

The Other Missouri History
Populists, Prostitutes, and Regular Folk
 Edited by Thomas M. Spencer

(Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005. Pp. vii, 241. Notes, index. Paperbound, \$24.95.)

The nine essays that comprise this volume consider the ways in which ordinary people—those without power or wealth—have been able to influence public policy. Using the organizing categories of race, gender, and class, the authors explore how these “other” Missourians have helped to shape the history of the state. Wide ranging in time and topic, the essays investigate race and politics in the post-Civil War era, labor organization (both farm and industry) from the antebellum period to modern times, and the legal and illegal organization of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although the essays deal specifically with Missourians and Missouri issues, they point to ways in which locally-based social history can enrich our understanding of national trends and demonstrate how everyday people help to influence the course of history.

Both Greg Andrews’s essay on Radical Reconstruction politics in Ralls County and Tom Spencer’s on the Bald Knobbers of Taney County in the same era are representative of this collection in their excellent use of local newspapers, state court records, governors’ papers, and census records to build solid cases that challenge traditional interpretations. Bonnie Stepenhoff relies on oral his-

tories, records of the Farm Security Administration, and correspondence in manuscript collections to explore “Survival Strategies of Farm Laborers in the Missouri Bootheel, 1900-1958,” while Robert Faust, in “Women, Identity, and Reform in Missouri’s Lead Belt, 1900-1923,” draws on the papers of women’s clubs, corporations, and schools to trace the growth of progressive women’s interests from “self-culture to social welfare” (p. 197). Daniel Graff’s and Deborah Henry’s essays place race at the center of their analyses of labor organization in St. Louis. Whether looking at the antebellum period (Graff), or at the post-World War II era (Henry), these authors find that race trumps all other factors, as white solidarity prevented blacks from attaining equal opportunity in the labor market. Rounding out the collection are essays by Michael Steiner on populism in northern Missouri and Amber Clifford on prostitution in Kansas City.

Well written and pleasingly presented with footnotes rather than endnotes, this volume deserves careful consideration by those who live beyond Missouri. These essays allow us to test our general theories against the specificity of particular place and time. Because the subject matter is so varied, every reader should find at least several essays appealing. Taken

together, the contributions to *The Other Missouri History* force us to expand our viewpoint and to look beyond the words and deeds of the rich and powerful. By assuming the perspective of ordinary people, this volume helps us to gain a richer interpretation of historical events in Missouri and elsewhere.

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Language and Political Meaning in Revolutionary America

By John Howe

(Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004. Pp. xii, 281. Illustrations, notes, index. \$39.95.)

There is little doubt of the substantial role played by vocabulary in determining the outcome of public events. Whether deployed in the service of great historical struggles or of fleeting political squabbles, language can produce deadlock, or it can reframe the very manner in which citizens understand the questions at issue.

Professor John Howe devotes considerable effort to recounting the evolution of language in late colonial America, and to investigating its influence on the political struggles of the era. His book does not attempt to create an overarching theory of language during the several decades of the Revolutionary period, but it does provide useful insights into the interplay of language and politics.

Modern readers easily forget, for example, that during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the English language was still very

much in flux. Conventions of spelling, punctuation, and grammar (not to mention definitions of words) now so familiar to Englishmen and Americans alike were still matters in play during the decades preceding the Revolution. Samuel Johnson's 1755 dictionary became the leading achievement of a fifty-year movement to prescribe standard language. The respectability that such standardization brought to the English language fit nicely with the ambitious goals of Great Britain's political leadership.

Howe observes that the movement toward standardization, still a work in progress on the eve of the Revolution, complicated the political debate that ultimately led to schism between the mother country and her colonies. The conflict with the British during what Howe calls "the imperial crisis" was exacerbated by the fact that the two sides possessed different definitions of common terms like