

Stories from the Heart: Missouri's African American Heritage

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mate in which they operated. With a tenuous share of the private labor force (barely 7 percent), stark obstacles to new or secondary organizing, little check on union-busting strategies, and a near evaporation of federal responsibility for workplace health and safety (at its current staffing and inspection levels, it would take OSHA 133 years to inspect each workplace under its jurisdiction just once), the labor movement faces not an uphill battle but a cliff.

Stories from the Heart: Missouri's African American Heritage, compiled by Gladys Caines Coggsell. Missouri Heritage Readers Series. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009. xvi, 141 pp. Illustrations, index. \$15.95 paper.

Reviewer Kristen Anderson is assistant professor of history at Webster University, St. Louis. Her dissertation (University of Iowa, 2009) is "German Americans, African Americans, and the Construction of Racial Identity in St. Louis, 1850–1870."

A master storyteller with the Missouri Folk Arts Program, Gladys Caines Coggsell presents here the tales she has collected over the past two decades through her fieldwork among the African American population of Missouri. Like any good storyteller, she recognizes the value not only of the stories people tell, but of the words they use to tell them. Those interviewed thus tell their stories in their own words, while she provides background information and transitions to knit the pieces together. These stories span Missouri history geographically and chronologically, including tales from all regions of the state, both rural and urban, and from throughout the twentieth century. The topics of the stories range from tales told to children — such as "Why Dogs Chase Cats" — to accounts of growing up as sharecroppers in the Missouri Bootheel or undergoing school desegregation in St. Louis.

The Missouri Heritage Readers series is designed to provide high-quality historical scholarship that is accessible to nonacademic readers. The book succeeds admirably at this goal and is a very accessible introduction to the history of African Americans in Missouri, particularly on the issues of childhood, education, community, and work. Although the discussion of these issues may not be new to scholars of African American history in Missouri, these stories are new, and scholars and general readers alike will benefit from them. This book will also find a readership among scholars of the African American experience in the Midwest as well as those interested in storytelling and the oral tradition in history.