

**Tori Bush, Richard Goodman, eds.** *The Gulf South: An Anthology of Environmental Writing*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2021. 408 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8130-6679-0.



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It is an arduous task to compile an anthology that attempts to capture the essence of the Gulf South and its environs in the modern era, but editors Tori Bush and Richard Goodman have done the near-impossible task in their new collection, *The Gulf South: An Anthology of Environmental Writing*. As a region, the Gulf South has fascinated people of all backgrounds for centuries due to its rich natural environment and human inhabitants. It is the unique blend of natural and anthropogenically influenced environs formed by repeat disastrous circumstances and ruthless perseverance that are as hard to synopsise as the people who choose to call the region home. In many ways, they blur together—the people and the place—like the fanning out of the deltaic sediment that serves as the lifeblood of its coastline.

For this reason, Bush and Goodman began their quest to assemble readings that define this region by consulting with scholars whose work is fundamentally inspired by it. In consultation with sixty Gulf South environmental studies scholars, Bush and Goodman constructed a list of over three

hundred texts to whittle down to their collection of items to consider. In the end, readers are left with forty excerpted pieces of work that range in style, genre, year of construction, and area of environmental focus. Readers will find the usual works included that they might expect from this region steeped in familiar history, including those from the depths of literary greats like Lafcadio Hearn, Zora Neale Hurston, and William Faulkner, along with recently recognized literary stars like Jesmyn Ward, Natasha Trethewey, and Moira Crone. They will also find excerpts from great naturalists such as John Muir, activists like Marjory Stoneman Douglas, and scholars like John McPhee, Robert Bullard, and John Barry. However, the real benefit of this collection is the introduction of new writers to know, along with different mediums of writing outlets such as Josh Neufeld's nonfiction cartoons on Hurricane Katrina, Joy Harjo's poem on the context of indigenous people's experiences on the Trail of Tears along the Mississippi River, and Catherine Cole's journalism for the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* at the end of the nineteenth

century on the Last Island storm of 1856 and its haunting remnants years later.

Bush and Goodman recommend that readers approach their collection in multiple ways, either by randomly selecting works based on topical interest or by approaching it as they have laid it out: chronologically. While both are valuable in their own right—the former drawing you to readings you may or may not recognize and the latter encouraging you to see the volume through the editors' eyes—the latter provides a rich study in Gulf South environmental history.

The chronological approach to the collection opens in 1888 with Cole's story about the remnants of Last Island and stretches to the twenty-first century with an excerpt from Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Jack E. Davis's book, *The Gulf* (2017). While the editors skip quickly to the latter twentieth century in the included works' date of publication (with only nine of the forty excerpted texts published before the 1970s), the content in the essays soundly covers three separate centuries (the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first). As explained by Bush and Goodman, this framing allows readers to examine the Gulf South through the eyes of those who lived it in the Anthropocene, when human intervention has irreversibly changed the landscape, ecology, and people of the region. In this way, the writing on the Gulf South becomes a living archive for the recognition, reaction, and activism of environmentally focused writers as they watch their world change. This framing thus brings deeper meaning to tracking how individual writers saw a change over time in their observed worlds, but also how a community of generations of environmentally conscious writers observed longitudinal changes in climate, landscape alteration, coastal land loss, environmental degradation, deforestation, and alterations to populations and communities. This method of reading also highlights how even if today's terminology for an environmental change did not exist in

a prior period, observations about early iterations of these changes were recorded.

In all, the anthology is incredibly useful not only as a collection of works on an already popular theme that has value in their collation outright but also as a case study in environmental understanding and awareness of regional history. The included appendices only accentuate the already robust nature of scholarship included in the volume's main text. The Appendix of Collected Texts in Thematic Order and a list of suggested readings bolster additional connections between the texts. For these reasons, the anthology could easily be used in various settings, ranging from casual browsing to classroom incorporation. For example, I could easily see its incorporation in classrooms in literature and writing departments and historical and environmental studies methods classes. Most of all, this anthology indeed serves as inspiration for future works of the like and hopefully will catapult the next generation of environmental scholars to continue drawing from the region's rich past to shape our impressions of its present.

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