personality and connecting to the audience. This includes body language, gestures, verbal tone and pitch, dramatic pauses, facial expressions, and eye contact with the listener.

One can learn about beach landings of U.S. forces at Iwo Jima reading data from an encyclopedia, but hearing a personal and emotional account of that same event draws the listener much deeper into that moment in time, almost forcing him/her to become a virtual participant. The bottom line, then, involves a transformation from learning of an event to experiencing it with all of its drama and intensity. Re-living the event by engaging the listener's senses remains one of the keys to oral history's survival generation after generation.

A SAMPLE INTERVIEW

Ironically, the trust gained between interviewer and narrator can lead to unpredictability. Although the inter-

Jody Foret

viewer is generally bound by a structured outline, the interviewee can suddenly alter the tone of the conversation with the revelation of a heart-felt secret that would only be exchanged between close friends or comrades in war. The following excerpts were taken from an interview in 2011 with Jody Foret, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran of the first Gulf War in Iraq in January 1991. After five months of aerial bombardment of Iraqi battle lines, coalition forces prepared for the ground invasion to expel Iraqi troops from Kuwait:

"For a week we sat there knowing what was coming. I think at that point, I was nineteen years old and I couldn't stop thinking about the simple things in life—like holding another person's hand… having a child…drinking cold water…sitting on a toilet. Having to worry about paying bills would have been welcomed at that point. The problems that I had were not problems anymore. Everything was very clear, like what was important

and what wasn't important anymore."

"I had to accept the fact that I was gonna die…because I really believed that…they told us that—that we weren't gonna make it. They already had our replacement platoon there. They had already told us we were only gonna last four hours. We had to deal with that for a week, waiting and not knowing."

"All these things are going through your mind like…I'll never get to see my wife again—I've only been married a month; I'll never have children; I'll never get to sleep in a bed again; never feel a human touch. I'll never have kids, never drink a Coca Cola, or eat crawfish. I'm gonna die at nineteen." (Foret, 2011).

ANALYZING THE SAMPLE

The most gripping interviews draw their energy from spontaneity, evoking an emotional reaction in participants and viewers alike. Perhaps audiences are drawn to the display of genuine emotion…or that of

Jody Foret

genuine pain. Starr (1984) affirms the attraction to this historical process, "[Oral history] can capture and preserve life stories that would otherwise be lost…It can fill, convey personality, explain motivation, reveal inner thoughts and perceptions" (p. 4). Nevertheless, results can often be both rewarding and frustrating for those who dare to use interviews as history, where sometimes truth and fiction merge in the most poetic of manners, leaving listeners with the dilemma of sorting it out.

Although inherent differences exist between oral and written records, the two can and should function together to produce accuracy in documenting a culture's history. Ritchie (1995) notes that, "Properly done, an oral history helps to interpret and define written records and makes sense out of the most obscure decisions and events" (p. 92). Rosengarten (1984) exclaims, "There is something lost and something gained in the transformation of these oral stories to written literature. Their publication marks the end of a long process of creation and re-creation and removes them from the orbit of the storyteller. His gestures, mimicries, and intonations—all the devise of his performance—are lost. No exclamation point can take the place of a thunderous slap on the knee" (p. 220).

Despite its appeal to some historians, oral history remains a controversial process in the academic world. Scholars require sources with substance, accuracy, and authenticity in order to produce works that are considered useful for research by their peers. Because oral history has long been characterized as subjective, arbitrary, and unverifiable, many scholars have held it suspect, unconvinced of its viability for research. If a story's drama appears too sensational to be true, then the content can often be deemed spurious and unworthy for scholarly use.

However, oral historians should agree that every interview be scrutinized before citing. Upon closer examination, testimonies like Foret's exemplify a defendable and quiet candor that coexists with drama. Although the shocking details of war from his account generates interest with civilians, Foret asserted that his story held purpose only for those who have stood and fought on a battlefield, not for spectators who viewed the war from a safe distance. Therefore, his story had but one goal—to help young marines who experience difficulty in finding peace after the fighting stops:

"Not that I've gotten explicit in this conversation with you, but I've talked more…I've been looser at the tongue with you than probably my own wife has ever heard me talk. And I'm only doing it because of that other Marine. I don't know if you understand that, but the possibility that another Marine might see this and be like, okay, you know ... " (Foret, 2011).

