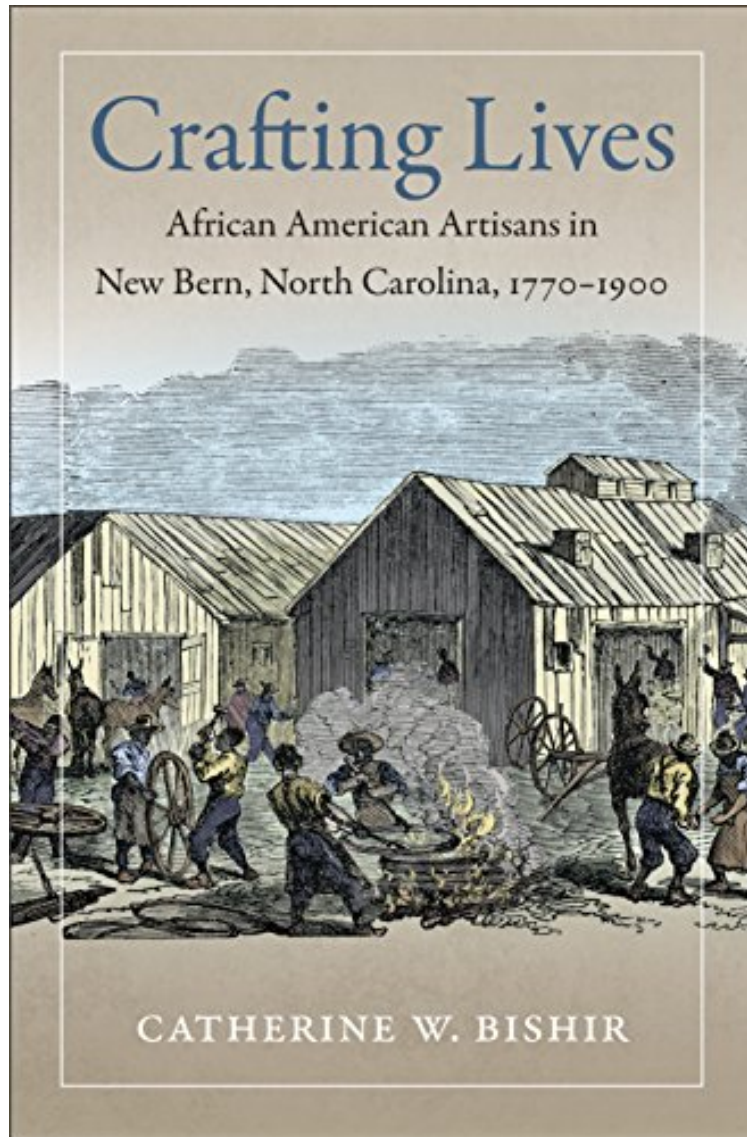


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Crafting Lives: African American Artisans in New Bern, North Carolina, 1770-1900

Catherine W. Bishir

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Catherine W. Bishir : Crafting Lives: African American Artisans in New Bern, North Carolina, 1770-1900

before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Crafting Lives: African American Artisans in New Bern, North Carolina, 1770-1900:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A must read for those engaged in African American research. By

Alice J. Ruckart By far the most complete, and perhaps the only, definitive scholarly study of African American artisans in New Bern. A new direction for further research, not only in New Bern, but North Carolina and the entire country.¹ of 1 people found the following review helpful. A very important book By Customer This book addresses a long-neglected subject in the social history of the South – the roles of enslaved and free African American artisans in shaping southern communities both before and after the Civil War. The small but vibrant port of New Bern, North Carolina, provides a detailed case study, with themes that doubtlessly resonated in cities across the region. Black carpenters, masons, coopers, blacksmiths, tailors, seamstresses, cobblers, and others navigated the complex legal, cultural, and political conditions that circumscribed their lives – first the institution of slavery, and then the specter of white supremacy and disenfranchisement – as they contributed their talents, negotiated opportunities for their families, became civic leaders, and sought recognition as productive and responsible American citizens. The book is rich with meticulously researched, often poignant, sometimes heartbreaking accounts of the experiences of these artisans of color. In a 1993 essay published in the journal *Southern Cultures*, “Landmarks of Power: Building a Southern Past, 1885-1915”, Bishir demonstrated that the restoration of power to the white southern elite at the turn of the 20th century was accompanied by a newly fabricated history based on nostalgic notions of white supremacy and gentility. The African American presence was reduced to a few subordinate stereotypes. In *Crafting Lives*, Bishir reclaims the complexity, richness, and humanity of southern life through the 19th century.

