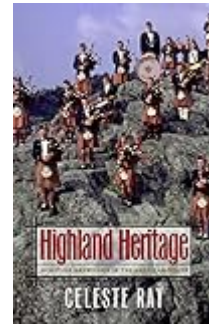


H-Net Reviews

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Celeste Ray. *Highland Heritage: Scottish Americans in the American South.* Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001. xix + 256 pp. \$16.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-4913-2.



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Living and Remembering a Constructed Past: Southerners and Highland Games

My parents used to live next door to a family, who, despite a very German surname, were aggressively and professionally Scottish, to the extent that at any given time, one of their five children was taking bagpipe lessons, and they could be counted on to turn out for any parade or civic event in full Highland regalia. Celeste Ray, an anthropologist at the University of the South, has produced an explanation and an examination of this phenomena, particularly as it is experienced in the southern United States. Based largely on her interviews and observations at a number of regional Highland Games, Ray has produced a fascinating account of a comparatively modern (post WWII) movement amongst Scottish Americans to construct a heritage. Interestingly, this is one in which recent changes in gender roles and family structure are replaced by a highly militarized and male-dominated culture.

This new "Highland Heritage" is an eclectic blend of Highland and Lowland Scottish traditions, melding the lowland "Burns' Supper" with Highland attire and, strangely, the lowland religion (Presbyterianism). In many ways, this syncretic approach smoothes over the potential historical and cultural fault lines among Scottish Americans, including differences in dates of emigra-

tion, the awkwardness of Scottish loyalism in the American Revolution, and the distinctive feuds between opposition groups in Scotland. Because this movement is so centered on mid-eighteenth century Jacobite traditions, it helps in forgetting that Scots killed Scots at Culloden in support of the British government. Ray makes the point that the British government, in recruiting and then deliberately "costuming" its Scottish soldiers as Highlanders, originated the process being used by modern Scottish-Americans now. At the same time, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Sir Walter Scott and the Romantic movement popularized Scotland and Queen Victoria's Balmoral legitimized it.

Because this is a selective process, what is left out of the new traditions is as meaningful as what is included. Women other than Flora McDonald (popular because of her strong association with North Carolina) are not included in the pantheon of Jacobite heroes, even though Lady Nithsdale, "Col." Anne Farquharson and Margaret Panmure played important and dramatically appealing roles in the rebellions. Irish and English Jacobitism is totally ignored, as are the rebellions of 1688, 1715 and 1719, in favor of the 1745. Many of the most enjoyed events, like the "kirkin' of the tartan" are documented to be twentieth century traditions, but have developed historical stories claiming ancient origins, a process that is

closely examined by Ray.

In a valuable comparison, Ray also includes heritage festivals in Scotland, and the relationship between the two groups. While Scottish festivals remain divided by class, and are largely an exclusive, not inclusive movement, Americans (many of whom refine their own festivals after visiting Scottish ones) pattern them as inclusive, classless, family-reunion affairs, while at the same time, welcoming Scottish clan chiefs and descendants of historical figures as celebrities. She also devotes some time in studying the recruitment of American tourists by Scotland, and their behavior while there, which reminded me distinctly of the conversation I had in Edinburgh with the Pakistani proprietor of a tourist shop, who declared that Braveheart T-shirts were a gift from god.

Perhaps most interesting for this list, Ray finds that southern Americans are particularly attuned to the "Highland Heritage," with its parallel themes of a lost cause, chivalry, heroes, and a recreation of a "Technicolor" past in which things were "the way they ought to be." In embracing a Scottish antebellum history, many Americans can enjoy it, without the baggage of slavery, Jim Crow or Reconstruction, except as a connection to the depredations suffered by Scottish ancestors, oppression after the defeat at Culloden, the banning of the pipes and tartan, and exile to America. Stunningly, Ray reported that many participants had not thought there was any possible racial connection to be drawn from the use of the traditional "fiery cross" lit at Highland games.

Ray is very frank about the irony inherent in this movement, from the situation in which American tourist dollars pay for the upkeep of castles, whose eighteenth century owners' demands probably pushed Scots into leaving, while much that is regarded as "traditional" was invented by English landowners in the Victorian Scot-

ticizing period of the nineteenth century. Much of this material asks for further development in more detail, especially a few tantalizing ideas at the end of the book—how do movies like *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy* change the way in which this movement operates? How will Scottish devolution effect the way in which Scotland relates to American tourists? What will the younger generation, interested in the competitive aspects of Highland games, make of it as they assume more control? How much influence will the "Celtic fringe" of Viking and Gael re-enactors have in the future, especially in confronting the conservative religious aspects of the movement?

There is only one minor problem with this book, and it is with the author's background research in Jacobitism. The bibliography would benefit tremendously from historical works on Jacobites, particularly studies like Paul Monod's on the material culture of Jacobitism, which would form a useful counterpoint to modern practices. This weakness shows in minor mistakes, like stating that it was the 1707 Act of Union which barred Catholics from the throne (it was the 1701 Act of Succession) or that George IV's grandfather was George II (it was Frederick, Prince of Wales, son of George II), and that Braemar celebrates the Battle of Sheriffmuir, when it instead was the signal to begin the rising in 1715, months before the battle.

Ray's book is a helpful insight into the behavior of modern Americans, as they search for a heritage and a community, particularly one in tune with a parallel heritage of being southern. Being able to track and examine new historical mythology as it occurs, as in the evolving heritage of the haggis toss, informs the entire process of memory and community traditions. As a textbook, this would be a thought-provoking and enjoyable addition to local history, oral history, and ethnic history syllabi, as well as those in anthropology and sociology.

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