But, twenty years passed since Foret's experience in the Arabian Desert. Is his story still reliable? After all, memories can fade and deceive, and his perception of the war was limited to what he saw and how he interpreted those things. However, his experience of combat was extremely real and personal, the likes of which oral history seeks to convey—from the deprivation of the simple comforts of life to enduring the hardships of war: sleeping in a hole in the ground with no shelter from rainstorms and freezing temperatures, encountering constant explosions and gunfire, surrounded by the stench of burning oil, and pondering his mortality as a teenager.

CONCLUSION

Institutions seek avenues of outreach to engage their communities, assure relevance to their constituents, and secure financial support. Oral history provides this important

connection between the keepers of history and its source found in the community. People enjoy the prospect that their voice holds importance in the collective memory, and the interview reassures them of this.

Therefore, the potential exists not only to garner provisional support from the community, but also to encourage future generations to entwine their lives with the institution as something more meaningful than a spectator. The institution continues to survive and serve. The community is represented, validated, and its heritage preserved. The mutual benefits generated by this relationship ensure the continuation of the cycle, and thus outreach is achieved.

Despite the challenges, oral history continues to thrive from a growing enthusiasm of historians and genealogists. As a result, academic and cultural institutions attempt to understand this medium and refine techniques that have kept it around for so long. Its paradox involving the potential coexistence of fiction with fact does not dissuade advocates who can find no substitute for the benefits that oral history offers as a partner to the written record. Guan (2014) states, "[T]he issue is not about the equivalency of oral and written sources, but that orality and literacy are two distinct and different ways of recalling our past" (p. 614). Oral historians do not view their work as a competition with literature.

They do not presume to supplant written records with oral testimonies, but merely to complement and enhance them. To the oral historian, this remains a simple and dependable resource that if utilized properly, can provide answers that the written record cannot.

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The Digital Public Library of America: Building a National Digital Library

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INTRODUCTION

The number of materials available in digital form increases every year. These include books, journal articles, manuscripts, photographs, and more. Of course they are spread out across many disparate institutions. However whereas a variety of state and national libraries exist to catalog, lend, and preserve their paper equivalents there is no such counterpart in the digital world.

Enter the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA). Since its founding in 2013, DPLA has sought to connect repositories which house digital content to patrons who wish to consume it. One can think of the organization as a search engine. DPLA aggregates metadata and provides an interface for users to search. Thus a student in Mississippi can view digitized photographs from a small historical society in Washington State without having to even know of its existence. In essence it functions as a national digital library

HISTORY AND STRUCTURE OF THE DPLA

Although such a concept has been around for many years, planning for the Digital Public Library of America began in 2010. In October of that year, 40 leading figures from the library, academic, and technology worlds met in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The product was a vision of a comprehensive network of resources drawn from institutions around the country. With further support from Harvard University and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation the dream became a reality.

However the structure of the DPLA is very different from a traditional library. Rather than storing all of its items in a central location, the organization partners with many different organizations. Some of these are "service hubs" which gather metadata from various smaller organizations and pass it through to DPLA. As of April 2015 there are 13 service hubs including the Digital Library of Georgia, Empire State Digital Network, and the South Carolina Digital Library.

There are also "content hubs". These are large institutions such as Harvard University, The New York Public Library, and The Smithsonian which each contribute more than 200,000 records. Unlike service hubs, content hubs do not gather metadata from other organizations. Instead they provide it for items in their collections. As of 2015 there are 16 such content hubs.

GOALS OF THE DPLA

Going forward DPLA is working on a number of goals. One of their top priorities is to expand the network of service hubs to cover the entire United States. In doing so, the Digital Public Library of America will be able to achieve their ambition of becoming a truly national digital library. Additionally, DPLA is working to diversify their collection. Doing so will ensure that all geographic areas, time periods, and content types are equally represented.

At the same time, they are seeking to increase usage of their platform. Providing access to our digitized cultural heritage does little good if no one ever looks at it. The community rep program is one part of the effort to raise awareness. They act as a force multiplier, spreading the word around the country of all the Digital Public Library of America has to offer in ways their staff alone cannot. Similarly the annual DPLAfest, a conference sponsored by the organization, will begin travelling around the country allowing people from different regions to interact with DPLA reps and staff while showcasing their contributions to the project.

Above all, the focus is on education. DPLA plans to do everything possible to further understand the needs of teachers and how its collection can be of use. To further facilitate increased usage, DPLA is considering expanding its selection of curated exhibits and possibly adding pathfinder style content pages to ease the process of locating relevant materials from the collection. With its materials already receiving educational usage, these efforts will increase their value to teachers and other educators.