From the colonial period onward, black artisans in southern cities--thousands of free and enslaved carpenters, coopers, dressmakers, blacksmiths, saddlers, shoemakers, bricklayers, shipwrights, cabinetmakers, tailors, and others--played vital roles in their communities. Yet only a very few black craftspeople have gained popular and scholarly attention. Catherine W. Bishir remedies this oversight by offering an in-depth portrayal of urban African American artisans in the small but important port city of New Bern. In so doing, she highlights the community's often unrecognized importance in the history of nineteenth-century black life. Drawing upon myriad sources, Bishir brings to life men and women who employed their trade skills, sense of purpose, and community relationships to work for liberty and self-sufficiency, to establish and protect their families, and to assume leadership in churches and associations and in New Bern's dynamic political life during and after the Civil War. Focusing on their words and actions, *Crafting Lives* provides a new understanding of urban southern black artisans' unique place in the larger picture of American artisan identity.

Catherine Bishir's latest work is a must-read for students and researchers of the U.S. South.--*Journal of African American History* Pays tribute to this . . . part of African-American life that . . . is seldom told.--*Durham Herald-Sun* A compelling story of African American urban artisans working in New Bern, North Carolina, from the colonial period up to the beginning of the twentieth century. . . . A major contribution to urban artisan knowledge in the United States.--*Journal of the North Carolina Association of Historians* Bishir's immensely readable, entertaining new book is a welcome contribution to the literature and a first-rate reconstruction of the obscure world of New Bern's nineteenth-century artisans of color.--*The North Carolina Historical* The long timeframe, unique setting, and thorough research required for this type of biography make Bishir's study an important addition to American artisan historiography.--*South Carolina Historical Magazine* The true value [of Bishir's book] lies upon the compelling personal histories of New Bernian artisans who remained largely anonymous up to now.--*Art Libraries Society of North America* Bishir sheds light on how African American artisans were affected by changing race relations, how they exercised agency, and most importantly how they crafted identities as artisans and citizens. Scholars interested in these subjects and the history of North Carolina will appreciate Bishir's fine book.--*Journal of American History* This work will appeal to a broad audience of scholars interested in southern labor history, the extended narrative of black life in the South, and the role of artisan workers in the larger shaping of American work and culture in the long nineteenth century.--*Journal of Southern History* With all the patience and precision of a New Bern tailor or tinsmith, Catherine Bishir has crafted a compelling picture of a gifted, embattled, and far-flung community of artisans. The implications of this masterful study ripple well beyond the coastal counties of North Carolina, nudging all of us to rethink our sense of the southern past.--Peter H. Wood, author of *Near Andersonville: Winslow Homer's Civil War* In Bishir's able hands, these urban artisans of color emerge as complex and fascinating people who led communities, brought about change, and paved the way for future African American triumphs and challenges.--John David Smith, Charles H. Stone Distinguished Professor of American History, University of North Carolina at Charlotte This is a meticulously researched study of free and enslaved African American artisans in North Carolina. Using a host of sources, including wills, account books, court records, newspapers, and bills of sale, Catherine Bishir constructs the richest history of black craftspeople that I have seen. The work is enhanced by its focus on a particular place, but the rich information Bishir has unearthed about these men and women in New Bern has much to tell us about African American artisans' experiences and practices throughout the wider South.--Heather Andrea Williams, author of *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* From the Inside Flap From the colonial period onward, black artisans in southern cities--thousands of free and enslaved carpenters, coopers, dressmakers, blacksmiths, saddlers, shoemakers,

bricklayers, shipwrights, cabinetmakers, tailors, and others--played vital roles in their communities. Yet only a very few black craftspeople have gained popular and scholarly attention. Catherine W. Bishir remedies this oversight by offering an in-depth portrayal of urban African American artisans in the small but important port city of New Bern. In so doing, she highlights the community's often unrecognized importance in the history of nineteenth-century black life.