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Review Of "Making Gullah: A History Of Sapelo Islanders, Race, And The American Imagination" By M. L. Cooper

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conclusions and opinions about politics and social conditions in the Confederacy, which topics have been the subjects of much of his research and writing over the years.

Answers to a number of questions that Escott poses could uncover further revelations about the war. For example, in interpreting the varied experiences of African Americans, historians might ask, “Are our interpretive categories too narrow and restrictive? Do we need to move beyond the either/or choices of black nationalism or American inclusion, protonationalism or protest, separatism or civil rights?” (p. 55)

Although he admits that he “came late to an interest in the Civil War’s military history,” Escott points out the importance of the work of such scholars as Gary Gallagher, Joseph Glatthaar, and Barton Myers and calls for further study on the definitions of victory and leadership, as well as the nature of war, including guerrilla warfare, and its impact on the civilian population (p. 68). He also discusses new techniques, opportunities, and the advantages that “digital humanities” will bring to future research. He provides a list of suggested principles “to guide the expansion of digital humanities research if we are to see the maximum benefits” (p. 103). The perspective of environmental impact, he argues, can enhance historians’ study of the war through such topics as weather, disease (human and animal), deforestation, mining, and agriculture. In his final chapter, the author concludes that Americans are entering into a new “period of far-reaching reevaluations and reconceptualizations of the consequences of the Civil War” (p. 124). Some of the topics he mentions in relation to the war’s lasting legacy are old, familiar ones. But for present and future generations of writers, certain questions and ideas about those topics are, and will continue to be, groundbreaking.

Thus, Paul Escott’s *Rethinking the Civil War* reminds historians that they can always think anew about the war. Young scholars especially—embarking on a career of writing about that devastating conflict—will want to consult the book.

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Making Gullah: A History of Sapelo Islanders, Race, and the American Imagination. By Melissa L. Cooper. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. Prologue, illustrations, epilogue, acknowledgments, notes, bibliography, index. Pp. 292. \$29.95, paper.)

A rewarding read, *Making Gullah* chronicles the evolution of Gullah identity as crafted by outsiders, novelists, historians, and folklorists who have defined the people of Sapelo Island. Cooper documents the long exercise in “race making,” a project that involved mapping ideas about black backwardness, superstition, immorality, and African-ness onto the residents of Sapelo beginning in the 1920s. The text interrogates the racialist writings of Julia Peterkin, chronicles the ideological battles of early sociologists and anthropologists who debated the “pathologies” and “Africanisms” of black Americans

(including Zora Neale Hurston's study of hoodoo), and recounts the pernicious racial bias of the work published by slave song hunter Lydia Parrish. *Making Gullah* also addresses the production of early black scholars such as Lorenzo Dow Turner, whose *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* "revolutionized the way that the Gullah dialect was imagined" (p. 102).

Having revealed the history of the creation of the Gullah image in the mind of white America, Cooper turns her attention to the use that a coterie of black women writers and the Gullah people themselves make of this imagined/created identity in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Where Federal Writer's Project researchers devoted time to assessing negative "racial characteristics," of the Gullah, novelists Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, and Gloria Naylor and filmmaker Julie Dash celebrated a culture imbued with ancient wisdom, power, and love. These women, asserts Cooper, communicated "the restorative power of black folklore," and envisioned a past in which the Gullah people used spiritual belief and family ties to resist the soul-crushing energy of white supremacy. Empowered by a new imagining of their past, the Gullah people began, Cooper argues, to envision a way to use this burnished identity as a tool in their struggles for independence.

Throughout the text, Cooper highlights the gap between black desire for freedom and justice and the white racial mythmaking mapped onto the people of Sapelo that dismissed and ignored their struggles. These glimpses of black resistance to white authority in each era suggest that the people of Sapelo never shared the vision of themselves as incapable and primitive, as put forward by "scholars." Nineteenth-century history of the Georgia Lowcountry is pockmarked with stories of black organization and resistance, including the political engagement of black Republicans under Tunis Campbell and the 1899 Darien Insurrection. In the penultimate chapter, Cooper argues that the Gullah, overwhelmed by high taxes and faced with displacement and land loss in the twenty-first century, seized upon their unique culture as they, yet again, organized to challenge forces aligned against them. Political organization driven by cultural empowerment of the Gullah people, including Cornelia Walker Bailey—native daughter of Sapelo and "the island's foremost land retention activist," who passed in October 2017—have not thwarted continued incursions by outsiders (p. 181). Sadly, a reimagined past does not translate into economic or political power to resist systemic forces leveled by the "cumya" against the "binya." A complex and thorough review of the literature about the Gullah people, Cooper's text offers a poignant reminder that their story is but a piece of the greater black struggle for freedom and equality in America.

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