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Review: The Broken Heart of America: St. Louis and the Violent History of the United States, by Walter Johnson

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(human, equine, and bovine), a scattering of archival collections, and her own observations. She also remains attentive to existing rodeo historiography, and although her conclusions break—often sharply—from those of previous writers on the subject, Nance nonetheless treats her predecessors as thinkers whose work deserves respect and engagement.

Nance largely succeeds in restoring horses and cattle to their rightful role at the center of rodeo history. Although her near-total omission of Mexican and Mexican American influences on and involvement in rodeo limits the book's scope, *Rodeo* nonetheless demands attention from western North American, environmental, agricultural, and animal historians. More surprisingly, perhaps, Nance's new book also offers revealing insights into the cultural and electoral politics of rural western communities on both sides of the 49th parallel as they increasingly came to uphold rodeo as an enduring refuge of "traditional" values about gender, grit, the exploitation of rodeo athletes (whether human, equine, or bovine), and the most recent bouts in what Nance repeatedly calls westerners' ongoing "quarrel with the land."

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THOMAS ANDREWS

The Broken Heart of America: St. Louis and the Violent History of the United States. By Walter Johnson. (New York, Basic Books, 2020. 528 pp.)

In *The Broken Heart of America*, historian Walter Johnson examines the histories of white supremacy, capitalism, and racist violence through the lens of St. Louis, Missouri, from the nineteenth to the early twenty-first century. He argues that St. Louis epitomizes the major themes of American history, including Indian wars, anti-Black lynching spectacles, epic riots, police violence, discrimination, exclusion, and segregation. More than a story of one city, he writes, *Broken Heart* uses that metropolis to explore "the history of 'racial capitalism': the intertwined history of white supremacist ideology and the practices of empire, extraction, and exploitation. Dynamic, unstable, ever-changing, and world-making" (p. 6).

Like many others, Johnson ponders the acceptance by working-class whites of a bargain with wealthier whites that has offered them so few benefits aside from the privileges of whiteness and the repudiation of dependency that they associated with racial minorities. With impressive skill, he recounts some of the well-known and not-so-well-known episodes of

injustice, including the incineration of Francis McIntosh, a free Black man, by a white mob in 1836, an act overwhelmingly supported by whites; the demographic shifts and the accompanying labor and housing competition of the World War I and II periods; the police killing of eighteen-year-old Melvin Cravens in 1965; and the killing of eighteen-year-old Michael Brown, Jr. by a white policeman in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014, the event that catalyzed the organization of Black Lives Matter.

At times, Johnson can be too sweeping. In describing the 1836 burning, for instance, he writes that McIntosh was “the victim of what was arguably the first lynching in the history of the United States” (p. 73). Three pages later, he steps on this qualified point when he attributes the contemporaneous response of Abraham Lincoln to the lynching, a perspective that the Illinois attorney could only have held if he had somehow known then the role that lynching would play in repressing Blacks over the next century: “Lincoln . . . knew that McIntosh was a dead man the moment he cut [a white policeman’s] throat” (p. 76). Similarly, he oversteps by claiming that “St. Louis has been the crucible of American history” and that “much of American history has unfolded from the juncture of empire and anti-Blackness in the city of St. Louis” (p. 5). Had he merely argued that St. Louis—like any other major city—had an ugly, important, and relevant history, he would have been on firmer ground. However, by hinging his argument on the *uniqueness* of St. Louis, Johnson is prone to overstatement: “slavery in St. Louis was uniquely precarious, and because it was uniquely precarious, it was uniquely violent” (p. 91). Additionally, his geographical boundaries shift according to the needs of the narrative, so that a study on Missouri all-too-briefly pulls in East St. Louis, Illinois, to incorporate the racist massacre there in 1917.

Johnson is an excellent writer who has produced a compelling, tragic, and often inspiring narrative of cruelty, cunning, competition, racial hatred, cultural resilience, and determined freedom. His book, *Broken Heart*, is significant—a hefty and incisive catalogue of racism and its attendant evils—and will be particularly useful for undergraduates, for those laypersons interested in the history of racial inequality and white backlash in America, or for those interested in the history of racism and freedom activism in the Midwest.

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