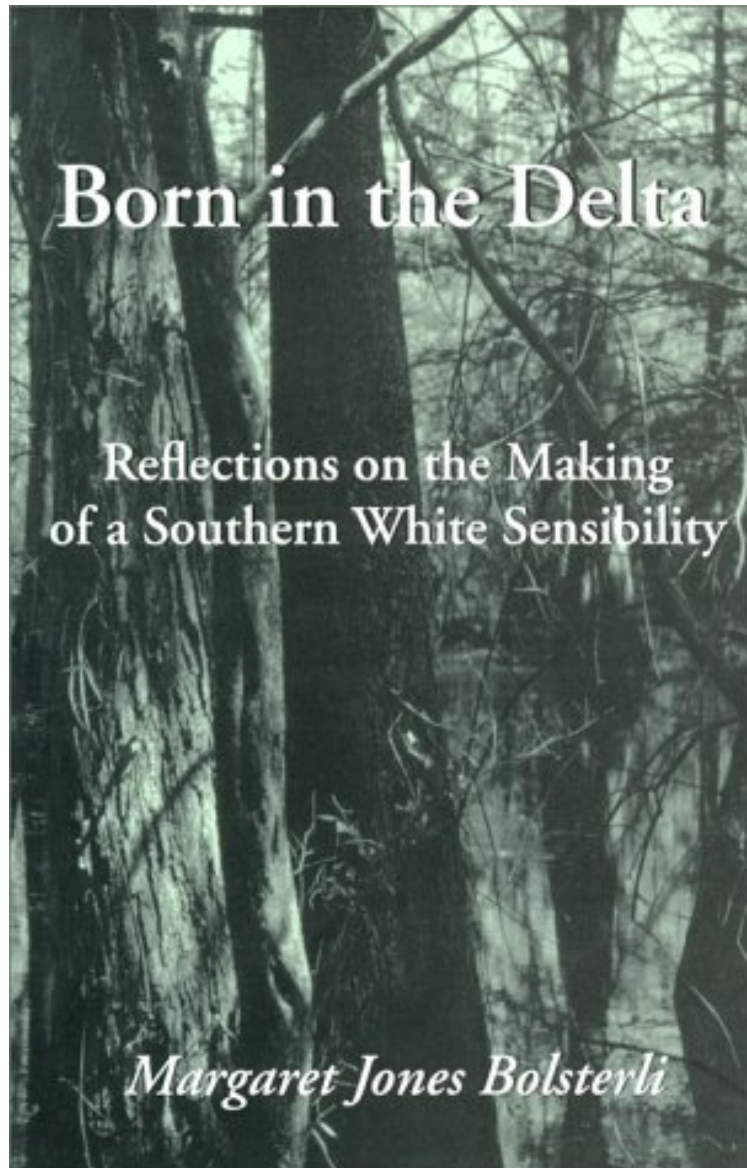


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Born in the Delta: Reflections on the Making of a Southern White Sensibility

BOLSTERLI MARGARET, Margaret Bolsterli
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1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Rural Southern History in a MemoirBy Virginia CazortThis is a

fascinating book that everybody with a southern heritage would enjoy and that people without a southern heritage ought to read so they wouldn't be tempted to misconstrue certain patterns of life in the South. 4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A book that a Southerner will love
By A Southern Reader
This small book should be must reading for those, both Northerners and Southerners, who want to know why we Southerners think like we do. Dr. Bolsterli's book about growing up in the 30's and 40's in the Arkansas Delta is wonderful. In writing about race, food, violence, the Confederacy, family, etc., she hits a lot of targets. At the risk of being trite, you will indeed laugh and cry. I suggest to better experience the book that it be read while eating a bowl of pot likker with some cornbread crumbled up in it. Buttermilk might also be helpful
7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Authentically Moving
By John Bowen
As I child, I passed by the author's childhood home many times when visiting my friends the Rices in nearby Watson, Arkansas. There were always brief comments about the stately Southern home at the end of the long drive and the important, cultured family that had lived there for generations. So, when I first read BORN IN THE DELTA, immediately after it was published, my reaction was partly personal. It is a beautifully crafted portrait of unique aspects of the Southern culture that still persists in the Mississippi Delta region. Each chapter tells a readable, retell-able story about everyday topics that range from the manners we taught our children, to Southern cooking at home. From the meaningfulness to children of a lively backyard pond, to the way proud Southern families artfully coped with the financial stresses of a volatile agricultural economy. And each chapter is more colorful, more rich with imagery, more authentic than the one before.
Berstoli's book is also informed by her deep knowledge of language and sociology. Her years in the University of Arkansas' English department provided a platform for continued research into Southern communication styles and social conventions. She has localized this book to a very small sub-region (focused in and around Desha County in Southeast Arkansas), which allows for observations that are much more precise than the popular, overgeneralized Southern stereotypes. If I taught a class in American History, I would certainly include BORN IN THE DELTA as a text.

In this gracefully written memoir, Margaret Jones Bolsterli recounts her experiences as a lively, observant girl coming of age on an Arkansas cotton farm during the 1930s and 1940s. The Mississippi River's broad, flat floodplain provides the setting for her vivid strokes of memory and history each portraying key elements of the "southern sensibility." Bolsterli's themes include the southerner's strong sense of place, the penchant for stories rather than true dialog, a caste system based on formality and race, the underlying current of violence, and the repressive function of evangelical religion. She also examines manners, the patriarchal family structure, the "southern belle" concept, and the persistence of the memory of the Civil War. A fascinating chapter on food indicates how African and European customs are melded in southern cuisine to include chicken, pork, "cracklin' bread," gravy and biscuits, field peas, turnip greens, butter beans, devil's food cake, and dill pickles. Comparable to Shirley Abbott's *Womenfolks*, *Born in the Delta* is a valuable resource for those interested in southern history and culture, as well as readers who just enjoy a good story, well-told.

"Bolsterli's work is both that of the Southerner native-born and of the cosmopolitan richly experienced with contrasting ways of knowing." Gayle Graham Yates, University of Minnesota