

strengthened. While numerous 18th and 19th-century socio-historical views of backwoods culture are given (including those of Frederick Jackson Turner), no mention is made of Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur who has some significant commentary on the backwoods in his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782). Jordan and Kaups make no references to the changing climate of North America since the early 18th century, and how such a change in weather patterns may have affected the use and distribution of double-pen log houses which are now found only in the heavy snowfall regions of the mountain West.

This reader strongly recommends *The American Backwoods Frontier* for all scholars of American culture and civilization.

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**Pleasant “Cousin Joe” Joseph and Harriet J. Ottenheimer. *Cousin Joe: Blues from New Orleans*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 227 pp., \$19.95.**

Unlike more traditional biographies, oral histories require that readers suspend their basic cultural assumptions about narrative. These assumptions, according to James Clifford, form a “myth of personal coherence” in which readers expect a narrator’s life story to represent a coherent and continuous self. The discrepancy between what a reader expects and what a reader receives forces the editor of an oral life-story to choose among several editorial options. In *Cousin Joe*, a work which took over twenty years to collect, to transcribe, and to edit, Harriet Ottenheimer informs us that she chose from three editing possibilities. She decided not to present a wholly unedited text complete with coughs and pauses, nor did she want to provide a work which included editorial commentary which might confuse the editor’s voice with the teller’s voice. Instead, she chose a style which strived for “some measure of coherence. . . intended for a general reading public” because Cousin Joe wanted his story to be a “best seller.” This compromising editorial tack proves to have a more positive than negative effect on the narrative, but Ottenheimer’s tendency toward an unedited text is plain. Although the book does exhibit standard spelling and grammar, much of the narrative is made up of unedited, rambling digressions.

Ottenheimer’s unobtrusive editing style allows Cousin Joe’s voice to reflect the reality of being black in a racist culture. Born to a poor, violent family on a Louisiana plantation in 1907, Cousin Joe relates the profound effect that this early social and familial abuse had on his life. Anger and frustration permeate his narrative, and Cousin Joe admits to too often finding solace from the world’s injustice through alcohol. But Cousin

Joe's musical genius afforded him a different kind of escape from an otherwise bleak existence, and Ottenheimer demonstrates this fact by using his songs to entitle each of the twenty chapters, by beginning each chapter with song lyrics which summarize a particular stage or important event in Cousin Joe's life, and by including twenty-four well-chosen photographs to illustrate the text.

Art imitated life for Cousin Joe, and he drew heavily upon personal experiences to create his music. From his brief semi-religious state at the age of seven, when he wrote and sang spirituals, to the age of sixty-five when he was awarded the Album of the Year in France, music was the controlling factor in his life. This is emphasized by two informative bibliographies and an impressive twenty-four page discography which concludes the book

Like most people who recount their lives, Cousin Joe dispels any "myth of personal coherence" by omitting details, by contradicting himself, and by degressing about minor points which do not further the story. And Ottenheimer's straightforward editing style does not soften the horrible accounts of violence, of racism, and of misogyny. But Cousin Joe's modest and endearing explanation of his musical genius, his insights about musical celebrities, his reverence for his fellow musicians, his unique perception of music, and his terrible honesty about pre-Civil Rights New Orleans will be of special interest to music enthusiasts, black studies scholars, and social-psychologists.

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**Hyung-chan Kim, ed. *Asian American Studies: An Annotated Bibliography and Research Guide.* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989) x, 504 pp.,\$55.00.**

Hyung-chan Kim's bibliography of humanities and social science materials on Asian Americans has two basic but important assets. First, its 3,396 entries encompass a large proportion of the relevant literature (creative writing and federal government publications have been excluded as they are adequately covered in other sources). Second, the bibliography is nicely organized. It is divided into two main sections dealing respectively with historical and contemporary matters. Each section has chapters on a variety of subjects, for example marriage and family, community organizations, immigration and refugees, and acculturation, adaptation and assimilation. Within each chapter, the appropriate books/monographs, articles, and theses/dissertations are listed alphabetically by author.

Nearly all of the entries are annotated. The volume begins with an