

# THE SOUTHERN REGISTER

*A Publication of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture*

*The University of Mississippi*

NEWSLETTER

OXFORD, MISSISSIPPI, U.S.A.

FALL 2020





A year ago, when I wrote my first column as director, I would have been puzzled by the picture on the cover of this *Southern Register*, wondering why the Lyric Theatre, an entertainment venue in downtown Oxford, was expressing such interest in personal hygiene. I might have thought Covid-19 a formula from high school chemistry that I missed, PPE a government agency to view skeptically, “pandemic” a word from a history book describing the devastating flu outbreak when my grandmother was born. This time a year ago, I had never heard the name George Floyd. None of us could have anticipated the difference twelve months can make. Intellectually we know that individual lives can change in an instant; we now know how rapidly the patterns of our collective existence can also shift in ways that we never expected.

People often say to me these days, “I don’t envy you.” I know what they mean to communicate (it is not comfort), but my usually unspoken reply is this: everyone should be so lucky in this time of crisis as I am. The coronavirus outbreak has washed over the working life of every single person at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, and every one of them has stood their ground. No in-person gatherings? No problem. Afton still assembled a star-studded set of fall SouthTalks, to be delivered remotely, around the fall programming theme of Voting Rights and Community Activism. Jimmy has continued publishing entries in the *Mississippi Encyclopedia* and essays in *Study the South*, and you’re reading the *Southern Register*, aren’t you? Every day I’m in touch with multiple people working from their kitchens and Zooming from their living rooms about the business of the Center: Bert about the finances, Margaret about the building, Rebecca about the website, Melanie about *Living Blues*, Andy about SouthDocs, the whole staff about the Southern Foodways Alliance, Darren about our incoming freshmen majors, Catarina about our new and returning graduate students. If I had to set sail as director and run into a global pandemic just a few miles offshore, these are the people I want in my boat.

A particular word of gratitude goes to Southern Studies faculty and students. The academic program is the heart of the Center, and, without exception, faculty members have spent the better parts of their summers teaching themselves how to conduct classes this fall under coronavirus guidelines. This adaptation has required learning new technologies, going to workshops, and rethinking the delivery of curriculum top to bottom. Students, understandably thrown off course in March, finished their degrees anyway. Combining those who defended theses in spring and summer, we had eleven (11!) graduates this year, six MA students and five MFA students. This success rate came from student resilience and dedication, but also from faculty commitment to student success, evident nowhere more clearly than in outgoing graduate director, Jessie Wilkerson. Jessie has accepted an endowed chair position at West Virginia University, but she left us with more clearly articulated expectations for what it means to be a Southern Studies graduate student.

This restless summer has brought to the nation, and to Mississippi, other challenges around questions of racial equality. Our state made the overdue decision to change our flag. In the heat of the pandemic and in the quiet of a weekday morning, the Confederate soldier statue on the UM Circle made an appropriate move across campus to a Civil War cemetery. Two days later, the painted portrait of Frederick Barnard fell off the wall of Barnard Observatory’s foyer. Barnard, the university’s third chancellor, was an erudite scholar, a well-respected professor, and enough of a progressive to lock horns with the rest of the administration on a variety of issues; he oversaw the construction of Barnard Observatory, completed in 1859, and understood it as his legacy to the campus. Still, after his large and imposing portrait returns from being repaired, we are not going to reinstall him as our primary greeter. (He’ll be around the corner.) We are going to fill the space instead with evidence of the South’s vibrant present life and of the ways we at the Center nurture the intellectual inquiry Barnard also valued. It was his idea to come down, but framing the future is our responsibility. Our plan for the foyer is to seek for it artwork directly linked to the contemporary experiences of Black southerners, none of whom could have attended the University of Mississippi when Barnard was the chancellor, even if their ancestors literally built the observatory, but all of whom play vital roles in the Southern Studies we practice here.

What will have happened a year from now? I won’t try to say. But I know the people I do not envy: soothsayers and fortune tellers. Here, we’ll take it one day at a time.

Katie McKee

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### Fall 2020

On the cover: *The Lyric Theatre, Oxford, Mississippi*.  
Photo by Shea Stewart.

