

# Book Reviews

## **AFRICAN-AMERICAN MUSIC IN MINNESOTA FROM SPIRITUALS TO RAP.**

*Selections and book by Judy M. Henderson.*

(St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press and Minnesota State Arts Board, 1994. Audio tape and 76-page book, \$12.95; compact disk and book, \$17.95.)

Since the earliest days of the Atlantic slave trade, uprooted Africans and their descendants have infused America with one of its most important and vital cultural treasures. African-American musical traditions. These vibrant traditions, which gave birth to genres as diverse as singing games, spirituals, lullabies, gospel music, blues, jazz, rap, and rhythm and blues, emerged from African-based musical aesthetics in New World contexts. Since the late nineteenth century, researchers have made serious efforts to document African-American music. At first, descriptions of performances and song texts appeared in local and regional collections. Less frequently, collectors also transcribed and published approximations of melodies and rhythms. With the advent of recorded sound in the twentieth century, scholars and enthusiasts sought to survey more accurately and document permanently the distinctive creations and performances of African-American musicians throughout the United States.

*African-American Music in Minnesota* makes an important and welcome contribution to these efforts, particularly in the Upper Midwest. With the exception of the largest urban centers, such as St. Louis or Kansas City, there has been little published discussion of the musical activities of African Americans in the Midwest, west of Chicago. Most recordings have featured music performed in southern rural settings or cities. This audio survey, therefore, begins to fill this gap by presenting a broad selection of music created and performed in Minnesota's urban centers. The 16 judiciously selected examples cover the spectrum of musical traditions one could expect to hear in Minnesota after 1940.

The dominant theme of this well-packaged collection is how Black Minnesotans have participated in and modified major currents in African-American music, which has created a common bond for them. Appropriately, the sampler begins by highlighting religious music within the state's African-American churches. Henderson acknowledges the central role of these churches in hosting, nurturing, and preserving some of the most significant social and cultural traditions. The first two examples illustrate church choirs singing arranged spirituals, a music that can be traced to the Reconstruction era and was preferred by Minnesota African-American churches in

the first half of the twentieth century. The next four selections demonstrate several different styles of gospel music. This religious expression developed throughout the twentieth century as African Americans migrated from the rural South to settle in urban industrial centers. Although Minnesota was not a key center for either migration or gospel, its African-American community benefited from the flowering of the tradition in other cities, such as Chicago and Detroit. The four selections feature one of the earliest published songs of Thomas A. Dorsey (the Father of Gospel Music) in the first third of the twentieth century, the mass choir styles of the 1960s, and the youthful and contemporary sounds of gospel rap of the 1990s. The next three numbers, among the most traditional on this recording, represent music by and for children. Here, Henderson captures the joy of children's play as well as the vitality of this oral tradition rooted in slavery. Without a doubt, the most unusual selection is a traditional lullaby with a text that I speculate is in a creolized African language.

The remainder of this recording addresses secular music traditions. In these selections one can most clearly glimpse the role of the Twin Cities as a crossroads. Big-name artists on tours through the Midwest visited the cities and performed with local artists, enriching the state's cultural life with blues and jazz. Five examples provide strong evidence of African-American entertainment for dancing and listening during the latter half of the twentieth century. The last two selections showcase the music of younger generations. Contemporary rap music is presented in well-developed compositional style rather than as raw street music. The final piece features African-style drumming, a tradition that emerged from a heritage-revitalization movement occurring in the Twin Cities as well as most other urban centers in the country.

The substantial book accompanying this recording is a great asset. It is well researched, informative, and abounding with photographs that personalize Minnesota's African-American story. It supplies additional information (beyond the examples on the recording) to provide a solid historical context for understanding African-American musical traditions in Minnesota.

If any aspect has been underemphasized in this survey collection, it is the distinctive contributions Black Minnesotans have made to the development of African-American music in the United States. While not on the scale of Motown or Chicago, the Twin Cities have been a significant creative hub. Artists such as Oscar Pettiford, Prince, Sheila E., Freddie Jackson, Jimmy Jam, and the Sounds of Blackness developed their talents in Minnesota. While the book men-

tions these artists, more exploration of the environment that produced the Minneapolis style of popular music and some musical examples would have strengthened the collection.

Nonetheless, this is an important musical survey. Bravo to Ms. Henderson for her hard work and to the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota State Arts Board for developing another solid winner for the Minnesota Musical Traditions series.

