The Blues Come to Texas: Paul Oliver and Mack McCormick's Unfinished Book by Alan Govenar, and: *The Original Blues: The Emergence of the Blues in African American Vaudeville* by Lynn Abbott, Doug Seroff (review)

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For example, Floyd argues in "'A Diarrhea of Plans and Constipation of Action': The Influence of Alabama Cotton Farmers, Merchants, and Brokers on Anglo-American Diplomacy during the First World War, 1914–1915" that southern farmers and merchants, who were concerned about the war's impact on the international cotton trade, politically threatened governors and state legislators, who in turn shared these concerns with national politicians. In the process, these groups not only influenced Allied economic policy against Germany but also reasserted the South's important political role in the nation.

The war, especially the political aim to spread democracy across the globe, also challenged traditional race relations. In "The Great War and Expanding Equality?: Black Carolinians Test Boundaries," Janet G. Hudson evaluates how African Americans navigated the demands for patriotism while living in a segregated society. She asserts that supporting the war and combining loyalty with demands for racial equality laid the rhetorical foundation for the future civil rights movement. Lee Sartain's study of the NAACP, "'The Race's Greatest Opportunity since Emancipation': The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Great War, and the South," comes to a similar conclusion, asserting that the young organization transformed itself into the preeminent civil rights organization through its role in the mobilization of African Americans for the war effort.

The authors in the three publications under review use traditional primary documents, including a wide array of newspapers, letters, and U.S. census and congressional records, as well as underutilized correspondence between politicians and their constituents, oral history interviews, shipping company records, contemporary medical journals, women's magazines, and textile journals. Together these books demonstrate the many challenges to the status quo in the South during World War I. Consequent political, economic, and social changes, even if minute, created the foundations for the even more dramatic transformations that occurred during and after World War II. All three are a must-read for any scholar of the American South and anyone interested in the many changes that occurred, not just in this region but also across the nation, as a result of the First World War.

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The Blues Come to Texas: Paul Oliver and Mack McCormick's Unfinished Book. Compiled by Alan Govenar. Essays by Alan Govenar and Kip Lornell. The John and Robin Dickson Series in Texas Music. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2019. Pp. [xii], 457. $95.00, ISBN 978-1-62349-638-8.)

The Original Blues: The Emergence of the Blues in African American Vaudeville. By Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017. Pp. viii, 420. Paper, $40.00, ISBN 978-1-4968-2326-7.)

In 1959, pioneering blues researchers Paul Oliver and Mack McCormick began work on an investigation into the history of blues music in Texas. This massive undertaking was almost doomed from the start, as the Oxford, England–based Oliver and the Houston, Texas–based McCormick had to share

research via the postal service, which could take weeks between mailings. As McCormick acknowledged in an early letter to Oliver, "any point-by-point collaboration is impractical at this distance, and would have other difficulties" (p. 2). Regardless, the pair devised a research and writing regimen, with McCormick conducting the on-the-ground fieldwork, interviewing blues musicians, and making recordings of performances; Oliver compiled McCormick's fieldwork with his own research and wrote the manuscript. The pair worked on this project sporadically until 1978, when communication between them effectively ended. What was eventually diagnosed as bipolar disorder in McCormick also slowed down progress on the book. In periods of mania, McCormick worked tirelessly conducting interviews and gathering census records, news clippings, and other data. The research and collecting expanded to the point that Oliver wrote to McCormick, "I am almost frightened by the amount of material! For it demands to be used and used well. . . . This is obviously a never ending quest" (p. 9). In other phases, McCormick sank into depression, finding work on the project difficult. Frustrations with each other's interpretations of source material and other aspects of the book led to some heated correspondence between the two. There were various unsuccessful attempts to revive the project, but it was not until Texas blues authority Alan Govenar (author of *Texas Blues: The Rise of a Contemporary Sound* [College Station, Tex., 2008]; *Lightnin' Hopkins: His Life and Blues* [Chicago, 2010]; *Living Texas Blues* [Dallas, 1985]; and others) met Paul Oliver in 1996, that the process to publish the manuscript was revived. Govenar contacted blues and folk music scholar Kip Lornell (author of, with Charles K. Wolfe, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly* [New York, 1992]; and of *Exploring American Folk Music: Ethnic, Grassroots, and Regional Traditions in the United States* [Jackson, Miss., 2012]; *Happy in the Service of the Lord: Afro-American Gospel Quartets in Memphis* [Urbana, 1988]; and others), and the two began the difficult task of bringing Paul Oliver's unfinished draft to life.

Govenar and Lornell are clear that this published work is unfinished. They wanted to present the manuscript as close to the form in which Oliver left it, though with some added contextual information. What was originally conceived as a two-volume work has been composed into a single volume, partly by reducing font size and including two columns of text per page, making this 457-page book effectively 914 pages. In addition to the original manuscript and Oliver's intended original preface, Govenar and Lornell have added an introduction, explaining the complex history of how this book has finally seen the light of day, and a section titled "Recording the Blues and the Folk Revival: A Prelude," intended to contextualize this work's scholarship.