### REGISTER STAFF

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# Living Blues News

We continue our celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of *Living Blues* in this issue with a deep dive into the heart of the blues—the Mississippi Delta. While the “birthplace of the blues” may be a complicated locale to pin down, there is no question where the child grew up. The Mississippi Delta covers a mere seven thousand square miles. A swath of immensely rich, fertile land that is roughly two hundred miles long by eighty-seven miles wide at its widest, this relatively small expanse of land has produced more blues musicians than any other place on the planet. But after more than one hundred years of bringing forth some of the greatest musical talents ever heard, what does the blues in the Delta look like today? What we found is an amazingly rich and diverse pool of talent that still lives and thrives in the Mississippi Delta. We also found a crucial support system that celebrates the music and the artists who create it. For more than two decades, the state of Mississippi has invested in the rich cultural heritage of the blues, and this support has allowed young musicians to see blues music as a viable career path. So, come on down and visit us and see for yourself what the blues in Mississippi looks like today.

It takes a staggering amount of work and support to create a special issue like this. I want to first say thank you to Craig Ray, director of Visit Mississippi, for his support. Thanks to writers Scott Barretta and Jim O’Neal for their deep dive into the Delta blues scene of today and yesterday. The stunning photography in this issue is once again from Bill Steber, who spent three weeks baking in the Mississippi summer sun to safely shoot photos outdoors during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thanks also to my associate editor Robin Dietrick and, of course, to art director Susan Lee who makes all of this look so wonderful. Last, but not least, I want to send out a special thanks to Wesley Smith, director of the Greenville-Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau, who was the driving force behind the idea for this issue and who worked until the bitter end to make sure it was a success.

And don’t forget, all of this work was done over the last two months as Covid-19 raced across the state of Mississippi. Masks, social distancing, no crowds, and shooting all photos outdoors were just a few of the added struggles we had to deal with. In fact, two of the artists featured here have come down with the coronavirus



recently. Southern soul artists Chris Ivy and his family have been sick, and Nathaniel Kimble spent two weeks in the hospital and still requires oxygen.

Please turn to page 150 for the results of the 2020 *Living Blues* Awards. This year we had a record number of votes. Thanks to everyone who took the time to cast theirs. This year’s big winner is cover artist Christone “Kingfish” Ingram. At just twenty-one years old, Kingfish took the awards for Blues Artist of the Year (Male) and Best Blues Album of 2019 (New Release) in the readers’ poll and Album of the Year and Best Debut in the critics’ poll for his album *Kingfish* on Alligator Records. On the opposite end of the age spectrum, congratulations to ninety-one-year-old Jimmy Johnson for winning the Most Outstanding Musician (Guitar) category in the critics’ poll. What an amazing musical genre where two artists seventy years apart in age can share the spotlight at the top.

Brett J. Bonner

# southtalks

— SERIES —

CENTER FOR THE STUDY  
OF SOUTHERN CULTURE

This semester, a few of our events fall under one or more of these three categories:

**Voting Rights and Community Activism** speaks directly to the flashpoints of 2020 and central questions around the responsibilities of citizens. Access to the ballot box has long been a contentious issue, particularly in Mississippi. Through this SouthTalks series, we engage with that history and consider what it means to claim a role in shaping the state.

**The Future of the South Initiative** focuses on the contemporary region and shapes conversations about how it will evolve, using innovative approaches to studying the South within the context of the nation, hemisphere, and the globe. Topics with this designation play a role in our classrooms, in the scholarship of faculty members, and in our community engagement work.

**The Movement and Migration Series** lectures in the spring of 2020 featured programming around the theme “Movement and Migration in, to, and through the US South” as a way of thinking about urgent issues connected to borders and belonging. We decided to continue the conversation of migration with two additional talks this fall.

## SEPTEMBER 9

Wednesday, noon • Virtual Event

🎧 “Our Body Tells a Story: A Pathway to Resilience and Wholeness”

**Jennifer Conner, Brookshield Laurent, Anne Cafer, and Meagen Rosenthal**

In this SouthTalk, University of Mississippi professors and co-directors of the UM Community First Research Center for Wellbeing and Creative Achievement, Anne Cafer and Meagen Rosenthal, moderate a Q&A with Jennifer Conner and Brookshield Laurent of the Delta Population Health Institute. Their discussion, shared as a prerecorded talk made available in early September on the Center website, expands upon the work of the Delta Population Health Institute.