*Reviewed by Phyllis M. May-Machunda, an African-American folklorist and ethnomusicologist who specializes in research on African-American cultures. She is an assistant professor of humanities/multicultural studies at Moorhead State University.*

### **SNELLING: MINNESOTA'S FIRST FIRST FAMILY.**

*By Barbara K. Luecke and John C. Luecke.*

(Eagan, Minn.: Grenadier Publications, 1993. 298 p. Paper, \$21.95.)

For 175 years the name Snelling has symbolized the conquest of the upper Mississippi country by Euro-Americans and the beginnings of the state of Minnesota. Yet little has been written about the man who built the fort that historians have called a "Citadel in the Wilderness" and the "Anchor Post of the Northwest." This book helps to fill the gap. Although it is not a fully developed biography or even a family history, it provides a wealth of accurate and easily accessible facts about the ancestry, lives, and descendants of Josiah and Abigail Hunt Snelling. It also opens a window on military life at Fort Snelling in the 1820s.

The first history of Fort Snelling as a frontier post was by Marcus Lee Hansen. His book, *Old Fort Snelling*, published in 1918, served for many years as the standard source for scholars. A whole new era of study began with archaeological work in the late 1950s and continued with the painstaking restoration of the fort as a major historic site in the 1960s and early 1970s. Research in both the ground and in archives turned up whole shelves of new information. This was used not only in reconstructing buildings but, even more, in shaping the interpretation of the fort's story for visitors.

The kind of "living history" that has for years intrigued and educated the public at Historic Fort Snelling requires an immense amount of accurate detail. It also demands dedicated actor-interpreters who are saturated in the culture of the era and in the daily lives of the characters they portray. Out of this intense experience have come people with unquenchable curiosity and the drive to pursue their research even further and present it to readers. The Lueckes are among them. Their work is a painstaking labor of love.

For the visitor whose interest has been piqued by touring the fort, this book will be a welcome follow-up. The arrangement is straightforward and chronological, with little attempt at developing broad themes or exploring character. Here are the recorded events in the lives of Josiah and Abigail Snelling. Life at the fort is treated year by year. The text is supplemented with portraits, photographs, and a number of clear, readable maps. There are 17 appendices that provide detail on a variety of subjects, from an inventory of Josiah's possessions in

August 1827 to a documentary summary of Abigail's weary struggle for her widow's pension through 34 years and untold layers of bureaucracy. The reader will also find annotations and a lengthy bibliography.

Both strengths and weaknesses arise from the book's origins. There is human appeal and immediacy. The tempo and texture of daily events are reflected in specific facts and original documents—lists of purchases and expenditures, personal letters, and first-hand reports. The outlines of the social life and customs of the period emerge. We see army culture with the rigid code of honor that helped to preserve military hierarchy in a democratic and individualistic frontier society. Snelling himself was a prickly example. The extent to which the troops were fueled by alcohol comes home in the fort's whiskey supply—4,255 gallons for the winter of 1822–23. Each man received a daily ration.

Dependence on original sources has its pitfalls, however. Times and attitudes have changed. The book contains little on Native Americans, but what is there would have been better omitted or at least disclaimed by the authors. Although in their own accounts they avoid bias, lengthy quotations from the memoirs of Henry Hunt Snelling and from contemporary letters carry a familiar tone of denigration and ridicule. This suggests one of the most difficult dilemmas of living history: how do you recreate authentically the voices of people from a past era without offending present-day sensitivities? Awkward as it may sometimes seem, an explicit critical framework is essential.

The book also suffers from lack of the careful editing demanded by any volume that brings together such a great quantity and variety of data. Transitions are often lacking; there are references to unidentified people and events; detail is too great in some places and absent in others. Less important but also annoying are the many errors in proofreading.

Despite these faults, *Snelling* justifies the labor that has gone into it. Major histories are seldom produced without generous support from colleagues, institutions, and publishers. Working largely on their own, the Lueckes have nevertheless made a useful addition to the story of Minnesota.

*Reviewed by Rhoda R. Gilman, who retired in 1992 from the position of senior research fellow at the Minnesota Historical Society. She is the author of The Story of Minnesota's Past, a history of the state for young readers.*

### **CALUMET AND FLEUR-DE-LYS: ARCHAEOLOGY OF INDIAN AND FRENCH CONTACT IN THE MIDCONTINENT.**

*Edited by John A. Walthall and Thomas E. Emerson.*

(Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992. 307 p. Cloth, \$45.00.)

