

Haints on Black Mountain [book review]

By: Kathelene McCarty Smith

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Haints on Black Mountain

Kathelene McCarty Smith

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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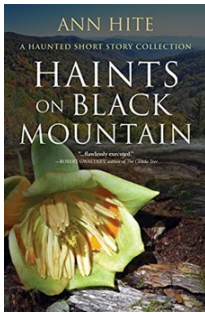
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Haints on Black Mountain

Ann Hite
 Macon: Mercer
 University Press, 2022
 ISBN: 9780881468526
 243 p. (Pbk) \$20.00

If you are from the South, you have certainly heard of “haint blue” — a color that adorns porches and sometimes entire houses, to keep spirits at bay. In this book of intertwining stories by Ann Hite, haints appear in the form of apparitions that encourage, support, comfort, and even warn generations of family members in the rural Black Mountain region of western North Carolina. Ancestral spirits weave a continuous thread throughout the book, uniting themes of nature, home, and family. While specters inhabit every chapter, these are not merely ghost stories, but shared narratives of life on Black Mountain spanning a period of 160 years.

The book is divided into three parts — *Wind*, *A Little Removed*, and *Women to Be Reckoned With*—each signaling a separate collection of stories featuring generational ghostly hauntings set against the backdrop of the Appalachia. In the first chapter, “Wrinkle in the Air,” the reader is introduced to Polly Murphy, a young Cherokee woman who will begin the dynastic chronicle of these stories. Polly connects strongly with nature and the souls that wander the mountain. She understands that the wind will soon blow in change for her tribe and her environment. Change came in the form of Samuel Richard Riley, who is gathering the history of the Cherokees and alerts the tribe of the government’s plan to remove them from their land. A native of Ireland, Riley also relates strongly to nature and the mountains, creating a deep bond with Polly. She understands that by breaking tradition and marrying Riley, she is not only committing to a new life, but also to the coming change for her people.

Nature continues as a theme in subsequent chapters, focusing on the severe storms that are prevalent on the mountain. Just as Polly dreaded losing her tribe’s homeland, in successive narratives her descendants fear losing their homes to storms and floods. In “The Root Cellar,” her grandson has lost the ability, or the desire, to lis-

ten to nature. Despite this, Polly’s spirit joins those of the mountain, warning him of the coming storm. He learns too late that he should have listened. In the final chapter of *Wind*, “Ghost Dog,” it is the spirit of a loyal pet that provides warning and rescue, finally being able to save a child in the present, just as he was not able to save his young charge in the past.

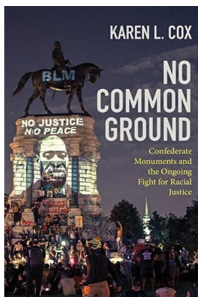
While storms connect the first chapters, the second section, *A Little Removed*, includes stories with characters that are either physically or mentally removed from their Black Mountain home. It begins with an account of Emmaline and her mother traveling from North Carolina to Georgia to stay with Emmaline’s grandmother. Emmaline’s mother finds employment at the Georgia Central State Hospital, which is known to be haunted. Emmaline soon finds that her new home of Milledgeville is also haunted by those who have unfinished business on this earth. Subsequent chapters are interwoven with spirits of family members and neighbors offering warnings and even words of wisdom. Such themes are illustrated in “Dancers on the Horizons,” where ethereal comforters help Emmaline come of age, and deal with her seemingly uncaring mother.

Part Three, titled *Women to Be Reckoned With*, involves stories that concern women who gain strength through adversity and challenges. Some of these struggles are of their own making while some come about as a result of their environment. “The Dance Lesson” tells the story of a mother and daughter who moved to Black Mountain from Atlanta in 1935. Fifteen-year-old Jean Logan meets two local boys, Carlton and James, who give her confidence and friendship. Yet it is Carlton’s mother who truly influences Jean and helps her evolve into the woman who she was meant to be. Strong women continue to dominate the section as the author intertwines past family connections with current ones. The spider, a known teacher and protector of wisdom in Cherokee traditions, is the catalyst in “A Spider’s Bite.” Miss Shirley, a New Orleans conjurer, teaches Jeannie Ray magic for the good of others, but instead, the young girl spins her web to further her own ambitions. The last chapters involve women who rely on their personal strength to get through hardship, such as the death of a loved one, or one who is not so loved.

Haints on Black Mountain is a good choice for those who are interested in Appalachian history, and culture, as well as those who like a good ghost story. Ann Hite captures the feel and lore of the North Carolina Mountains. Although the first section is the strongest, Hite's prose engages and entertains throughout the book as she leads the reader through the compelling stories of the people and spirits of the region.

Kathelene McCarty Smith, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

No Common Ground: Confederate Monuments and the Ongoing Fight for Racial Justice



Karen L. Cox
Chapel Hill: University of
North Carolina Press, 2021
ISBN:9781469662671
224 p. \$24.00 (Hbk)

Since the end of the Civil War, thousands of monuments have been built to memorialize the “Lost Cause,” which remembers Confederate soldiers “as defenders not of slavery but of the region and their race” (p. 18). In her new book, Karen L. Cox explores the legacy of these monuments and the fight to find common ground over the statues, the spaces they fill, and what they represent.

Initially built in commemoration of lost Confederate soldiers, the statues’ subjects and dedications became imbued with Lost Cause rhetoric and ideation. The memorial statues enabled many white southerners to express and share their version of Dixie, while many of their Black compatriots came to view the monuments as symbols of oppression as well as the glorification of men who fought to preserve the institution of slavery.

Cox begins the narrative with an introduction of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), founded in Nashville in the late 19th century with the goal of preserving and honoring Confederate culture. The education of children with a pro-southern message and the building of monuments helped teach and reinforce that message. Construction of these memorials has waxed and waned over the years, but there have been new

monuments erected in every decade since the Civil War. The most recent surge has occurred in the 21st century, with 35 new pro-Confederate monuments having been built during this time. While this new construction is often attributed to the same desire to protect southern heritage as that espoused by the UDC, Cox attempts to correct this narrative by explaining the full history of white and Black interpretations of these statues. The author delves into the rationale of those who think the monuments should remain in place, as well as the justifications by those who believe they should be removed.

Criticism of these statues is as old as the monuments themselves. On Confederate Memorial Day in 1887, a monument honoring John Calhoun, a prominent politician and defender of states’ right to preserve slavery, was unveiled in Charleston, South Carolina. The statue was derided by Black Charlestonians who considered the statue to be a personal affront and who therefore defaced the statue. Cox provides many examples of the statues that have been erected since and explains the progression of attitudes about them during Reconstruction, through World Wars I and II, in the midst of the Civil Rights era, and into the 21st century.

The final chapter of the book focuses on the recent fights over the removal of these monuments. Cox begins with the removal of the confederate flag (not a statue per se, but a monument, nevertheless, with many of the same attributes as the stone testaments) outside the South Carolina state capitol in Columbia, a battle that intensified after the 2015 murder of nine Black members of Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston. The author also scrutinizes the 2017 Charlottesville rally in which participants, under the guise of preventing the removal of a Robert E. Lee statue, marched, chanted, and violently demonstrated, ultimately leading to the murder of a counter protester. Several other recent cases across the southern United States also provide examples of the contentious arguments over these markers.

No Common Ground not only provides a thorough history of Confederate monuments, but also a timely one. Current events including police violence and the Black Lives Matter movement have highlighted issues surrounding race in the United States, and Cox has built a strong founda-