Long awaited by blues scholars, *The Blues Come to Texas: Paul Oliver and Mack McCormick's Unfinished Book* gives incredibly rich information on the history of blues in the Lone Star State and parts of nearby Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. While there is excellent information on well-known Texas artists like Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and Mance Lipscomb, *The Blues Come to Texas* is especially fascinating for its research into blues musicians little known outside this study. As Govenar writes in the introduction, "One can only ponder how our understanding of the blues might

have been different had this book been published in the 1970s, as its creators had hoped" (p. 11). Had this happened, perhaps other researchers could have helped expand our knowledge of artists like Harold Holiday (also known as Black Boy Shine), Attaway Harris, or Boozy Woods.

While the focus of this work is the greater Texas region, readers will gain valuable insights into the development of blues music in general. Indeed, the title of the book (a line from Blind Lemon Jefferson: "Well the Blues come to Texas, lopin' like a mule") was the source of some consternation between the authors (p. 11). In some correspondence Oliver fretted, "Even if we never populate the theory, I would like to leave the reader with the impression that there was a fair likelihood that the blues came *from* Texas" (p. 10).

Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff's *The Original Blues: The Emergence of the Blues in African American Vaudeville* is essentially the concluding work in a trilogy, which also includes Abbott and Seroff's books *Out of Sight: The Rise of African American Popular Music, 1889–1895* (Jackson, Miss., 2002) and *Ragged But Right: Black Traveling Shows, "Coon Songs," and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz* (Jackson, Miss., 2007). All three works rethink the development of the blues genre by documenting a more prominent role for minstrelsy, vaudeville, and other popular urban entertainments. Many narratives of the blues describe a linear path as the music progressed from the cotton fields to performance stages. While not necessarily untrue, these descriptions often diminish the influence of the professional tent shows and vaudeville circuits on the music of country blues artists.

The Original Blues examines the development of American vaudeville in the late nineteenth century, delves into the emergence of blues acts on the stages of professional touring vaudeville productions over the first three decades of the twentieth century, and describes the influence vaudeville played in popularizing blues guitar. In examining the rise of early women blues recording artists of the 1920s, the authors examine the transition of the derisively named "coon shouters" into the celebrated "blues queens," made possible by the rising southern black vaudeville circuits. Particularly fascinating is Abbott and Seroff's chapter on Butler "String Beans" May, who is practically unknown today, but who was, as the authors state, "the greatest attraction of pre-1920 African American vaudeville and the first blues star" (p. 67). Though he played piano, the authors make a strong case for May's influence on the next generation of country blues guitar players like Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Blake, and others. The increasing commercialization of the blues is well documented in the book through approximately two hundred black-and-white reproductions of sheet music covers, photographs, and advertisements from African American newspapers, particularly from the Chicago *Defender* and the Indianapolis *Freeman*.

Both *The Original Blues* and *The Blues Come to Texas* offer important contributions to our understanding of the origins of the blues. While *The Original Blues* can be read as a stand-alone work, it is best read in conjunction with Abbott and Seroff's other works. Readers will get more from *The Blues Come to Texas* after delving into general histories of the blues. Both of these works help correct some misunderstandings about the origins and spread of the

blues and add substantially to our understanding of this important American music.

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Farmers Helping Farmers: The Rise of the Farm and Home Bureaus, 1914–1935. By Nancy K. Berlage. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016. Pp. xii, 308. $48.00, ISBN 978-0-8071-6330-6.)

In 1911, rural people in counties across the United States began to form private voluntary organizations to educate themselves. They wanted thriving farms, and by the early 1920s, these county associations had been renamed bureaus and appeared in every state. According to Nancy K. Berlage in *Farmers Helping Farmers: The Rise of the Farm and Home Bureaus, 1914–1935*, science was central to the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), and members focused most on disseminating scientific knowledge through its impressive organizational systems. Borrowing historian Louis Galambos's "organizational synthesis," Berlage uses the concept to argue that people at the local level enthusiastically engaged with the AFBF (p. 5). This reinterpretation of the history of the AFBF challenges the mostly negative views of it, since other historians have criticized the organization as an elitist group with undue influence on national politics. By focusing on local developments, Berlage argues that the AFBF provided structure, efficiency, professional standards, public relations, and expertise to rural people who wanted science to ensure their success as farmers.

Berlage covers a twenty-year period when farmers experienced tremendous scientific and technological change, a moment she acknowledges that other agricultural historians have documented well. What she adds is an overlooked perspective that takes seriously the experiences of rural people who wanted to learn about what a scientific approach to farming could offer and apply it to their lives. Six chapters tell the story of local farm bureaus, primarily in Illinois, Iowa, and New York, adding a few examples from other states. The narrative begins by explaining the origins and structure of the organization. The culture of persuasion that developed in these farm bureaus was pervasive, and Berlage challenges the one-dimensional assessment that the AFBF was coercive. She argues that some members threatened by marginalization found sociability and a sense of belonging in the AFBF. The AFBF also supported the development of cooperatives, which Berlage studies broadly. In addition to economic cooperatives, members pursued social cooperation enthusiastically, which meant that members organized a slew of picnics, sports festivals, dramas, musicals, and other contests. Social cohesion was crucial during the efforts to eradicate bovine tuberculosis, when the federal government, the AFBF, and university and extension experts worked together to convince reluctant farmers to cull their herds.

A strong component of this analysis is gender, and Berlage expands on the work of historians of rural women to move beyond their economic contributions to investigate their assertions of private and public authority. Women moved fluidly among sometimes competing notions of gender. In some circumstances they championed their roles as wives and mothers, while in other cases they