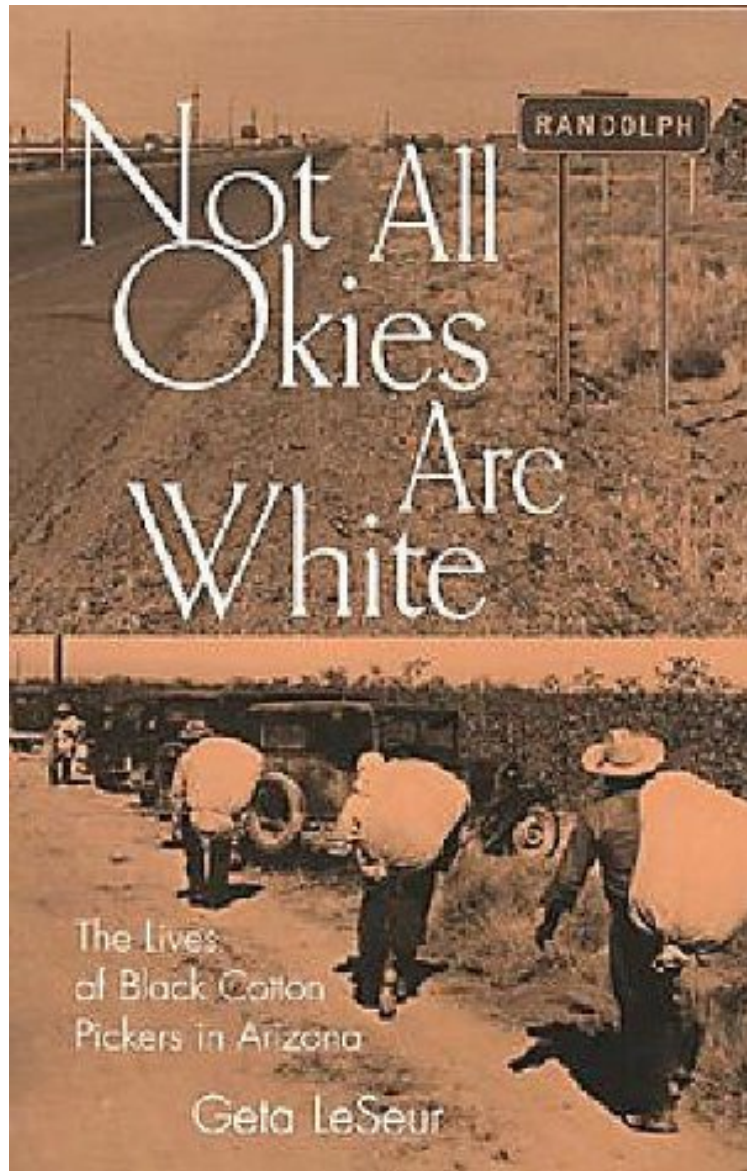


(Free and download) Not All Okies Are White: The Lives of Black Cotton Pickers in Arizona

Not All Okies Are White: The Lives of Black Cotton Pickers in Arizona

Geta LeSeur

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Vividly revealing the challenges faced by a group of migrant workers who eventually formed the multiracial town of Randolph, Arizona, *Not All Okies Are White* is a brilliant, spellbinding celebration of the resilience and adaptability of people too often ignored by history texts. Recognizing the black exodus to the American West as an overlooked but integral chapter in American history, Geta LeSeur fills the void by extending her research beyond the Mississippi River and the Mason-Dixon line, examining close-up the personal lives of third- and fourth-generation descendants of pre-Emancipation blacks. In this first full-length study to explore the migrant life of any nonwhite group within the United States and the first to focus specifically on a primarily black town in the Southwest, LeSeur deftly uncovers the stepping-stone pattern of black movement west of the Mississippi into Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, and consequent migrations to Arizona and California imposed by economic and social conditions. *Not All Okies Are White* recaptures the ways of life for black migrant workers, as well as Hispanics and Native Americans, in the first half of the century through richly detailed interviews of the families of Randolph's founders. Through the words of each narrator, these personal stories recount work experiences and survival strategies, offering new insights into the people's relationship to the land. The narratives reveal a creative tension between place and identity, movement and migration. LeSeur provides a historical, cultural, and literary context for the oral histories by incorporating news articles, information culled from historical society archives, analyses of films and novels, advertisements, and photographs. An innovative blend of history telling and literary analysis, *Not All Okies Are White* describes LeSeur's acquaintance with and growing involvement in the lives of the residents of Randolph and surrounding farm communities. The result is a highly accessible cross-disciplinary study that will appeal to scholars and general readers interested in oral history, African American history, multicultural studies, and women's studies.

From BooklistThe Great Migration of African Americans leaving the South for better lives in the North has been well documented, but little has been written about the black migrant workers, or black Okies, who headed west. LeSeur, professor of English, black studies, and women's studies at the University of Missouri[^]-Columbia, was surprised to discover that Arizona supported a large and profitable cotton industry, then became enamored of the small town of Randolph because it reminded her of the village in Jamaica in which she grew up. Struck by the residents' pride in their work and the strength and determination of the women, and curious about Randolph's rise in the first half of the century and decline after machines replaced handpickers, she set out to preserve the town's invaluable oral history. The result is a vital blend of the animated reminiscences of nearly 20 Randolph residents and LeSeur's own lucid and affecting essays about multigenerational interactions among the town's African American, Native American, Mexican American, and Anglo American families. Donna Seaman "LeSeur's research deserves commendation for its originality, including detailed interviews with dozens of Randolph residents. Her subjects are equally fascinating."The Chronicles of Oklahoma