THE DPLA IN MISSISSIPI

Of course many of you are wondering how all of the above is relevant to Mississippi. Currently there is neither a service nor a content hub within our borders. Thus the amount of Mississippi related material is low at the moment. Unfortunately little can be done in the short term to correct the situation. Adding a new service hub requires a great deal of planning and effort. Furthermore the process is separate from the outreach done by Community Reps.

However the strength of DPLA is in the connections it forges with diverse regions of the country. So while finding items directly related to Mississippi may be difficult such is not the case for the broad stroke of US history. Any high school student with an internet connection can access materials from institutions across America, all free of charge. So essentially anyone and everyone can reach a treasure trove through DPLA's search interface.

Furthermore by working directly with libraries, archives, and museums the results one retrieves through it are likely to be more accurate than those from search engines such as Google. In some ways the Digital Public Library of America is similar to the type of subscription databases provided by vendors such as EBSCO or organizations like the HathiTrust. The main difference is that DPLA provides access to freely available materials in a wide variety of formats.

CONCLUSION

Thus the organization has a great deal of potential. The Digital Public Library of America embodies a model of decentralized, yet interconnected institutions which come together to point patrons to already existing collections. It is not yet another library. As an aggregator, DPLA is a more accurate version of search engines and a free alternative to subscription databases. True its scope is not yet as universal as its vision. But increased usage by everyday students, teachers, and librarians will drive ever more traffic through its systems and spur further development. We all therefore can play a part in the building of America's next great national library.

News Briefs

Tina Harry
Catalog & Assistant Automation
Librarian and Associate Professor
University of Mississippi

Greg Sellers joined Hinds Community College Libraries April 20, 2015, as the Administrative Librarian for the Vicksburg Campus Learning Resource Center. He comes to Hinds after serving as school librarian for the Vicksburg-Warren School District.

Since graduating from the University of Alabama's School of Library and Information Studies, he has served as Collection Management Services Director and as Collection Management Librarian & Recorder of State Documents at the Mississippi Library Commission. He has also worked as the Interlibrary Loan Manager for the Jackson-Hinds Library System.

Mariah Grant joined the Millsaps College Library as Acquisitions Librarian in February. Mariah has an MLIS from the University of Arizona, her native state, and previously worked at MVSU.

She replaces Jamie Wilson who is now the Electronic Resources and Web Services Librarian.

Judy McNeece retired from Dixie Regional Library System on April 30, 2015.

McNeece became Director of DRLS in 2004. She earned a Masters of Library Science from George Peabody College for Teach-

ers. Throughout her career Judy has worked in many types of libraries. She has worked in college, high school, church and special libraries in addition to her service to public libraries. While at DRLS McNeece wrote and received many grants, including one from Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Mississippi, Inc. and another from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation. The new Director, Regina Graham worked with Judy McNeece as Assistant Director to DRLS for 11 years and said that working with Judy has been a pleasure. "She has been a good boss. She has excelled in scheduling a diverse selection of authors for Lunching with Books. She has never been afraid to tackle a big project like rearranging whole libraries. She has brought many good ideas to the system and is truly passionate about public libraries."

Judy McNeece

The **University of Mississippi** is hiring! The position of Head of Research and Instruction Services is now open for applicants, and reports directly to the Assistant Dean for Public Services and is part of the Library's management team. The Head of Research and Instruction Services will lead the newly merged department in the development and delivery of dynamic services and programs devoted to meeting patrons' existing and emerging research needs within the J.D. Williams Library. Current programs include physical and virtual reference services, research consultations, outreach, information literacy, and instruction services. The department head manages all aspects of the Research and Instruction Services department and actively engages with academic departments to ensure that the library provides high-quality, user-focused research and information services to University faculty, staff and students. The position is a 12-month, tenure track faculty appointment. Visit jobs.olemiss.edu for more information.

Edge, John T., Elizabeth Englehardt & Ted Ownby. *The Larder: Food Studies Methods from the American South.* Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013. $24.95 (paperback)

John T. Edge, the director of the Southern Foodways Alliance, has brought together sixteen essays, organized into five sections which look at how food has shaped our culture. Foodways is defined as the study of why and how we eat and what food means socially and culturally.

The book begins with the discussion of cookbooks and how they mirror history and reflect social change. *The Creole Cookbook* of New Orleans is an example. When it was first created, it had recipes from black women who were cooking for rich white families. Later, as the city changed the recipes were said to be from men or Latinate chefs. Cookbooks are ways women directly and/or indirectly give their values to the public because they only place recipes that their family enjoys. Cookbooks were also a way for women to help with the union effort during the Civil War.

