



Ghost Dancing on the Cracker Circuit: The Culture of Festivals in the American South

Rodger Lyle Brown

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Everybody knows about community festivals that celebrate the good ol' days?events like Rattlesnake Roundup, Peanut Days, and Mule Day. Countless towns around the South stage them. They set aside one weekend a year, rope off some parking, and celebrate some local theme on the courthouse lawn or in a nearby pasture, touting lost days of imagined glory.

The phenomenon is rapidly proliferating across the region, but until now the deeper significance of these hometown events has not been explored. In *Ghost Dancing on the Cracker Circuit* Rodger Brown takes the reader on a road trip across the South. He visits many festivals and unweaves their webs to find the meaning that underlies them. Contrary to popular interpretation of them as times of celebration and fund-raising, Brown discerns them to be times of mourning. Behind the scrim of jolly slideshows he find communities responding to economic restructuring and cultural change.

As he travels across the South, he absorbs vivid impressions of boosterism and cornball symbolism. Along this comical trail that he terms the "cracker circuit" he perceives how these seasonal events are staged by white sponsors attempting to resurrect a splendid past that actually never existed. He likens them to legendary Indians "ghost dancing" in ceremonial performances staged to conjure up a lost paradise. In chapters with such titles as "Stuffing Sin in a Lard Bucker" and "Aunt Bee's Death Certificate" Brown not only sketches intriguing portraits of people and places but also makes fascinating revelations?the political meaning of *Green Acres* and *Gilligan's Island* , the real story behind the Hatfield and McCoy Feud, and the surprising role of *The Andy Griffith Show* in contemporary southern mythography. Brown's adventurous, good-natured inspection of this pervasive cultural curiosity discloses the state of the South at the turn of the millennium.

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