



Through Others' Eyes: Published Accounts of Antebellum Montgomery, Alabama

Jeffrey C. Benton

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Through Others' Eyes includes descriptions of traveling to and from Montgomery, but it focuses on the travelers' descriptions of Montgomery itself. The twenty-eight published accounts between 1825 and 1861 were written by Americans and Europeans with a variety of backgrounds. A few are as objective as can reasonably be expected considering the short durations of the writers' visits. Some are prone to display their preconceptions and prejudices. Most exaggerate—they had to make their books marketable. The accounts are sometimes insightful or incredulous, often humorous and colorful, always giving the reader a vicarious experience of being there. For most of its forty-year antebellum history, Montgomery was a frontier river town. These accounts of it do not reveal moonlight and magnolias, but a rather coarse culture. The touring authors don't mince words about slavery; after all, their readers expected commentary about the most peculiar of Southern institutions. However, the writers' diverse views of slavery are as complicated and contradictory as was the institution itself. Together, these accounts sketch a fascinating world populated by individuals and with customs that would have inspired Charles Dickens had he overcome his prejudices and ventured further south than Richmond in 1842. The "Epilogue" provides a description of the first capital of the Confederacy.

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