The earliest period of Indian contact with European peoples in the Great Lakes and upper Mississippi valley has yet to be understood thoroughly. Following in the wake of Francis Parkman's multivolume work on the French in North America, the publication in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of such works as Pierre Radisson's narrative and the Jesuit Relations began a brief fashion for studies

of French explorers. Midwestern historians such as Louise Phelps Kellogg and Grace Lee Nute attempted to make sense of these early sources, though usually from a European perspective. Then, perhaps because their work was assumed to be the last word on the subject, the French fell out of fashion. The papers in this volume go a long way toward demonstrating how much yet needs to be done. They show how historical archaeology can broaden the scope of historical accounts, including the material record of Native American people.

Collected from papers presented at the 1988 Conference on French Colonial Archaeology in the Illinois Country, this book's contributions show the real strength of historical archaeology: Far from being simple reports of objects found, the essays combine information from archival and archaeological sources. One especially successful paper is Lenville J. Stelle's "History and Archaeology: The 1730 Mesquakie Fort," dealing with a battle between a group of Mesquakie or "Fox" and the French and their Indian allies in northeastern Illinois. The exact location of this battle has been a mystery to later researchers. After presenting the written record—letters and maps—Stelle describes the archaeological record of the most convincing location for the fort, at the headwaters of the Sangamon River.

Another paper of special interest to readers from Minnesota is "The Mdewakanton Dakota and Initial French Contact" by Douglas A. Birk and the late Elden Johnson. Birk is the leading ethnohistorian and archaeologist of the fur trade in Minnesota. Johnson, who was a professor of anthropology at the University of Minnesota, did a variety of studies at Mille Lacs. Here, they combine an examination of such written sources Father Louis Hennepin's account of his so-called captivity at Mille Lacs in 1680 with a description of the archaeological record of the communities Hennepin visited there. The article gives a much-needed, concrete perspective on Hennepin's befuddled and prejudiced account of the Mille Lacs Dakota.

Other papers deal with a continuing, important question in the field of historic and prehistoric archaeology: What is the relationship between the cultures described only from the archaeological record and those whose village sites and cultures are recorded both archaeologically and in documentary sources? As Thomas E. Emerson and James A. Brown show in "The Late Prehistory and Protohistory of Illinois," this is one of the most difficult problems for archaeologists. The fluidity of cultural groups and the strength of intertribal trade mean that archaeological features may be found in a variety of regions and locations inhabited by a variety of groups. And, as ethnohistorians have made increasingly clear, present-day tribal designations and organization often have no relationship to those of 300 years ago. Thus, it is not always a simple matter to make a clear connection between such prehistoric groups as the Oneota or Mississippian and later Ioway, Ojibway, or Dakota.

For nonarchaeological readers, the volume may occasionally be tough going; however, it will be a useful reference source for many historians. As an example, Gregory A. Waselkov's account of French trade in the Creek country of Alabama contains a glossary of trade terminology as well as a list of objects traded or given as presents to Indians between 1701 and 1763, based on archival sources. Such lists are invaluable for anyone exploring the French trade in any region of North America.

Scattered through the references cited in this volume are those very same late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sources that began the fashion for research into the French presence in North America. These citations may suggest that Reuben Gold Thwaites's work in annotating the Jesuit Relations cannot be challenged. In fact, however, this should stand as a warning, indicating that the work of collecting and annotating the documentary record of the French is in need of revitalization. Many standard French narratives, including Pierre Radisson's account of a trip to the Lake Superior region in 1659, first published by the Prince Society of Boston in 1885, badly need new annotation to correct a variety of nineteenth-century mistakes. If historians do not take up the task, it will remain for archaeologists to expand further the range of their already numerous talents.

*Reviewed by Bruce M. White, a historical anthropologist who lives in St. Paul. His article "Encounters with Spirits: Ojibwa and Dakota Theories about the French and Their Merchandise" was published in the Summer 1994 issue of Ethnohistory.*

## **LEARNING HISTORY IN AMERICA: SCHOOLS, CULTURES, AND POLITICS.**

*Edited by Lloyd Kramer, Donald Reid, and William L. Barney.*

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994. 225 p. Cloth, \$39.95; paper, \$16.95.)

The 15 essays in this collection attempt to provide a far-ranging discussion by people of differing perspectives concerned with the state of historical understanding in the United States. Gathered together for a conference in North Carolina in 1991, the authors are drawn from a variety of disciplines including journalism, secondary and post-secondary education, and filmmaking, but most are historians by training and profession. This eclectic combination has its roots in a controversy now raging:

A well-publicized intellectual and emotional debate about cultural diversity and national unity has divided polemical opponents in the schools, the media, and the political parties of contemporary American society. . . . The controversy seems certain to continue into the next century because it is closely connected to social, economic, and cultural patterns that are creating a new, more diverse American society.

