Navitsky, Rielle Public Spectacles of Violence: Sensational Cinema and Journalism in Early Twentieth-Century Mexico and Brazil Durham, NC: Duke University Press 344 pp., $27.95, ISBN: 082236963X Publication Date: June 2017

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during the Civil War. In short, although historians of slavery and of broader American religion will detect troubling flaws or omissions, Cox’s study is a deeply interesting and overall helpful examination of an oft-overlooked dimension of the otherwise familiar Lee. Civil War scholars, students, and buffs will all certainly benefit from this very readable work.

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Brown, C. Christopher
The Road to Jim Crow: The African American Struggle on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, 1860–1915
Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society
384 pp., $22.96,
ISBN 978-0-9965944-1-7
Publication Date: February 2016

C. Christopher Brown is a lawyer, educator, and activist. In the early 1990s, he served as lead counsel in civil rights litigation that brought about comprehensive electoral reform on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. advocacy for African American voting rights contributed directly to this book, a case study of African American disenfranchisement.

Brown has published a handful of scholarly articles on African American voting and political activism in the age of Jim Crow, but he is not a historian. As a result, The Road to Jim Crow is more descriptive than analytical, and the bibliography does not include the most recent scholarship on the subject. He also does not always recognize how the local history he describes compares with events elsewhere. As an example, he references “standard Eastern Shore racism” (72) and faults “white Shoremen’s impatience with the legal system” (178) with a rise in lynchings in the 1880s.

Brown is clearly bothered by this history, and it is evident that he wrote The Road to Jim Crow to understand why the Reconstruction amendments failed to fully integrate emancipated African Americans into Maryland’s society and politics. Chapters 1 and 2 describe the situation of Eastern Shore African Americans before the Civil War. Chapters 3 and 4 relate the reactions of Eastern Shore whites and blacks to federal emancipation and disfranchisement. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the limited integration of freedmen into local politics and the economy, as well as the origins of institutionalized segregation. Chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10 relate the brutal so-called redemption of the Eastern Shore by white supremacists. Chapters 11, 12, and 13 consider how Eastern Shore African Americans coped with segregation in the early twentieth century.

At its best, The Road to Jim Crow provides readers with a readable microhistory of the bloody Reconstruction-era conflict between local and federal authorities to remake the post-slavery South. One strength of the book is Brown’s attention to party politics, especially the Republican Party’s ineffectiveness as a tool for political reconstruction. As elsewhere in the Reconstruction South, Maryland’s black voters elected white Republicans to office, but these black voters never shared in “political power or patronage” (80). In response, African Americans organized their own political campaigns and conventions, including regularly scheduled Colored Republican State Conventions in the 1870s (79).

Brown’s account of rising white supremacy in the 1870s and 1880s is another strength of this work. Members of the Eastern Shore’s Democratic Party spoke frankly and publicly about their ambition to redeem the region from “Negro rule” (137). Brown recounts their efforts with stress-inducing accounts of church burnings, public whippings, and lynching. In chapter 8, he memorializes six young black men lynched by white mobs between 1891 and 1898. Over the course of several chapters, he describes the rigid enforcement of new segregation laws, the implementation of a segregated education system devised to create a permanent black underclass, and a racialized justice system. Violence encouraged outmigration, and it is easy to imagine Brown’s subjects joining the Great Migration of African Americans who fled north in the early twentieth century. Those left behind withdrew from local politics, learned to walk gingerly around white people, and made the most of economic and social opportunities in segregated communities.

I anticipate that The Road to Jim Crow will be of special interest to a general adult reading audience, especially Eastern Shore–based educators, local historians, and public historians, who likely teach local African American history. Contemporary civil rights activists would also benefit from reading this account, as they will recognize the rhetoric and tactics of late nineteenth-century white supremacists. Activists should know this history, and they should know C. Christopher Brown for his admirable work to undo institutional racism in Maryland’s electoral system.

