

Conscious of both place and time, Klotter nicely balances the Breckinridge story with descriptions of Kentucky and often stimulating commentary on regional and national issues. Because of the author's success in handling his material, his book becomes much more than a mere history of a border-state family.

Beginning with the migration of John Breckinridge into Kentucky in the late eighteenth century, the Breckinridges greatly influenced the development of a complex and diverse frontier state. Klotter deftly handles the family's tangled relationship to the institution of slavery and persuasively explains, for example, why Robert J. Breckinridge developed strong antislavery opinions and became a strong Unionist while his nephew John C. Breckinridge became the southern Democrats' presidential candidate in 1860 and a Confederate general. Indeed the account of family divisions during the Civil War, which is far superior to most cliché-riddled accounts, is one of the most moving parts of the narrative.

Although Klotter obviously admires the Breckinridges' many achievements, he does not hastily pass over the unsavory part of their story. His description and analysis of the relations between husbands and wives and parents and children is careful and even-handed. Likewise the scandal that erupted as a result of W. C. P. Breckinridge's affair with a Washington woman is treated straightforwardly, with special attention given to its political consequences and effect on the family.

Given the variety of family activities, Klotter had to deal with everything from horse racing to midwifery, and he handles most topics with aplomb. The account of the reformer and academic, Sophonisba Breckinridge, and the fascinating description of the interplay between family history and professional training in the life of Mary Breckinridge, display both thorough research and considerable imagination.

Some readers may have wished Klotter had ended the book with Mary—the chapters on John Bayne Breckinridge add little to the story—and his final chapter on the family as a whole—even with its useful analysis of the tension between reform and conservatism among the Breckinridges—is disappointing. Yet despite an occasional problem with diction, Klotter has produced a well-written and often evocative narrative that is liberally sprinkled with first-rate analysis. As a history of a southern family, *Breckinridges of Kentucky* stands unrivaled.

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Killings: Folk Justice in the Upper South. By William Lynwood Montell. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986. Pp.

xxvi, 184. Map, illustrations, tables, figures, notes, works consulted, index. \$19.00.)

William Lynwood Montell's *Killings* is a captivating book of interest to the general reader as well as to the specialist in oral traditions and cultural history. His study area, which he calls "the State Line country," "is situated astraddle the Kentucky-Tennessee state line, a little east of the midpoint," and it "extends for approximately nine miles from north to south and ten miles from east to west" (p. xiv). Within the context of the social, cultural, and economic history of the State Line country, Montell focuses on fifty documented killings (verified by court records and "substantial" oral traditions) that took place between the mid-1800s and 1940.

"Such a contextual approach," he says, "allows for the portrayal of lethal violence in its true relation to other elements of the area's culture, rather than in distorted or sensationalized perspective. The use of oral sources makes such an approach possible, as the researcher is compelled to look at killings and their causes through the eyes of insiders" (p. xviii). To supplement and document the oral accounts he collected from residents over a six-year period, Montell also searched local newspapers, histories, and court records. To protect his informants from "possible embarrassment and harassment," he uses fictitious personal and place names and omits all documentation containing specific references to the study area—a justifiable practice in such a study.

In four chapters arranged chronologically, Montell examines the historical and social conditions and attitudes that led to a staggering homicide rate in the study area and describes killings that occurred across the years. A fifth chapter deals with the study area since World War II and includes an analysis of local migrants to "a booming east central Indiana city," called "Northtown" by Montell. In these chapters we learn that family feuds and vendettas were not common in the study area; that killings generally resulted from one-on-one arguments and altercations; that killing was done in defense of property, family, and personal honor; that alcohol, theft, and boundary disputes accounted for many of the killings; that logging and sawmilling camps were especially conducive to violence; that residents of the State Line country did not view killings as criminal acts; and that former residents who moved to Indiana did not continue to commit murder.

In short, mainly because the area was physically isolated and politically fragmented among four counties, there was no effective law enforcement through the 1930s, so the culture developed its own code of folk justice. Families living in this rugged area were extremely poor, and protection of what property they had was valued more than human life. As one informant said, "I learned that anything I wanted I had to work hard for, and I wasn't going to let

anyone take it away from me" (p. 67). With ample oral narratives of killings as macabre as any story written by Flannery O'Connor, Montell clearly demonstrates that the State Line country is a subregional culture that, within well-established limits, tolerated violence to maintain social order.

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The Damndest Radical: The Life and World of Ben Reitman, Chicago's Celebrated Social Reformer, Hobo King, and Whorehouse Physician. By Roger A. Bruns. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987. Pp. xi, 332. Illustrations, notes, selected bibliography, index. \$24.95.)

Benjamin Reitman lived in the dark shadow of the Progressive Era. Born in 1879, he ended his Chicago childhood abruptly when he jumped an eastbound freight and entered the hobo world. Despite frequent wandering, he managed to graduate from a Chicago medical college in 1904. Then in 1907, while on the road, he met James Eads How, whose St. Louis hobo college Reitman decided to imitate in Chicago with well-publicized results. A year later he met Emma Goldman, and for the next decade he was her road manager and lover. But he never became a part of the anarchist movement, which distrusted him as a crude-mouthed, publicity-seeking adventurer. Even Goldman's interest was limited to his crude attractiveness and helpfulness in handling her lecture tours. He neither influenced nor was influenced by the movement. He simply traveled with Goldman, his "blue-eyed Mommy." In 1912 he paid the price for his association with Goldman, however, when San Diego vigilantes—bankers and real estate salesmen—abducted him to the desert, stripped, injured, and humiliated him. After that he began to drift from the anarchists. In later life he advocated birth control (which led to two trials and imprisonment), continued the hobo college, medicated the Chicago crime syndicate's prostitutes, and in the 1930s supported a pioneering educational campaign against venereal disease. He died in 1942.

This is a "life and world" biography in which, one might say, the world obscures the life. Reitman was clearly interesting, but he did not lead, influence, nor report events. He was an arranger who knew how to publicize the hobo college and reserve Emma Goldman's hotel rooms. In his reform activities, humanitarianism, not ideology, drove him; expediency, not vision. To describe the world of some Progressive Era reformers through his life illuminates neither. Long chapters discuss events, but readers often learn only that Ben was somewhere nearby and little involved. We read