During the prerecorded talk, Conner and Laurent present on how their training has taught them to listen to the stories of our bodies, which inform their work in population health in the Delta. They explore how

## Fall 2020

*SouthTalks is a series of events (including lectures, performances, film screenings, and panel discussions) that explores the interdisciplinary nature of Southern Studies. This series is free and open to the public, and typically takes place in the Tupelo Room of Barnard Observatory. However, as a result of the current health crisis, all events will be virtual and accessible on the Center's YouTube channel. Visit the Center's website for up-to-date information about all Center events. Registration will be required for all events. If you have any questions, please contact Afton Thomas at amthoma4@olemiss.edu.*

*Programming denoted with 🎧 have a prerecorded video that complements the live Q&A that will take place at the dates specified below.*

the interconnectedness of place, time, and health are expressed in our bodies and can serve as the pathway for holistic healing for self and communities.

Jennifer Conner was instrumental in launching the Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention and has achieved many policy, system, and environment changes along the southern US region to improve community resiliency. Brookshield Laurent is the founding chairwoman for the department of Clinical Medicine at NYIT-COM at Arkansas State University and the founding executive director for the Delta Population Health Institute. Anne Cafer is an assistant professor of sociology, and Meagen Rosenthal is a UM associate professor of pharmacy administration.

## SEPTEMBER 16

Wednesday, noon • Virtual Event

🎧 “Why Dystopia Now? Exploring the Place, Value, and Necessity of Speculative and Dystopian Themes in Maurice Carlos Ruffin's *We Cast a Shadow*”

**Maurice Ruffin and Hilary Word**

In this SouthTalk, Southern Studies MA graduate Hilary Word and 2020–21 University of Mississippi Grisham Writer in Residence, Maurice Carlos Ruffin, sit down to discuss Ruffin's latest work, the dystopian-satire novel *We Cast a Shadow*. Word and Ruffin expand upon their prerecorded conversation on Ruffin's book in this live Q&A. The prerecorded conversation will be available on the Center's website in September.

Maurice Carlos Ruffin's novel *We Cast a Shadow* was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award and was longlisted for the PEN America Open Book Prize, the Center for Fiction Prize, and the Aspen Words Literary Prize. A New Orleans native, Ruffin is



**Maurice Carlos Ruffin**

a professor of creative writing at Louisiana State University. His forthcoming book of short stories, *The Ones Who Don't Say They Love You*, will be published in 2021.

Born in Atlanta, Georgia, but raised in both Georgia and Mississippi, Hilary Word now proudly claims Jackson, Mississippi, as her home. She completed her undergraduate education at Tougaloo College, where she obtained a BA in history in May 2017. She entered the Southern Studies MA program in the fall of 2018 and graduated in May 2020. Word's thesis, "Post-Soul Speculation: An Exploration of Afro-Southern Speculative Fiction," earned her the Sue Hart Prize for an outstanding paper at the intersection of Southern Studies and gender studies.



Hilary Word

## SEPTEMBER 23

Wednesday, noon • Virtual Event



### MOVEMENT AND MIGRATION SERIES LECTURE

#### "The Lebanese in Mississippi: An Oral History"

James G. Thomas, Jr. and Jessica Wilkerson

James G. Thomas, Jr.'s recent work "The Lebanese in Mississippi: An Oral History" documents and interprets the lives of first- and subsequent-generation Lebanese Mississippians whose families immigrated to the state looking for a better life. It is an oral record of their forbears' experiences of settling in a foreign land where they knew few people, did not speak the language, and had to create their own occupations. Ultimately, however, it is the collective story of maintaining an ethnic identity while assimilating into a new culture. In this live Q&A, Thomas and Wilkerson discuss the origins and findings of Thomas's study. The project can be found online at [www.thelebaneseinmississippi.com](http://www.thelebaneseinmississippi.com).

