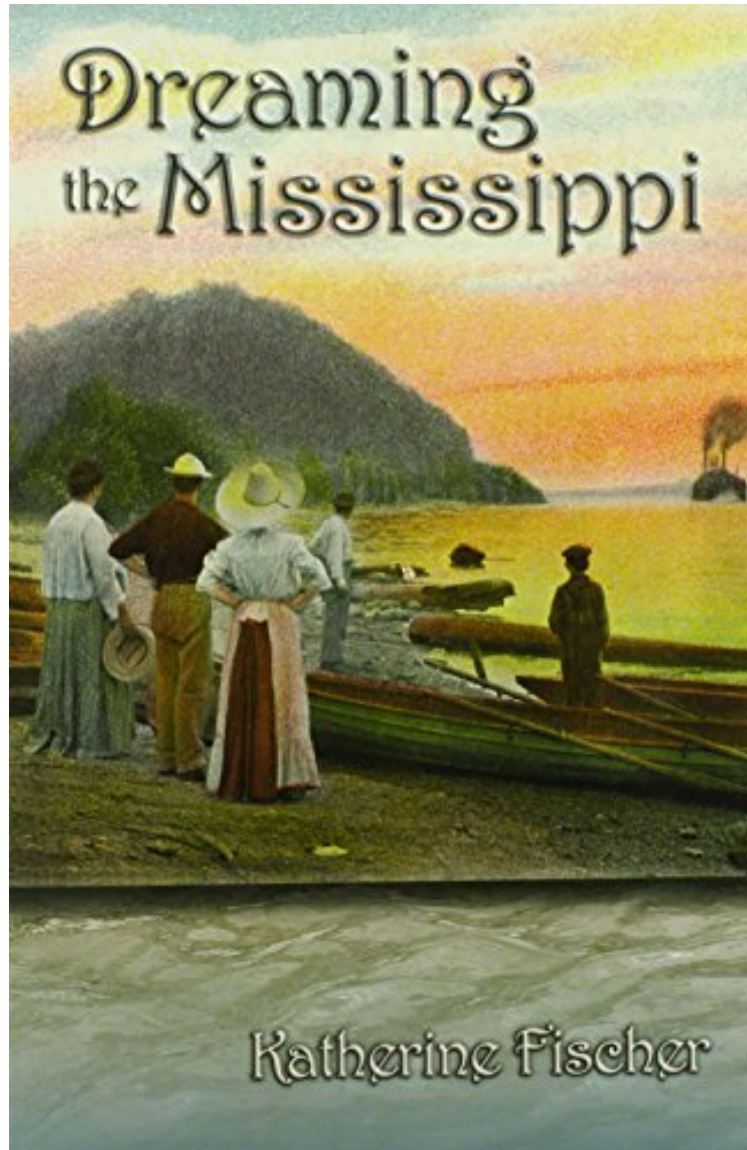


(Mobile pdf) Dreaming the Mississippi

## Dreaming the Mississippi

*Katherine Fischer*

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**Katherine Fischer : Dreaming the Mississippi** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dreaming the Mississippi:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A handful of black-and-white photographs, and somber reflections upon the outcome to Hurricane Katrina's wrathBy Midwest Book ReviewWritten by National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium consultant Katherine Fisher, Dreaming the Mississippi is part memoir, part cultural reflection, part celebration of the mighty Mississippi. From the author's daily life in a house so close to the Mississippi banks that

each spring she must open her basement doors to accept the regular floods, to tongue-in-cheek accounts of river rats and towboat pilots, to tales of desperate sandbagging against unruly flood tides, river hangouts, choice waterfront taverns, and more. A chapter especially devoted to the river's mouth considers not only the natural gulf itself, but the gulf as a metaphor for the gulf between engineers and naturalists, America's haves and its have-nots. A handful of black-and-white photographs, and somber reflections upon the outcome to Hurricane Katrina's wrath round out this reverent reflection upon not only the celebrated Mississippi, but also humankind's inextricable bond to the natural world.

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Good book but I have mixed feelings about it. By Old School I have had a fascination for the Mississippi River since reading Huckleberry Finn and Life on the Mississippi as a boy even though I live about 150 miles from the river. I have canoed hundreds of it's miles and, even at 63, I plan to paddle the entire length from Lake Itasca to the Gulf solo before my life is over. I have a rather extensive collection of books about the Mississippi including everything from purely fiction to the scientific. This book was a pleasant addition to my collection because it added a nice human dimension. However, it has some serious flaws. Keep in mind that what I consider flaws may be highlights for another reader.

