

Reviews: Books

BY JOHN LEWIS



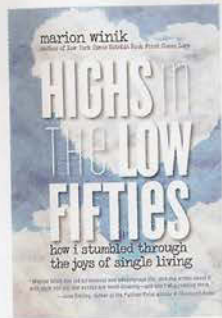
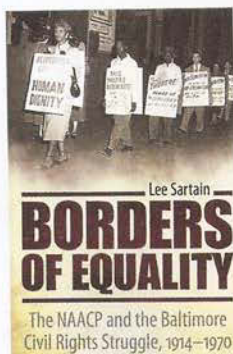
The Wonder Bread Summer

Jessica Anya Blau
(Harper Perennial)

With this raucous and sometimes raunchy romp through 1980s excess, Blau has written what might be seen as a chick-lit spin on *The Hangover*, a right-of-passage misadventure fueled by estrogen rather than testosterone. But Blau, a Hopkins Writing Seminars alum, has actually crafted a brisk, witty road odyssey that alludes to both Alice in Wonderland and Kerouac. Her cheeky narrative revolves around a multiracial, 20-year-old named Allie navigating a perilous landscape of sex, drugs, and rock and roll, with random violence, complicated kinship, and a Wonder Bread bag full of cocaine in the mix. Billy Idol even makes a heroic cameo. It makes for a lively summer read, one that, with any luck at all, could also be a lively summer film. How about it, Cameron Crowe?

Borders of Equality

Lee Sartain (University Press of Mississippi)
With scholarly detail, Sartain examines the NAACP and Baltimore's civil-rights movement from 1914 to 1970. Sartain, who teaches American studies at the University of Portsmouth in the UK, positions Baltimore as an ideal case study of the era, because of its geography and demographics. Though his writing can be wonky, he concisely chronicles the protests, boycotts, and legal skirmishes that made the NAACP such a force. Along the way, Sartain reminds us of the heroic efforts of Lillie May Jackson, who headed the Baltimore branch for decades. When writing about Jackson, Sartain summons a vitality that transcends his academic tendencies. I'd love to see him tackle a Jackson biography that explores how her example resonated with her progeny. If you don't know who they are, you need to read Sartain's book.



Highs in the Low Fifties

Marion Winik (skirt!)

The protagonist of *The Wonder Bread Summer* could grow up to be Marion Winik, if she's lucky. Winik, who teaches at the University of Baltimore, had her share of wild times in the 1970s and 1980s and, as this memoir attests, survived with her sense of humor, and sense of dignity, intact. Widowed, divorced, and a single mom, she embarks on a search for a mate with predictably disastrous results as chapter titles like "Match Dot Bomb" and "The Five Guys You Meet in Hell" indicate. She hits bottom when making out with a former student, but musters a laugh in the process. And that's the root of her genius—Winik confesses shortcomings with startling candor, while conjuring tears of laughter with sharp-witted observations and self-deprecating wit. By book's end, she reassesses her priorities and the tears keep coming, but you're no longer laughing.

B To read more of arts and culture editor John Lewis's musings on Baltimore's arts scene, check out his blog, *All the Pieces Matter*, at baltimoremagazine.net/allthepiecesmatter.