



Crafting the Overseer's Image (Studies in Rhetoric/Communication)

William E. Wiethoff

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Though Overseers played crucial roles in managing and perpetuating the plantation culture of the American South, they remain shadowy figures on an otherwise widely studied landscape. Wiethoff illumines the rhetoric surrounding a class of workers whom historians often have relegated to the periphery. In this wideranging analysis, Wiethoff canvasses the period from 1650 through 1865 and across a southern expanse that stretches to include the Upper and Deep South as well as jurisdictions west of the Mississippi. Overseers left scant written evidence about their lives and times, but Wiethoff unearths characterizations constructed by friends and enemies, neighbors and strangers. He also mines the legal record to gauge the impact of legislative and case law rhetoric on public memory. The first book-length study of the overseer in four decades, Wiethoff's study bridges historical, legal, and rhetorical scholarship to present a provocative investigation into the multifaceted roles of this oft-forgotten figure in plantation society.



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