

The Devil's Lane

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THE

DEVIL'S LANE



**SEX AND RACE IN
THE EARLY SOUTH**

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When Europeans settled in the early South, they quarrelled over many things --- but few imbroglios were so fierce as battles over land. Landowners wrangled bitterly over boundaries with neighbours and contested areas became known as "the devil's lane". Violence and bloodshed were but some of the consequences to befall those who ventured into these disputed territories. The Devil's Lane highlights important new work on sexuality, race, and gender in the South from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. Contributors explore legal history by examining race, crime and punishment, sex across the colour line, and slander. Emerging stars and established scholars such as Peter Wood and Carol Berkin weave together the fascinating story of competing agendas and clashing cultures on the southern frontier. One chapter focuses on a community's resistance to a hermaphrodite, where the town court conducted a series of "examinations" to determine the individual's gender. Other pieces address topics ranging from resistance to sexual exploitation on the part of slave women to spousal murders, from interpreting women's expressions of religious ecstasy to a pastor's sermons about depraved sinners and graphic depictions of carnage, all in the name of "exposing" evil, and from a case of infanticide to the practice of state-mandated castration. Several of the authors pay close attention to the social and personal dynamics of interracial women's networks and relationships across place and time. The Devil's Lane illuminates early forms of sexual oppression, inviting comparative questions about authority and violence, social attitudes and sexual tensions, the impact of slavery as well as the twisted course of race relations among blacks, whites, and Indians. Several scholars look particularly at the Gulf South, myopically neglected in traditional literature, and an outstanding feature of this collection. These eighteen original essays reveal why the intersection of sex and race marks an essential point of departure for understanding Southern social relations, and a turning point for the field of colonial history. The rich, varied, and distinctive experiences showcased in The Devil's Lane provide an extraordinary opportunity for readers interested in women's history, African-American history, southern history, and especially colonial history to explore a wide range of exciting issues.

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