

James R. Veteto, Edward M. Maclin, eds.. *The Slaw and the Slow Cooked: Culture and Barbecue in the Mid-South*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012. 232 pp. \$59.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-283-37191-9.

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Published on H-Southern-Lit (September, 2014)

Commissioned by Anthony Dyer Hoefer (George Mason University)

Barbecue may be an American “sacrament,” as Gary Paul Nabhan asserts in the foreword, and hagiographic work on its cults and customs abounds. These include *Savage Barbecue: Race, Culture, and the Invention of America's First Food* by Andrew Warnes (2008); *Republic of Barbecue: Stories beyond the Brisket* by Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt (2009); and *Barbecue: The History of an American Institution* by Robert F. Moss (2010). Nabhan adeptly describes barbecue as a “choreographed dance” that is performed by distinctive cultural groups (p. ix). Historical studies with a regional emphasis range from Doug Worgul's *The Grand Barbecue: A Celebration of the History, Places, Personalities and Techniques of Kansas City Barbecue* (2001) to Robb Walsh's *Legends of Texas Barbecue Cookbook: Recipes and Recollections from the Pit Bosses* (2002), to John Shelton Reed, Dale Volberg Reed, and William McKinney's *Holy Smoke: The Big Book of North Carolina Barbecue* (2008). While *The Slaw and the Slow Cooked* focuses on America's “Mid-South,” the book illuminates how barbecue is a totem food for all Americans. It places western Tennessee/Memphis as the home base of the mid-South barbecue tradition but meanders into middle Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas, and northern Louisiana. The book's purpose is to engage in an ongoing dialogue with a multidisciplinary audience, and it

certainly succeeds in meeting this objective.

The editors, James R. Veteto and Edward M. Maclin, in their introduction, acknowledge that “slaw” and “slow cooked” may be the only two components of a barbecue meal that are ubiquitous in the American South; the rest are too diverse to enumerate. Veteto and Maclin reject the elitist notion, held by some food scholars, that southern barbecue is an unhealthy, commercialized phenomenon. Rather, they write, it is a culturally constructed tradition and cuisine that has contributed to southern identities. For southerners of all ethnic and racial backgrounds, everything begins with “the smoking of the hog” (p. 7). Beyond that, most southerners believe that however they eat barbecue is “the only way God intended it to be done” (p. 8).

The book has two sections of essays. Selections in part 1, “Traditional and Contemporary Landscapes of Mid-South Barbecue,” include a solid overview of barbecue's history in the region; a short, anecdotal portrait of the Jones Bar-B-Q Diner in Marianna, Arkansas; an ethnographic inquiry into barbecue folkways in southern Arkansas and northern Louisiana; and a study of the barbecue fundraiser at St. Patrick's Irish Picnic in McEwen, Tennessee. Part 2 is entitled “Old/New

Barbecue Moving Forward.” Jonathan Deutsch’s behind-the-scenes glimpse at how masculinity functioned in a competition barbecue team demonstrates how his fieldwork could uncover broader topics of gender and performance. Angela and Paul Knipple make the case for barbecue as one of the “greatest cultural treasures in the Mid-South” and situate it within the global slow food movement (p. 164). In their conclusion, Maclin and Veteto imagine future directions for mid-South barbecue as it enters the digital age; they argue that “reincorporating heirloom foods and sustainable farming practices back into barbecue traditions” is a serviceable endeavor (p. 196).

Various essays fall within the purview of courses on food studies, American studies, southern studies, anthropology, sociology, and cultural history; they could easily be assigned individually to undergraduate or graduate students. In the aggregate, the essays elaborate on regional rituals and recipes that comprise the miscellany and commonalities of barbecue. They offer semiological analysis of barbecue’s dialects and metalanguage. Though only loosely related by the arbitrary boundary of “Mid-South,” all the juxtaposed vignettes reveal how the meanings of barbecue are simultaneously real and mythical. *The Slaw and the Slow Cooked* complements other regional studies and enhances the general body of work on barbecue as a national ceremonial cuisine.

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Citation: Robin O’Sullivan. Review of Veteto, James R.; Maclin, Edward M., eds. *The Slaw and the Slow Cooked: Culture and Barbecue in the Mid-South*. H-Southern-Lit, H-Net Reviews. September, 2014.

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