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Studies on silent cinema in Latin America have experienced a remarkable growth during the last few years. The progress has been evident in Latin American countries, as well as in other academic spaces, especially in the United States. Among those studies, Public Spectacles of Violence: Sensational Cinema and Journalism in Early Twentieth-Century Mexico and Brazil, by Rielle Navitski, stands out. Navitski is a professor and researcher at the University of Georgia. This book is an important contribution to the historiography of Mexican and Brazilian cinematography and of Latin American silent cinema in general.
The author explores the role of sensational images in the development of early cinema and journalism in Brazil and Mexico. She highlights the relationship between these two fields, observing that the silent cinema of these countries was intimately linked to their print culture (serial literature, illustrated police reportage, and fan magazines). This starting point serves to demonstrate how the visual culture of the first decades of the twentieth century oriented experiences of modernization and new forms of public life whose configuration was permeated by violence, by using the concept of spectacles of violence (taken from Guy Debord). The author identifies two ways of staging these spectacles of violence: “violent actualities,” which consist of the recording or reconstruction of real-life violent acts, and what she calls “sensational fictions,” fiction films full of violent deaths and catastrophes (6). She analyzes, in addition to the tabloid graphic press, an important film corpus composed of works that have survived to our day, as well as other lost films, which the author reconstructs through press comments and other sources.

One of the most important achievements of the book lies in its strategy of analysis: an appropriate, comparative approach for two national cases—the early cinematography of Mexico and Brazil—that, according to Navitski, “gave expression to accelerated modernization in societies marked by regional, ethnic, and class divides” (5). For this purpose, she divides the book into two parts, in which she tracks the production and reception of sensational films and their printed intertexts, although there is a considerable difference in periodization, which the author attributes to the incidence of historical processes in the development of the film narrative in each of the countries. The first part, devoted to Mexico between 1896 and 1927, addresses the intersection of visual culture with the process of national modernization in contexts marked by violence, from the Porfiriato to the post-revolutionary period. Navitski analyzes famous films such as El automóvil gris (Enrique Rosas, 1918) and other, less-known ones, such as Fanny o el robo de los treinta millones (Manuel Sánchez Valtierra, 1922) and El tren fantasma (Gabriel García Moreno, 1926), which, along with other productions, exposed violence as popular entertainment. In the second part, the study deals with the Brazilian case between 1906 and 1930 and its different approaches to sensational cinema: first, the illustrated police reportage and the first narrative films in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, which staged real-life violence; then, the influence of European serial films in Rio during the 1910s, which inspired many local productions of crime and adventure; and, finally, the adventure melodramas made outside Sao Paulo and Rio by semi-amateur filmmakers in the 1920s.

After reading Public Spectacles, the balance is very positive. The correct reconstruction of the historical context, the study’s theoretical depth, the excellent use of printed sources to compensate for the eventual absence of film material, and the richness of the images included in the book give form to a very solid volume, which is a must for researchers and students interested in the early cinema of Brazil and Mexico. The book contributes to the understanding of the consolidation period of cinema as an art and, at the same time, as a spectacle for the masses, and it also contributes decisively to the discussion—always active in Latin America—about modernization processes.

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Briant, Pierre
The First European: A History of Alexander in the Age of Empire
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Even the ancient historians and commentators found the legacy of Alexander the Great to be vexing. On one hand, the Macedonian was a condemnable figure who was guilty of the drunken murder of his friend Cleitus; of destroying the Phoenician city of Tyre; and, most prominently, of course, of the blind and burning ambition to subjugate faraway peoples. On the other hand, he was the worthy leader who united the peoples of Europe and Asia, respected the religions and ways of those whom he ruled, and was chaste and clement with the princesses of Persia.

Pierre Briant, a distinguished French scholar of ancient history now an emeritus professor at the Collège de France, examines what the Europeans of the (very) long eighteenth century made of this protean character. It was a time when Europe was developing commerce and its theories, when France conquered Egypt, and when England ruled India. An earlier European figure who engaged with Asia was, therefore, particularly relevant, and, indeed, the legacy of Alexander, Briant shows, fascinated the great (Bayle, Voltaire, and Montesquieu, for example) and the relatively obscure alike. Briant’s work is impressively erudite and thorough, examining more than 600 works in French, German, and English. He explains that he has studied not only the original texts but also their various translations. He also cites the sometimes anonymous reviews of these works in the periodicals of the time. In the process, he brings to light fascinating finds. For example, Briant shows that the young Bonaparte, an avid reader of the classical texts, authored a critical assessment of the ancient conqueror. By following an obscure reference in an adapted translation of John Gillies’s History of Ancient Greece (1786) into French by Émile Ruelle (1841), Briant is led to the work of Théodore Jouffroy, “a now long-forgotten philosopher,” who regarded Alexander’s conquest in a Hegelian fashion as a herald of the coming of Christianity (302).

The efforts of Baron de Sainte-Croix serve as Briant’s point of departure. In 1770, Sainte-Croix penned a prize-winning response to the question posed by the Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres as to...