



The Spine of the Virginias

Michael Abraham

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A mere 73 days after a ragtag South Carolina militia attacked Fort Sumter launching the War Between the States, a band of railroad executives and politicians from 27 Virginia counties met in Wheeling, then Virginia's third largest city, and laid the foundation for our nation's 35th state, West Virginia. Born amidst the Sturm und Drang of our nation's most tragic and disruptive event, West Virginia is the first and only state created from another state without the parent state's consent. The lore which emerged was purposefully designed to imbue its citizens with pride and righteous purpose. The border is as craggy and haphazard as the topography upon which it was superimposed, a beautiful, tragic, and widely misunderstood swath of the central Appalachia. Michael Abraham was raised as a member of an ethnic minority by a Northern father and a Southern mother in a small southwest Virginia town. With Blue Bloods to the east, hillbillies to the west, and evangelical Christians everywhere, he forged an egalitarian ethos and a kinship with those who tied their fortunes, sensibilities, and affections to rugged, isolated areas. In *The Spine of the Virginias*, Abraham chips away at the West Virginia formation myth. He follows with a collection of contemporary vignettes of people and places on both sides of the border of Virginia and West Virginia, in revealing looks at the interaction between a landscape and its people. Inspired by the quote, "Culture is something we think other people have," Abraham profiles doctors, lawyers, journalists, miners, and businesspeople; senators, mayors, and gubernatorial candidates; filmmakers, musicians, and artists; beekeepers, maple syrup producers, brick sculptors, and barbarians. This palette is infused with green and brown earthtones, the canvas is a richly corrugated and rugged parchment, and the patina is a pall of resentment, resignation, affection, divided loyalties, and constitutional ambiguities.

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