Originally from the Mississippi Delta, James G. Thomas, Jr. is the

associate director for publications at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture. He holds a BA in English and philosophy, an MA in Southern Studies, and an MFA in documentary expression, each from the University of Mississippi.

Jessica Wilkerson is associate professor of history at West Virginia



Jessica Wilkerson



James G. Thomas, Jr.

ANDREA MORALES

University, where she holds the Stuart and Joyce Robbins Chair, a position she began in fall of 2020 after spending six years at the University of Mississippi. She is the author of *To Live Here, You Have to Fight: How Women Led Appalachian Movements for Social Justice*.

## SEPTEMBER 30

Wednesday, noon • Virtual Event



### MOVEMENT AND MIGRATION SERIES LECTURE

#### "From Latino Orlando to International Memphis: Migration and Transformation in the US South"

Simone Delorme and Annemarie Anderson

In this live Q&A, Annemarie Anderson and Simone Delorme discuss Delorme's recently published book, *Latino Orlando: Suburban Transformation and Racial Conflict*, and her current work in Memphis. A live Q&A with viewers follows the conversation.

In her prerecorded SouthTalk, Simone Delorme discusses the findings from her new book, which documents the ways that southern places are being transformed by an influx of Latino migrants. She will be drawing comparisons to her current research in Memphis, which examines how newcomers challenge the South's historic Black-white racial binary and are incorporated into the social, political, and economic life of communities that were nontraditional destinations of migration. Delorme's prerecorded talk will be available on the Center's website after September 15.

Simone Delorme joined the University of Mississippi's Department of Sociology and Anthropology and the Center for the Study of Southern Culture in the fall of 2013. She specializes in migration to the US South, with interests in race relations, integration and incorporation, community development, and social class inequalities.

Annemarie Anderson is the oral historian for the Southern Foodways Alliance. She conducts oral

history work throughout the South and is a current student in the Southern Studies MFA in Documentary Expression program.



Simone Delorme



Annemarie Anderson



## OCTOBER 14

Wednesday, 6:00 p.m. • Virtual Event

### VOTING RIGHTS AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISM SERIES LECTURE

#### “Voter Suppression and US Elections” Roundtable Discussion

Jim Downs, Carol Anderson, and Kevin M. Kruse

In this election year, the Center for the Study of Southern Culture has partnered with the University of Georgia Press to host a roundtable discussion with coeditor of the UGA Press History in the Headlines series, Jim Downs. Downs is also editor of the recently published *Voter Suppression in US Elections*. Carol Anderson and Kevin M. Kruse join Downs in this conversation.

Historians have long been engaged in telling the story of the struggle for the vote. In the wake of recent contested elections, the suppression of the vote has returned to the headlines, as awareness of the deep structural barriers to the ballot, particularly for poor, Black, and Latino voters, has called attention to the historical roots of issues related to voting access. At an annual conference of the Organization of American Historians, Carol Anderson, Kevin M. Kruse, Heather Cox Richardson, and Heather Anne Thompson had a conversation with Stacey Abrams about the long history of voter suppression. *Voter Suppression in US Elections* is a transcript of that extraordinary conversation, edited by Jim Downs.

Jim Downs is the Gilder Lehrman NEH Professor of History and Civil War Studies at Gettysburg College. He is the author or editor



Jim Downs

#### Carol Anderson



of six other books, including *Sick from Freedom: African American Illness and Suffering during the Civil War and Reconstruction*.

Carol Anderson is the Charles Howard Candler Professor and Chair of African American Studies at Emory University. She is the author of the recent *One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression Is Destroying Our Democracy*.

She is a regular contributor to the *Guardian* and advisor for its year-long series on voting rights.

Kevin M. Kruse studies the political, social, and urban/suburban history of twentieth-century America. Focused on conflicts over race, rights, and religion, he has particular interests in segregation



Kevin M. Kruse

and the civil rights movement, the rise of religious nationalism, and the making of modern conservatism. He is the author of several books, including *Fault Lines: A History of the United States since 1974*, with Julian Zelizer.

