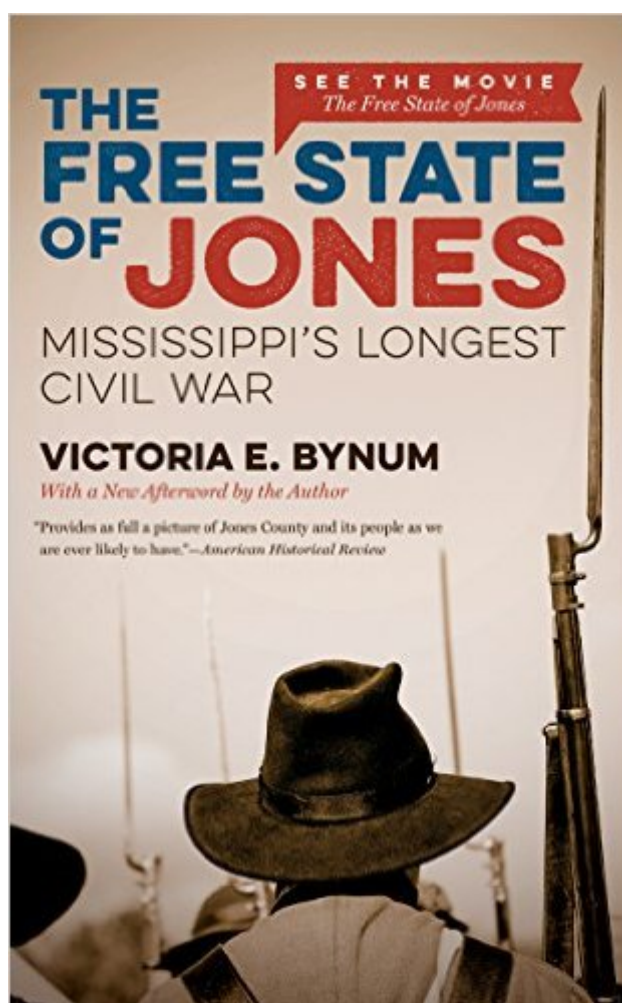


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The Free State Of Jones, Movie Edition: Mississippi's Longest Civil War (The Fred W. Morrison Series In Southern Studies)



Synopsis

Between late 1863 and mid-1864, an armed band of Confederate deserters battled Confederate cavalry in the Piney Woods region of Jones County, Mississippi. Calling themselves the Knight Company after their captain, Newton Knight, they set up headquarters in the swamps of the Leaf River, where they declared their loyalty to the U.S. government. The story of the Jones County rebellion is well known among Mississippians, and debate over whether the county actually seceded from the state during the war has smoldered for more than a century. Adding further controversy to the legend is the story of Newt Knight's interracial romance with his wartime accomplice, Rachel, a slave. From their relationship there developed a mixed-race community that endured long after the Civil War had ended, and the ambiguous racial identity of their descendants confounded the rules of segregated Mississippi well into the twentieth century. Victoria Bynum traces the origins and legacy of the Jones County uprising from the American Revolution to the modern civil rights movement. In bridging the gap between the legendary and the real Free State of Jones, she shows how the legend--what was told, what was embellished, and what was left out--reveals a great deal about the South's transition from slavery to segregation; the racial, gender, and class politics of the period; and the contingent nature of history and memory. In a new afterword, Bynum updates readers on recent scholarship, current issues of race and Southern heritage, and the coming movie that make this Civil War story essential reading. The Free State of Jones film, starring Matthew McConaughey, Gugu Mbatha-Raw, and Keri Russell, will be released in May 2016.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a native Mississippian I began delving into my genealogy expecting to find the usual host of Confederate ancestors. There were some, to be sure. What I didn't expect to find was one gr-gr grandfather who was a Union veteran from Maine and a gr-gr-gr grandmother who sheltered a band of deserters who took up arms against the Confederacy in Jones County, Mississippi. Victoria Bynum's book concerns the latter event, its antecedents, and its reverberations down through the years. Jones County stood in marked contrast to most of antebellum Mississippi. In 1860 55% of the state's population was held in slavery, whereas in Jones County the figure was 12%. The area was heavily forested and more suitable to raising livestock than plantation agriculture. Thus Jones County citizens were by and large anti-secessionist. Once the war broke out, however, a goodly number of young men joined Confederate units. Others only did so a year later one step ahead of conscription. But many of the late joining soldiers felt no esprit de corp once the Confederacy lost Vicksburg in 1863 and then passed a law exempting owners of 20 or more slaves from military service. Confederate deserters were not unique to Jones County, but in the Piney Woods their numbers and the support they received from kin and sympathisers were enough to draw attention. And in Newt Knight they had a man willing to organize them and fight. After several attempts, Confederate forces waged a successful campaign that diminished but did not eradicate the Knight Band. While she did not grow up in Mississippi, Victoria Bynum has kinship links that made her aware of this odd story of a rebellion within the rebellion. After a decade of research she has written what will likely remain the definitive book on the subject.

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