families during the late nineteenth-century South were not unlike white families, and black violence was lower than white—no prototypes of twentieth-century pathologies there.

Though Vandal is insistent in his portrayal of blacks as vigorously resisting the violence and intimidation that they received from whites, he elsewhere contradicts himself by saying that they were less active and less violent than a neutral observer would expect under such circumstances. Nor is this the only contradiction.

The chapter on gender is to be applauded as one of the most interesting in the book. Yet, it raises some troubling questions. Vandal credits the southern code of honor, and the Victorian code of chastity and purity, with shaping the behavior of women, whose activities he retrieves from newspapers and a few other sources. Left unexamined is the possibility that this evidence was itself shaped by the culture. Contemporary observers of the behavior may simply have made it conform to existing values and expectations.

Even more problematic is the notion that violence during such a turbulent period can tell us much about southern violence in general—apart from the well-known tradition of white vigilante action that is energized when racial boundaries are threatened—particularly when collective violence and individual violence are merged for most analytical purposes. For instance, Vandal makes the interesting observation that black killers usually came from the lower ranks of society, whereas white killers came from all ranks and stations. Since he presumably includes the participants in collective violence, the point does no more than reaffirm our knowledge that vigilante justice in the South was a community affair. It says nothing about the run-of-the-mill murders in the twentieth century that were largely transactions among family and friends.

_**Rethinking Southern Violence**_ is full of interesting information and observations. Vandal understands the context and is able to generalize without offending the god of anachronism. He also joins his story to the narrative of Populism and disfranchisement that follows. For anyone interested in southern violence, Reconstruction, or race relations, this book is a significant contribution.

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_Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals._ By Elizabeth H. Pleck (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2000) 328 pp. $55.00 cloth $22.95 paper

In this absorbing and richly suggestive book, Pleck explores the history of rituals pertaining to holidays, such as Mother’s Day and Kwanzaa, and to special events with neither fixed histories nor fixed dates, such as family reunions or wedding anniversaries. She divides the history of ritual enactments into three phases. The first, which started in the colonial pe-
period, involved “either a carnivalesque, outdoor form of celebration or a lack of attention to ritual” (1). The second, which began in the early nineteenth century, relied on sentimentality and commercialism and “centered around consumerism and a display of status and wealth to celebrate home and family” (1). The third, which flowered in the late 1960s and 1970s, involved a critique of sentimentalism. These “postsentimental” rituals, as Pleck calls them, celebrated “family diversity as well as racial and ethnic pluralism” and treated rituals as contested terrain on which people fought cultural and social battles (2). What blunted the edge of the postsentimental ritual was its commitment to individualism, consumerism, and a therapeutic orientation.

For Pleck, the heritage of these three categories—sequential, layered, and far from neat—creates a dense cultural fabric. In all periods, Pleck shows how change emerged in response to shifts in cultural and social experience, especially shifts in family, nationalism, and popular culture. She is particularly attentive to how gender and ethnicity shaped and reshaped celebrations.

Drawing on such anthropologists and cultural critics as Abrahams, Douglas, Foucault, and Turner, Pleck sees rituals as a rich and complicated series of processes through which social groups invent and reinvent traditions. In her telling, rituals are a “form of symbolic communication, a nest of symbols” (11). Pleck usually keeps her assumptions and methodological approach implicit, with the result that stories and historical change, rather than explicitly theoretical ritual analysis, remain central to her discussion.

Pleck structures her book around a series of events—Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Passover, Chinese New Year, children’s birthday parties, rites of passage for children (child naming, first communion, quinceañera), funerals, and weddings. Yet, this list only begins to reveal how skillfully Pleck’s analysis weaves together social and cultural struggles. Indeed, what gives Pleck’s book considerable distinctiveness in the growing body of literature about the history of holidays and celebrations is her focus on dramas of social tension. Much of her discussion involves conflicts between the white Protestants who tried to define national norms and the racial and ethnic groups who, asserting the importance of their own stories, have imitated, melded, adapted, and challenged the rituals that a dominant culture tried to impose. Pleck also discusses how families and social groups fight over how meaning is to be infused into cultural reenactments. The book ends up as an extended exploration of the connections between family life, consumer culture, and celebration.

It is a reminder about the complications of the past that we often struggle to reinvent, even as we think that we are recovering it.

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Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics. By Melissa Nobles (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000) 248 pp. $49.50 cloth $16.95 paper

It has become a well-worn notion of modern scholarship to discuss the social construction of race. From sophisticated cultural analysis to sports commentary about why we consider Tiger Woods an African-American even though his mother is Asian, Americans are becoming increasingly adept at identifying how racial categories are created in the eye of the beholder. Nobles has set about the task of demonstrating just how long this social construction has been underway and, more important, how it has been institutionalized into that seemingly objective government enumeration, the census.

Nobles compares the racial categories in the censuses of two modern multiracial societies, the United States and Brazil. In each country she finds categories that shift radically over the years and often betray racist underpinnings. Her systematic study is as sharp an indictment of prejudicial attitudes as any of the more dramatic histories of southern segregation, the Ku Klux Klan, or slavery itself.

Merely reading through the categories of racial choice in the U.S. censuses offers a shorthand history of race thinking in America. In 1790, the categories were Free White Males, Free White Females, All Other Free Persons, and Slaves. After the Civil War, the categories of choice were White, Black, Mulatto, Chinese, and Indian. The mulatto designation and its recognition of multiracialism has a contemporary ring, as Nobles states in her last chapter, but the motivation behind the category is hardly modern. She details the ideological background of this development. Census Superintendent Joseph Kennedy argued in 1864, for example, that a “corruption of morals progresses with greater admixture of races,” thus explaining “the slow progress of the free colored population.” Blacks would become extinct, if they “[became] diffused among the dominant race” (46). Thus, when other census data would be correlated with those in the mulatto category, this decline could be “scientifically” demonstrated, and arguments for race segregation would prevail. These notions reached their height (of absurdity) in the 1890 census, when enumerators tried to create distinctions among Mulatto, Quadroon, and Octoroon, the better to understand the implications of race mixing. These investigations proved fruitless, as well as ultimately ludicrous.