The book also includes essays about *The Waffle House* and *Krispy Kreme*, two businesses that began in the south. *The Waffle House* is an all-night diner with inexpensive food that is inclusive, meaning that everyone is accepted and included. Even during the Civil Rights period, both blacks and whites were served. *Krispy Kreme* is an industry that allows customers to see the donuts being made in the production room. Employees put on a show for the customers, making them feel a part of the process.

The editors believe the South is more of a salad than a melting pot. It is a mixture of Mexican, Asian and other ethnic restaurants. Southern food is defined as the production and consumption of food through the interaction of white, black and Native Americans. Southern food is depicted in songs as well as Southern literature by the great Southern writers.

The authors of the essays are very knowledgeable about their subject. The essays are in depth and can be used for scholarly research because there are notes at the end of each essay. This book is recommended for both a academic and public libraries.

Audrey Beach
Reference Librarian
MS Delta Community College

Herron, Matt. *Mississippi Eyes: the Story and Photography of the Southern Documentary Project*. San Rafael, California: Talking Fingers Publications, 2014. 133 pages. $35.00 (hardcover)

When Matt Herron moved with his wife and two young children to Mississippi in early 1964, it was with a plan to head up a team of photographers who would document rural Southern life, primarily in black communities, during a time of great social change. The Civil Rights Movement was underway and Mississippi was a major focus for activists and organizers who wanted to advance the cause of civil rights for marginalized minority citizens of the state. Plans for what would become Mississippi Freedom Summer were being made, and Herron saw an opportunity to participate by working in his chosen field – documentary photography.

Herron, a longtime admirer of famed photographer Dorothea Lange, hoped that his Southern Documentary Project might be a successor to the documentary photography sponsored by the Farm Security Administration during the 1930s, another time of great social change. Herron's project, in the end, did not meet this goal, but for a time during 1964 the five project photographers – Bob Adelman, George Ballis, Matt Herron, Nick Lawrence, and David Prince – lived alongside Freedom Summer workers, attended rallies, and ran from white sheriff's deputies while taking photographs. They learned not to be heroes and to keep their eyes on the project goal of documenting truth.

The text of *Mississippi Eyes* is an informative history of Herron's work to organize, gain funding for, and direct the work of the Southern Documentary Project. Herron's writing is conversational and readable, and includes excerpts of diaries and correspondence. From one page to the next, the reader meets giants of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi – Aaron Henry, Victoria Gray, Bob Moses, Fannie Lou Hamer, and others. A significant aspect of Herron's words is reality. He describes not only the condition of life in Mississippi and the varying viewpoints of white and black society. He also portrays the business nature of running a photography project, downplaying the romanticism that can be a part of some artistic endeavors.

Herron's words, though, are the backdrop for 160 black and white photographs that portray life, hope, courage, frustration, compassion, and determination. Photographs are captioned and attributed. Two facsimiles show Herron's correspondence with Dorothea Lange. An index provides access to names, topics, and places in both text and photographs. The title, *Mississippi Eyes*, refers to the fact that project photographers and their cameras were looking at Mississippi and its people but were also being changed and would thereafter see the world through Mississippi eyes.

This book would be well placed in high school, public, and college libraries. It would serve the reading and study interests of those interested in Mississippi history, especially the civil rights era, as well as those interested in artistic and documentary photography.

Linda K. Ginn
Catalog Librarian
University of Southern Mississippi

Mitchell, Dennis J. *A New History of Mississippi*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2014. 593 pp. $40.00 (hardback)

Thirty-five years after the last general survey of Mississippi was published, Dennis J. Mitchell offers readers an updated narrative history of the Magnolia State. Political, social, and economic history come together to tell the story of Mississippi and its inhabitants, beginning with the ascent and decline of multiple Native American cultures, and concluding with Mississippi's transition into the twenty-first century. In line with the histories of Mississippi that predate this study, Mitchell begins his narrative with a highly descriptive account of Mississippi's geography and natural resources. To be sure, geography and natural resources take center stage in this study, for they have shaped the state not only physically, but culturally and economically as well.

Of particular interest is Mitchell's coverage of segregation in the chapter entitled Segregation: Red, Yellow, Black, and White. While the segregation-era experiences of African Americans in Mississippi is well known to most readers, the struggles of other marginalized groups - Native Americans, Chinese, and second generation Japanese Americans - is lesser known and recounted in rich detail here. Mitchell also gives due emphasis to the accomplishments of Mississippi women. Standouts include Nellie Nugent Somerville and Fannye Cook. As a staunch campaigner for women's rights, Somerville became president of the Mississippi Woman Suffrage Association and the first woman elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives in 1923. Cook, with her dedication to conservation, turned the tide on environmental destruction in the state. Her specimen collection is the foundation of Mississippi's natural history museum and she was instrumental in the establishment of the State Game and Fish Commission in 1932.