This is not just a controversy among university and college professors about how to teach such courses as western civilization. With the publication of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) and Francis FitzGerald's *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century* (1979), this debate among academics has broken through into popular culture, and the subsequent public debate has engaged us all. The controversy is not only about what our historical identity will be but who will get to create that identity.

On one side are those who celebrate the emerging diversity of American culture and its subsequent impact on our popular imagination and academic work; on the other are

those who fear that the fragmentation into ethnic, racial, and gender differences threatens to undermine a shared vision of American culture and ideals. In addition, historians are worried about who is promoting and creating historical reality. Some academics feel that their work has had less impact on the emerging historical consciousness than popular films and political figures have.

The book's essays are divided into four parts: textbooks, survey courses, and historical education; rethinking categories of historical meaning; popular films and historical memory; and political culture and historical interpretation. In Part I the authors engage us in the struggle of instructors at the college and secondary levels to teach history through survey courses to students who simply are not interested in making historical meaning or connections between their lives and history. I found Richard Roberts's discussion, "Teaching Non-Western History at Stanford," the most interesting. With many others, I have followed the debate over the content of western civilization courses and the canon they present. I had heard about Stanford's attempt to rethink how this course would be taught, and it was wonderful to read the account of an instructor who had actually taught it, struggled with its limitations, and soared with its possibilities.

In Part II, two authors argue that the basis upon which historians have constructed historical meaning in the past has been flawed. These essays discuss the absence of race and gender in older scholarship and argue that this absence speaks to the underlying biases of that scholarship. Both race and gender have been compelling, if unacknowledged, ideologies of American cultural life; both must be introduced into the narrative of a new historical identity if it is to have any power at all. The last essay discusses the renewed interest in great books in literature as well as historical study, touching on the debate over the historical canon—whether it exists and, if so, how to engage in a conversation with it from a contemporary perspective.

I found the essays in Part III the most intriguing because they begin to engage us in the struggle over who is creating and who should create our historical identity. Robert Rosenstone's article, "The Historical Film: Looking at the Past in a Postliterate Age," puts the issues quite succinctly: "Let's be blunt and admit it: historical films trouble and disturb professional historians. Have troubled and disturbed historians for a long time." Why is this so? Rosenstone asks. Films, from the historian's point of view, are inaccurate; they fictionalize people, events, and movements. Some even falsify history. He also presents another reason for this dis-

comfort: Films, particularly popular films, are outside the control of historians; the composition of our historical identity is therefore not solely the work of historians. Rosenstone's essay reviews the attempts historians have made to influence, use, and critique films, and he ends with an insightful conclusion that gets to the heart of historians' distrust of this genre. Historical films require that historians accept invention as one way of knowing about the past; that is, empirical knowledge is but one way of thinking about the meaning of the past.

Ariel Dorfman's "Interventions in the Field of Dreams" is the transcript of an actual film that is a thoughtful and provocative dialogue about the construction of history and meaning in American culture. It is a powerful reminder that the reinvention of American historical identity is a continuing tension between differing and conflicting perspectives, as well as between fiction and reality. I found the essay the most absorbing and thought provoking in the volume.

In the last section, Francis FitzGerald takes us through the ways American politicians teach history lessons in their public discussions of foreign policy. These lessons reinforce a longstanding popular belief that we are an exceptional people whose culture is destined to influence and dominate the rest of the world. In counterpoint to the forces of multiculturalism that seem to threaten American cohesiveness in the late twentieth century stands this civil religion of American exceptionalism which defines our relationship to the world.

Edwin M. Yoder, Jr., had the monumental task of formulating some final, cohesive statements for the volume. He points to the collapse of a consensus about humanistic learning that has shaken the academic and popular consciousness. (Its fissures are obvious through the essays in this publication.) He doubts that in this unsettled climate it is possible to reshape a compelling story—a "master narrative"—but the alternative, accepting a historyless condition, is equally unacceptable. He urges an acknowledgment that there is a legitimate connection between history and popular will or ideas. Given that content will always be debated, he challenges teachers, writers, and journalists to shape and communicate a plausible and reasonable master narrative. To do less is to fail at our paramount mission—to influence that version of our common past that will otherwise with certainty arise and grow to maturity without our contributions.

*Reviewed by* Maureen Otwell, *head of the Minnesota Historical Society's Education Department.*



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