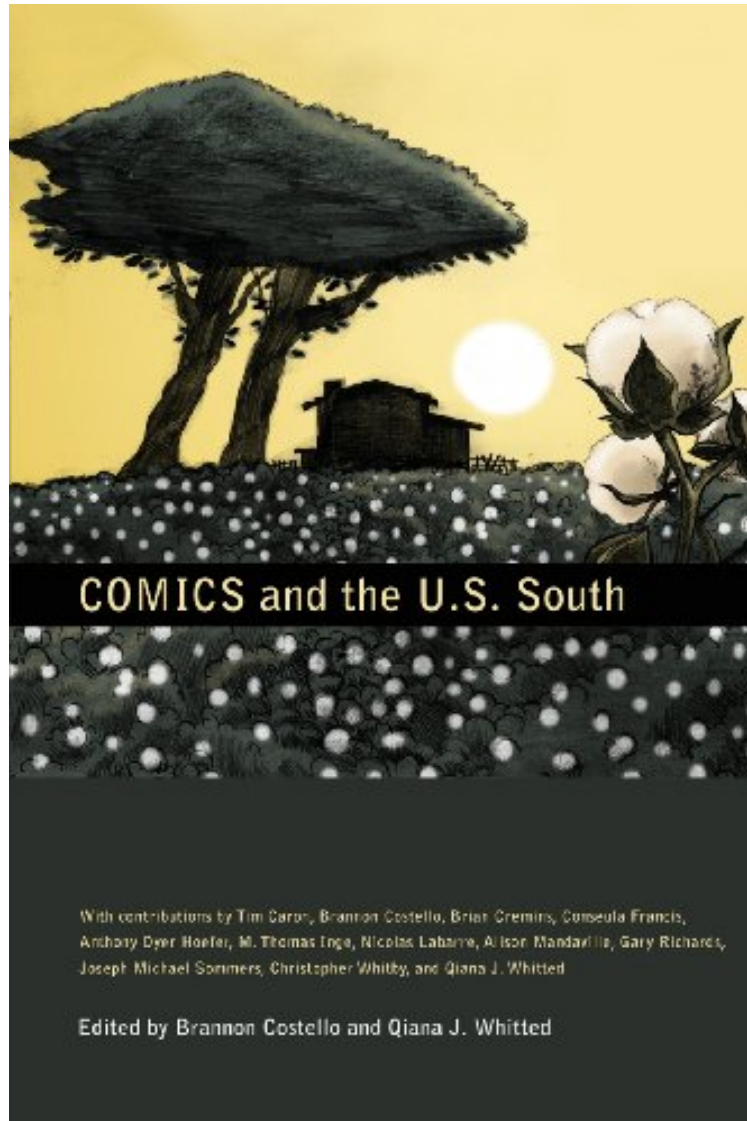


Comics and the U.S. South

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From University Press of Mississippi : Comics and the U.S. South before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Comics and the U.S. South:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy CamilaBought it for a class. Came as pictured.4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Review of Comics and the U.S. SouthBy Jeremy A DeFattaThe University Press of Mississippi is no stranger to comic book scholarship; it is actually one of their primary foci [...]. With Comics and the U.S. South (2012), the press has assembled articles of various critical viewpoints that examine Southern