First the bad: The book is probably more suited to feminine readers although I did enjoy it. The author is a college writing teacher and it seems as if she tries too hard at times. It's as if after teaching writing for years, she is finally taking a shot at writing her own book and sometimes her writing seems too forced and contrived as a result. She sometimes took several pages to describe a concept that she could have described better in three or four well-worded and compact sentences. In fact, I bet she would criticize her students if they were so wordy. When doing so, she becomes very redundant, explaining the same thing over and over again until I almost felt like shouting, "OK! I get it!" I had the feeling that she couldn't restrain herself from explaining an idea in every clever way she could think of rather than simply choosing the best way she came up with to express the idea. If she eliminated that redundancy, the already short book (I read it in two short sittings and I read slowly) the book would actually be more of a short story. She needs to be more concise, in my opinion. I experience an analogy in my own work. I am a photographer and when I show a portfolio, I have to edit tightly and eliminate many good pictures to avoid redundancy. It's difficult but it must be done. The same applies to writing.

Another thing is that the book has a very unfocused and odd structure. In the forward, the author warns the reader that her story jumps around in time and place almost randomly. It does! She seems to justify such a structure but doesn't explain why it was necessary and, frankly, I don't think it was necessary. There were passages in the book where the reader may suddenly not know how what the author is talking about because she changed time and place so abruptly and without warning. At the end of the book, she even includes discussion questions that are obviously meant for students - something that seemed a bit odd. One of those discussion questions asks students to explain why the author jumped around so much. It almost seems as if the book itself was intended to show her students that their writing teacher could write. Well, she definitely can but she needs to edit her work more tightly and exercise more focus.

Too many of her stories involve people that the reader doesn't know because the characters aren't developed. They are personal things about her family that, frankly, I wasn't very interested in. She kept drifting out of the navigation channel, so to speak. Another reader may disagree with me about this but I simply had very little interest in what her son living somewhere else was doing because the son was a stranger to me as a reader. I also had no interest in the odd chapter about a project in Japan. It seemed so out-of-place and had very little relation to the rest of the book. I sometimes felt like the author just felt like ruminating about all kinds of mostly unrelated stuff. In a way, it reads like someone's personal diary. There's nothing wrong with that as long as the reader is kept in mind.

One thing that really did grate on me was that she had to bring her politics into the book in the later chapters. She let the reader know that she is a liberal pacifist who is anti-capital punishment, anti-gun, anti-Bush, anti-Fox News, etc. Her positions are often very naive and uninformed and most definitely biased. I wish she had restrained herself from this. It wasn't necessary and added nothing. I would have been almost as disappointed if she pushed a conservative agenda. Unfortunately, because this came up in the last part of the book, it left me with a bad taste in my mouth. In one odd passage that I had to read twice to make sure I read it correctly, she writes in apparent horror that people living along the river may have guns hidden in their houses! This is very odd thing for someone living along the river with it's hunting and fishing culture. It was perfectly clear that she is very misinformed about guns but that's another story. She needs to educate herself about this subject before bringing it up in a books that will probably be read by hunters and fisherman.

On the plus side, I really enjoyed parts of the book because she talks about parts of the river that I know intimately, having paddled them and I even camped on islands that she camped on frequently. And the things she says about boat traffic, wing dams, cigar boats, tows, etc., are true and I felt like I was on the river again as I read them. I also enjoyed her river-related metaphors although they, too, often felt forced and contrived. One of my favorites was her metaphor about the locks being like passages in our life from adolescence to adulthood, etc. That was well done but, again, when she found a clever metaphor, she seemed to be so proud of it that she often beat it to death or added several more metaphors to express the same idea. She needs to pick the best one and go with it. Make a decision!

I realize as I finish this review that I have pointed out more negative things about this book than positive things. That may be a bit misleading because I did enjoy the book. I guess it may be because I just finished the book about a half hour ago and the politics she felt compelled to throw in at the end left me disappointed. She should have just presented the facts as she knows them and not bad-mouthed president bush, Fox

News, etc. You would think Katrina was the fault of conservatives!

Offering a fresh perspective on the rivers environment, industry, and recreation, *Dreaming the Mississippi* challenges old stereotypes through the experiences of modern Americans who work the barges, rope-swing into muddy bottoms, struggle against hurricane floodwaters, and otherwise find new meaning on this great watery corridor. In an engaging voice, earnest and energetic, Katherine Fischer describes how the rivers natural and human histories overlap and interweave as she tells of her own gradual immersion in its lifewhich led her to buy a house so close to its banks that each spring she must open her basement doors to accept its inevitable floods.

Deep, elegant, and intimate. John M. Barry, author of *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America*