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Lee Bidgood

East Tennessee State University, bidgood@etsu.edu

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Review: Fiddler's Dream: Old-Time, Swing, and Bluegrass Fiddling in Twentieth Century Missouri

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Fiddler's Dream: Old-Time, Swing, and Bluegrass Fiddling in Twentieth-Century Missouri. By Howard Wight Marshall. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2017. Pp. xx, 427. \$29.95, ISBN 978-0-8262-2121-6.)

In *Fiddler's Dream: Old-Time, Swing, and Bluegrass Fiddling in Twentieth-Century Missouri*, art historian and preservationist Howard Wight Marshall surveys Missouri fiddling from 1920 to 1960, continuing a quest he began with *Play Me Something Quick and Devilish: Old-Time Fiddlers in Missouri* (Columbia, Mo., 2013). This engaging volume should be of interest to musicians, general readers, and scholars of vernacular expressive culture.

Marshall's ongoing documentation of fiddling in his home state draws on material collected in oral interviews, archival photographs, field recordings, transcriptions of selected tunes, and his own personal knowledge of fiddling. The transcriptions are well formed and correspond to the selected recordings on the included compact disc. The volume is organized thematically, with chapters titled "Radio Fiddlers," "Music Parties," "Contests," "Shows," and "Family Tradition." Not constraining the study to one generic approach, Marshall devotes chapters to swing and jazz, with significant space for western swing, in addition to chapters on bluegrass and old-time approaches.

The chapters contain a stream of episodic biographies of fiddlers. While Marshall makes many fascinating observations about fiddling on local and national levels, he does not connect them in a larger rhetorical framework. Marshall's admiration for the people, musical practices, and material that he conveys is clear, but his perspective is one of celebration, not critical consideration.

Marshall's writing on issues pertaining to ethnicity shows this lack of critical engagement. African American fiddlers are mentioned in a matter-of-fact way through the earlier chapters, following a typical pattern in which white musicians who gained prominence in the early and mid-twentieth century are shown to have had links with older black musicians (for instance, Bill Monroe's childhood experiences with Arnold Schultz, the Carter Family's reliance on Lesley Riddle, and Hank Williams's formation with Rufus "Tee Tot" Payne). While Marshall introduces key black musicians and pays extended attention to the life and contributions of African American jazz fiddler Claude Williams, the author seems to normalize rather than call into question problematic race-related issues. He neglects to discuss how racial differences shaped culture and music in Missouri and throughout the United States, not only in the past. When mentioning a song that uses the phrase "Yellow Gals," for instance, Marshall's abbreviated observation is simply that this racialized label "would not have concerned most Missouri fiddlers" (p. 122). In the introduction to chapter 5, he describes the growth of interest in fiddling contests during the 1920s as an outgrowth of a "general national ebullience about being 'American'" (p. 135). Marshall's flippant implication that being American was unproblematic during this heyday of lynching and nativism, a period when dozens of African American people were lynched in Missouri, seems the result of either willful disregard or striking naiveté. This practice of omission is consistent throughout the entire volume.

Marshall's goal to provide a representative survey of Missouri fiddling is ambitious. He accomplishes it with considerable skill and clearly with a great deal of work to gather relevant sources. While he does not address cultural politics, his humane attention to the fiddlers he discusses and his musicianly care for the tunes that he documents provide in many ways a model for such documentary work. For readers eager to learn more about string band traditions in the United States, this volume provides a wide-ranging and detailed, if celebratory, introduction.

East Tennessee State University

LEE BIDGOOD

Goat Castle: A True Story of Murder, Race, and the Gothic South. By Karen L. Cox. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. Pp. [xii], 227. \$26.00, ISBN 978-1-4696-3503-3.)

Goat Castle: A True Story of Murder, Race, and the Gothic South provides a captivating exploration of a once-sensational murder case in Natchez, Mississippi, in August 1932. The robbery and murder of Jennie Merrill, an aging, wealthy spinster descended from the town's antebellum planter elite, a long-standing neighborly feud over marauding livestock, and an interracial group of conspirators—who included Richard “Dick” Dana and Octavia Dockery, white squatters and residents of a neighboring filthy and dilapidated mansion, and Lawrence Williams, a local African American man—enticed many observers. The primary motivation for the murder was old-fashioned greed. Yet this aspect and the treatment of African American suspects and innocent residents were soon overshadowed by prurient interest in Dana and Dockery, the “‘Wild Man’ and the ‘Goat Woman’” (p. 14). Amid popular fascination with antebellum slave mansions, Old South nostalgia, and burgeoning Depression-era plantation tourism, locals and newspaper readers across the United States were riveted by the details of the crime and the personalities at its center.

Drawing on extant personal papers, correspondence, legal case files, prison reports, extensive contemporary newspaper coverage, and recently recovered photographs and oral accounts, author Karen L. Cox makes evident her diligence and resourcefulness. She meticulously reconstructs the details of the botched robbery and the opportunistic shooting of Merrill, and by using genealogical information, Cox examines the life stories of the victim, the offenders, and the police. The book's chapters proceed through the various stages of the crime, community reactions, national interest, criminal and police investigations, and court proceedings, often retelling different aspects of the story from the perspectives of contemporary black and white residents, police, and others.

Two less-developed aspects of the story relate to crime rates in early 1930s Natchez and the wider significance of the forensic investigations. Cox notes the growth of the state prison population in the early 1930s and mentions other offenders, but general information on crime in early 1930s Natchez and surrounding counties is sparse. While the unusual and esoteric features of the Merrill murder are clear, it would nonetheless be useful to know how common robbery, breaking and entering, murder, and manslaughter were in these years,