identity, race and regional relationships in the South, national imaginings of the South and its people, and that call for re-examinations of popular conceptions of the South, such as in the post-Katrina New Orleans of Josh Neufeld's *A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge*. The book collects scholarly work on a variety of graphic forms including web comics, newspaper comic strips, popular comic books, and graphic novels. Of special interest, however, is the frank seriousness with which the authors of the collection's various articles deal with popular comic books, from Captain America in Brannon Costello's "Southern Super-Patriots and United States Nationalism," to Swamp Thing in Qiana J. Whitted's "Of Slaves and Other Swamp Things," to Preacher's Jesse Custer in Nicolas Labarre's "Meat Fiction and Burning Western Light." All speak from an understanding of comics' maturity and legitimacy in dealing with serious, literary topics--racism and personal vs. regional identity, to name but two. It is appropriate, given popular culture's love affair with the superhero--seen in the recent commercial successes of Marvel's *The Avengers* film and DC's *Dark Knight Rises*, that many of the collection's most prominent articles deal with superhero comics in some way. Though the genre is classically derided for its reliance on non-realistic elements in its storytelling, Whitted, in her article on Alan Moore and Steve Veitch's *Swamp Thing*, quotes A. Timothy Spaulding, stating that novels such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* "reject realism" in order to strengthen the emotional and intellectual "impact" of a specific cause or piece of subject matter (198). Indeed, this does not only extend to the supernatural or superpowers, but to the uses of mythic and iconic images and ideas in popular comics, such as in Labarre's examination of John Wayne's role in *Preacher* (245-248), or Whitted's viewpoints of the Louisiana bayou as a dark place hiding the innumerable wrongs visited upon black inhabitants over the last few centuries (200-203, 208-209). This use of the mythic even permeates the more realistic works examined in the book, such as in Neufeld's *New Orleans*--perhaps one of the most mythically-charged cities in the world. Perhaps the most unprecedented article in the collection, Nicolas Labarre's examination of Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon's *Preacher* is apparently unique in its scope. Where many articles in the collection--including those by editors Costello and Whitted--seek to focus on the negative aspects of the South commonly known throughout the United States, Labarre separates his work from this arguably easier critical path in choosing to examine a character--Jesse Custer, the titular preacher--who self-identifies as a Southerner but resists nearly every negative stereotype that identity traditionally carries. Labarre succeeds in drawing attention to *Preacher* writer Garth Ennis's (an Irishman) attempts to reinforce this point, citing such lines as Custer's rebuff of his girlfriend Tulip's ignorant conception of all white Southerners as characters from *Deliverance*: "That's just your damn yankee stereotype of the South. You don't start rapin' canoeists 'cause you had grits for breakfast" (260). Indeed, Labarre goes further in his examination of Custer, committing a great deal of page space to analyzing the preacher's resistance to, and bloody battles with, his mother's aristocratic East Texas family, the L'Angelles. In his rejection of the L'Angelle creed and his destruction of the ancient family plantation house (250-255), Custer fully separates himself from the dark past hanging over the heads of many white Southerners. Some strategies that parallel Labarre's are also used by Joseph Michael Sommers in his article "Crooked Appalachia," which examines a storyline about Melungeon witches in Mike Mignola's *Hellboy* series. Sommers remarks upon the Melungeon identity as a piece of what scholar George Tindall calls the "Vanishing South" (Sommers 219). In this theory, the South as it is popularly stereotyped is little more than an invention of various sensationalist media. Indeed, as Tindall further points out, the South has, at least since the middle of the last century, become more and more culturally akin to the rest of the United States, effectively making many regions of the country nearly indistinguishable (219). The Melungeons, therefore, become especially interesting nationally in light of this societal evolution; being a mixed-race ethnicity and culture they are effectively "raceless". Sommers further cites Melungeon historian Wayne Winkler, who claims that Melungeons have faced great difficulties because of "America[s]. . . unhealthy obsession with race" (220), a claim that, by its wording, extends both ways across the Mason-Dixon Line. By incorporating the idea of the Melungeon witch into his story, Mignola allows readers "new ways. . . to interact with History" (Sommers, quoting Alan Moore 237), often constructing remarkably and chillingly human characters who are not bound by realism--an underlying idea that is threaded throughout the essay collection. While graphic fiction is a relatively young medium not necessarily bound by realism, the contributors to *Comics and the U.S. South* demonstrate that it offers a place for a plethora of story types to be told. These contributors (Whitted, Costello, Labarre, Sommers, and Neufeld stand out from a total of twelve) not only offer a worthy addition to the growing body of comics criticism, but also offer fresh perspectives and viewpoints on the constantly evolving South, its people, and their simultaneously varied and shared identities. It is refreshing to see that, contrary to stereotypes, even what may seem on the surface to be the most outlandish and silly stories can carry great depths of meaning. These scholars effectively capture this unreal reality in their work.

Comics and the U.S. South offers a wide-ranging and long overdue assessment of how life and culture in the United States South is represented in serial comics, graphic novels, newspaper comic strips, and webcomics. Diverting the lens of comics studies from the skyscrapers of Superman's Metropolis or Chris Ware's Chicago to the swamps, back roads, small towns, and cities of the U.S. South, this collection critically examines the pulp genres associated with mainstream comic books alongside independent and alternative comics. Some essays seek to discover what Captain America can reveal about southern regionalism and how slave narratives can help us reread *Swamp Thing*; others

examine how creators such as Walt Kelly (Pogo), Howard Cruse (Stuck Rubber Baby), Kyle Baker (Nat Turner), and Josh Neufeld (A.D.: New Orleans after the Deluge) draw upon the unique formal properties of the comics to question and revise familiar narratives of race, class, and sexuality; and another considers how southern writer Randall Kenan adapted elements of comics form to prose fiction. With essays from an interdisciplinary group of scholars, *Comics and the U.S. South* contributes to and also productively reorients the most significant and compelling conversations in both comics scholarship and in southern studies.

From the Inside Flap
A wide-ranging survey of how comics have portrayed southern ways of life
About the Author
Brannon Costello, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, is associate professor of English at Louisiana State University and is the editor of *Howard Chaykin: Conversations* (University Press of Mississippi).