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### Ballots and Fence Rails: Reconstruction on the Lower Cape Fear

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*Ballots and Fence Rails: Reconstruction on the Lower Cape Fear*

William McKee Evans, 1995. *Ballots and Fence Rails: Reconstruction on the Lower Cape Fear*. Foreword by Charles Joyner. Athens and London: University of Georgia Press. xx + 314 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$19.95 (paper).

This reprint makes Evans' classic local history of Reconstruction in North Carolina, first published in 1965, available to a new generation of researchers and reminds us of the issues revisionist scholars faced in the 1960s. The new edition includes a brief Foreword by Charles Joyner who reflects on the changes in historical scholarship which have generally come to pass over the past few decades. Joyner also notes the importance of Evans having examined wide-ranging issues through the study of a "small place."

Evans illuminates the historiographic context of his study in his final chapter. He challenges many of the then prevailing notions about Reconstruction, such as it was marked by "Negro domination" and Northern "carpetbaggers" consistently brought malicious misgovernment to the region. He does not, however, argue that Reconstruction was without its problems. It left in place a political system that placed steadfast limitations on the possibilities for change. The persistence of "serious cultural and economic inequalities" and the lack of a "politically reliable mechanism of force," in particular, sustained the return of reactionary regimes in the region (pp. 257-58).

While certain aspects of Evan's use of language and racial attitudes have not bore the test of time well, his detailed knowledge of this particular place's history, and his lively narrative reflecting the complexity of human nature and 19th-century race relations make this study a classic.