Despite the immense volume of detail included in this work, Mitchell has skillfully combined the familiar with the obscure, creating a narrative that is compelling and easy to follow. Adding to its appeal is a collection of illustrations and photographs. This ambitious work is recommended for enthusiasts of Mississippi history, but it is sure to engage general readers as well. It is appropriate for both academic and public libraries.

Michele Frasier-Robinson
Reference Library for Education and Psychology
The University of Southern Mississippi

Mitchell, George. *Mississippi Hill Country Blues 1967 (American Made Music Series).* Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2013. 144 pp. $40.00 (hardcover)

Mississippi Hill Country Blues 1967 is brimming with sumptuous photographs and compelling stories set against the raw backdrop of life in the Mississippi Delta in 1967. This book is a must have for any blues aficionado. Mitchell's book documents the musicological odyssey that he and his wife undertook as they spent the summer of 1967 in a northern region called the Hill Country. Mitchell was on a quest to discover Mississippi blues musicians who had yet to be recorded at the time. Along this trek, he was fortunate to encounter a rich, unique circle of musicianship found only in the North Mississippi Hill Country. Chief among the featured treasures are Mississippians Fred McDowell, R.L. Burnside, Jessie Mae Hemphill, and Othar Turner, all of whom comprise the founding legacy of Mississippi Hill Country style of blues that music lovers around the world have come to cherish.

Such magic and authenticity are conveyed through the historic photographs that chronicle Mitchell's expedition. The deep, rich tones of the images draw your eyes deeper and deeper into the photos to reveal the everyday lives of a community of real people who have a passionate love for music and life despite living in very poor economic conditions. Mitchell noted how welcomed he and his wife felt and how they were incredibly moved by the overflowing generosity they received. These were hard times and many of these folks were struggling with severe poverty and widespread discrimination. Yet, they presented Mitchell and his wife with only friendly acceptance and grace. Mitchell's book is unique and it heralds the birth of a vibrant blues tradition at the moment of discovery. Mitchell's journey contributed greatly to the proliferation of this musical tradition and the musical world is ever better for his endeavor.

Any library will benefit from having this book on the shelf. *Mississippi Hill Country Blues 1967* covers a variety of subject areas including: photography/music, ethnomusicology, blues, and rural Mississippi. It provides great general information on a truly unique musical tradition that would be suitable for a public library collection. It also has plenty of interesting details and tidbits that would make this book valuable for a research library as well. All in all, a marvelous work.

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Taylor-Perry, Janet. *Lucky Thirteen*. 2013. 284 pp. $13.13 (paperback)

Lucky Thirteen is set in a small Louisiana town, and tells the story of a woman (teacher Larkin Sloan) who had a very bad day, as a result of being drugged and kidnapped. The other main character, Ray Reynolds, is a police detective trying to catch a serial killer who has already killed twelve women. Within this framework, the plot has enough twists and turns to keep you riveted.

This book is published by the author, Janet Taylor-Perry, who is a native of Laurel, Mississippi. Her writing of Larkin's teaching experiences is based on her own life experience as a teacher of fifth through twelfth grades in various districts of Mississippi public schools.

After reading "serial killer" in the blurb on the back of *Lucky Thirteen*, I have to admit that I expected a gruesome thriller. Instead, I actually found this book to be a sweet romance (no lurid sex scenes) mixed with a few supernatural elements and some religious overtones. With this book, the author has quite possibly created a new genre niche, the "cozy serial killer book." There is some swearing in the dialogue, so I recommend the book chiefly for adult readers.

The author's portrayal of the characters makes them appealing to the reader (except for the serial killer), and the story line is engaging. The dialogue, however, seems a bit stilted, being somewhat stiff and contrived in some places. Within the story, the pacing varies, being a little fast in some scenes and a little slow in others. For example, the romances will either take giant leaps forward, or dawdle on for lengthy periods of time. The plot is interesting, but somewhat improbable, so I suggest you suspend disbelief and enjoy.

Lucky Thirteen was a semi-finalist in 2012 for the Pirate's Alley Faulkner Wisdom Competition. I found this book, the first in The Raiford Chronicles series, to be a fun read, and I look forward to reading the next book in the series, *Heartless*. This is recommended for an adult readership and all public libraries. *Lucky Thirteen* is also available as a Kindle e-book through Amazon.

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