

illustrate his findings. He traces the development of an association of black barbers, details the rise of several prominent businesses, and emphasizes the contradictions faced by many black barbers who achieved success by grooming only white patrons. The most interesting sections of his book are those where he delves deeply into stories of particular barbers such as Alonzo Herndon of Atlanta, a founding member of the Niagara Movement (precursor to the NAACP), and an organizer of insurance companies serving African Americans. He achieved success by "shaving the city's wealthy and politically connected white patrons." Mills covers desegregation's effects on barbershops in the South. **VERDICT** While intriguing and thoroughly documented, recognizing incongruities, tensions, and the ironies that arose from barbershops functioning both as businesses and as cultural institutions, Mills's book is not organized so as to keep his central themes clear. Specialists with a deep interest in the history of race, African American culture, and politics will find it useful, but readers with a more general interest may be lost by the difficult structure.—Ahmer Qadeer, Brooklyn

TRAVEL & GEOGRAPHY

Kumar, Amitava. *A Matter of Rats: A Short Biography of Patna.* Duke Univ. Apr. 2014. 144p. notes. index. ISBN 9780822357049. \$19.95. TRAV

Covering the time span of July 2012 thru May 2013, filmmaker, journalist, novelist, and poet Kumar (Helen D. Lockwood Professor of English, Vassar Coll.) discusses his hometown of Patna, India, "in the belief that Patna would be of interest to anyone." When seen through the eyes of Kumar, the city is unique and common, familiar and strange, once glorious but now dying and decaying. The reader sees little glimpses of the city's people, places, history, literature, and gossip, as Kumar travels, talks, and remembers. If you are concerned or wondering about the rats mentioned in the title, fear not; in Patna they live in libraries and museums, carry off ladies' dentures, and are known to taste better than chicken! **VERDICT** This new look at an ancient city transports readers on a fun journey. Lovers of travel writing, Indian history, and fans of literature will greatly enjoy this short book and wonder why Kumar did not write a slightly longer biography of Patna.—Melissa Aho, Univ. of Minnesota Bio-Medical Lib., Minneapolis

Roll, Todd. *Pedal Portland: 25 Easy Rides for Exploring the City by Bike.* Timber. Apr. 2014. 224p. illus. maps. index. ISBN 9781604694239. pap. \$16.95. TRAV

The subtitle tells it all—these are easy rides of about ten miles each with no challenging

elevation gain. Roll, who owns a Portland bike touring company, includes a map for each ride, plus an overview of the neighborhood and notable sights. His affectionate descriptions of the neighborhoods—"the crunchy ex-ghetto now known for bikeability and good living"—are like advice from a good friend. The instructions are detailed, with turn-by-turn directions. The author notes type of surface and road and cautions where heavy traffic can be expected. Special bicycle traffic signage and laws are explained in the introduction,

with a list of bicycle repair shops appended. Roll also provides instructions for reaching the ride's starting point by mass transit, or where to park. To add interest, scavenger hunt clues are included for each ride. Suggestions for stops along the routes for shopping, snacking, and pit stops are plentiful. **VERDICT** This appealing family- and novice-friendly guidebook is a good choice for locals looking for easy rides and a wish to explore Portland-area neighborhoods; perfect for visitors who wish to explore by bicycle.—Susan Belsky, Oshkosh P.L., WI

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