an extraordinarily thorough exploration of documents, oral histories, interviews, and related books and articles. He gives readers a clear view of Herman Wells’s trajectory through academic and public space. His careful work allows us to see the president’s values expressed through his actions, policies, and decisions, and provides us with a remarkably detailed understanding of Wells’s skillful management of potentially controversial issues, careful cultivation of individuals, and strong defense of academic values.

Wells wrote little that could be called personal introspection. The record contains dictated messages—each with a carefully thought-out purpose—prepared to achieve intentional results. His exceptional charm and warm personality led people to believe they knew him well, but everyone believed he was their personal friend. Capshew’s close reading of the documentary and oral history record provides many remarkable insights into Wells’s personal life, his commitment to his fraternity, his personal engagement with the defense of Alfred Kinsey’s controversial enterprise, his careful but steadfast efforts to improve race relations on campus, and other similar issues of the era. Sometimes the most telling comments appear in the valuable and extensive footnotes. Even so, I wish that Capshew would have attempted an even closer interior analysis of his subject’s motives and personal opinions, but perhaps the man was so completely his public self that such speculation would not help us understand him better. In any event, Capshew’s work is a fine biography of an extraordinary individual, and we are in his debt for this definitive perspective on Herman B. Wells.

JOHN V. LOMBARDI is Professor of History at Louisiana State University and co-editor of The Top American Research Universities (2000). He is president emeritus of the University of Florida; former chancellor of the University of Massachusetts Amherst; former president of the Louisiana State University system; and has served as dean of International Programs, dean of Arts and Sciences, and faculty member of the History Department at Indiana University (1967-1987).

Blood and Smoke
A True Tale of Mystery, Mayhem, and the Birth of the Indy 500
By Charles Leerhsen

The first Indianapolis 500, held May 30, 1911, ranks as one of the most significant moments in the history of automobile racing. In this page turn-
er, Charles Leerhsen captures the event in all its complexity.

Early automobile races often took place on beaches or on public roads, disrupting public use and creating dangerous conditions. Others were held on horse tracks, where blinding dust hindered safe competition. In contrast, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, which opened in 1909, was built for the purpose of automobile racing and was expected to host races that would be both safe and exciting.

Carl Graham Fisher and three other well-to-do Indiana businessmen founded the track. Fisher took the lead role. A former bicycle racer, he had made a fortune as an automobile dealer and a manufacturer of acetylene gas lighting for cars. In 1909 and 1910, he promoted a variety of races at the Speedway, with the longest scheduled for 300 miles. Race meets spanned several days and included many short events. Attendance was low, however, and several participants died, putting in doubt the safety advantage of the purpose-built facility. Fisher pushed ahead with a new brick racing surface and a daring new format featuring a single 500-mile event. He looked to 1911 to turn around the track’s fortunes.

As the book’s title indicates, danger is one of Leerhsen’s major themes. Early racing was notoriously deadly, and public condemnation sometimes threatened the budding sport. Leerhsen succinctly captures the dilemma for men like Fisher: “death was simultaneously the worst and best thing that could possibly happen from a promoter’s point of view” (p. 75). In the 1911 race, a riding mechanic (early drivers had a mechanic onboard) died, but the real threat to racing’s credibility on this occasion was the chaotic scoring, which had not been an issue in shorter feature events.

Official results indicate that Ray Harroun won the first Indianapolis 500 in a Marmon car averaging 74.6 miles per hour. Leerhsen, however, details how the technologically primitive scoring system made accuracy impossible. Rival driver Ralph Mulford maintained that he won, and he may well have. Leerhsen lays out the longtime relationship between Carl Fisher and Howard Marmon, whose namesake cars were built in Indianapolis. In the chaotic postrace review, business considerations may have been decisive.

Leerhsen aims the book at a broad audience, so the prose is informal. “Ballsy,” “balls-out,” “nutso,” and “horseshit” flavor the narrative (pp. 3, 49, 85, 102). His useful capsule biographies of leading racers bring out their colorful variety. Some were wealthy heirs who enjoyed racing and its budding celebrity culture; others were hired hands of car manufacturers. Leerhsen builds his story in large part from news reports in trade publications like The Horseless Age and Motor Age. He provides a brief explanation of his sources, but he chooses not to document individ-
ual quotations, limiting the book’s usefulness for scholars following his footsteps. Nonetheless, historians, like the general public, will learn a lot about the sport’s early years from this brisk book.

Randall Hall is managing editor of the Journal of Southern History and an adjunct associate professor of history at Rice University. He has written articles on automobile racing in the U.S. South between 1903 and the 1950s.

The World, the Flesh, and the Devil
A History of Colonial St. Louis
By Patricia Cleary
(Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011. Pp. xviii, 357. Illustrations, bibliography, index. $40.00.)

Patricia Cleary’s new book on early St. Louis is an excellent addition to the growing literature on the history of this fascinating place. This volume, following closely on the heels of Shannon Lee Dawdy’s important study, Building the Devil’s Empire: French Colonial New Orleans (2008), offers another example of rogue colonialism, where imperial plans met frontier realities. The devil, we might say, was in the details, or, as the last Spanish lieutenant governor of Upper Louisiana wrote on the eve of his departure in 1804: “El Diablo se lo llevo todo” (“The devil take all!”) (p. 323). At one point in the book, Cleary describes the settlement’s first Spanish official, Francisco Riu, as feeling “besieged, bothered, and beleaguered” (p. 100). (I’m convinced she had the song from Pal Joey in mind when she wrote that line.) Show tunes aside, Cleary has given us the most complete history of colonial St. Louis and one of the finest and most detailed portraits of colonial life in mid-America.

The book is organized chronologically; indeed, one might say that Cleary’s narrative takes its shape from the abundant reports and correspondence of Spanish officials. That reliance is occasionally problematic; for example, in the middle of an excellent discussion of Zenon Trudeau’s attempts to deal with the Osage, the author includes a paragraph on his complaints about the inadequacies of his house (p. 283). Judging from the footnotes, this interruption seems to derive from the chronology of his correspondence. That is a minor quibble, but Cleary tends to let the many official pronouncements speak for themselves without providing explicit critical distance. She quotes Fernando de Leyba, complaining in 1778 that “the settlers were ‘interested only in trading with the Indians’ and so neglected their farming. ‘All are, or wish to be merchants’” (p. 209). While Leyba’s