## OCTOBER 19

Monday, 5:00 p.m. • Virtual Event

### VOTING RIGHTS AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISM SERIES LECTURE

#### “The Half-Life of Freedom, Race, and Justice in America Today”

Jelani Cobb

Journalist, educator, and diversity speaker Jelani Cobb writes about the enormous complexity of race in America. As recipient of the Sidney Hillman Prize for Opinion and Analysis Journalism for his *New Yorker* columns, Cobb was praised for combining “the strengths of an on-the-scene reporter, a public intellectual, a teacher, a vivid writer, a subtle moralist, and an accomplished professional historian”—qualities he brings to his gripping talks. In this event, Cobb will deliver the talk, “The Half-Life of Freedom, Race, and Justice in America Today.”

Jelani Cobb joined Columbia University’s Journalism School faculty in 2016. He has contributed to the *New Yorker* since 2012 and became a staff writer in 2015. Prior to joining the faculty at Columbia University, Cobb was an associate professor of history and director of the Africana Studies Institute at the University of Connecticut where he specialized in post-Civil War African American history, twentieth-century American politics, and the history of the Cold War.



Jelani Cobb

## OCTOBER 29

Thursday, 3:00 p.m. • Virtual Event

### “Whose Blues? Black Bluesism, Blues Universalism, and the Postmodern Paradoxes of America’s Global Music”

Adam Gussow, Ken “Sugar Brown” Kawashima, and Brian Foster

In this live Q&A, Adam Gussow and Ken “Sugar Brown” Kawashima, a Korean-Japanese American bluesman highlighted in Gussow’s book *Whose Blues? Facing Up to Race and the Future of the Music*, will be joined by Brian Foster, assistant professor of sociology and Southern Studies, for a conversation on Gussow’s book. A pre-recorded talk between Gussow, Kawashima, and Foster will be available on the Center website by

mid-October, and Foster will begin the live Q&A with prepared questions, then open it up to viewers.

Gussow's book challenges us to think freshly about the blues in a postmodern moment, more than a century removed from the music's rural southern origins. If "blues is Black music," as some contemporary claimants insist, what should we make of the International Blues Challenge held annually in Memphis, with its all-comers mix of nationalities and ethnicities? If there's "no Black, no white, just the blues," as another familiar meme would



Adam Gussow

have us believe, why do some Black blues people hear that proclamation not as a call to transracial fellowship, but as an aggressive attempt at cultural appropriation and the erasure of traumatic racial histories sounded by the music?

Adam Gussow is a professor of English and Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi.

Ken Kawashima is a professor of modern Japanese history and Marxist theory in the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Toronto. He is also a blues musician, singer, and composer known as Sugar Brown.



Ken Kawashima



Brian Foster

Brian Foster is an assistant professor of sociology and Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi. His first book, *I Don't Like the Blues: Race, Place, and the Backbeat of Black Life*, which focuses on race and community life in the Mississippi Delta, will be out December 2020.

## NOVEMBER 11

Wednesday, noon • Virtual Event

 "Looking at Southern Landscapes: Inspiration, Influence, and Impact"

**W. Ralph Eubanks and David Wharton**

During this prerecorded talk, David Wharton and W. Ralph Eubanks discuss their experiences with the southern landscape, Wharton as a photographer and Eubanks as a writer and student of southern literature. Wharton discusses his book *Scenes from Southern Roadsides*, which contains 133 black-and-white photographs made in rural areas throughout the American South. Eubanks talks about his forthcoming book, *A Place Like Mississippi*, which examines

how Mississippi's landscape has influenced the work of its writers. Together they discuss how photographers present the realities of the landscape and how writers overlay their impressions over those realities.

On November 11, both Eubanks and Wharton will engage with viewers and answer questions sparked by their recorded talk, which will be made available on the



JAMES G. THOMAS, JR.

David Wharton

Center's website on November 2.

David Wharton has an MFA in photography and a PhD in American studies, both from the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of three books of photographs, with a fourth due to be published in 2021. He has taught at the University of Mississippi's Center for the Study of Southern Culture since 1999.

W. Ralph Eubanks is the author of *Ever Is a Long Time: A Journey into Mississippi's Dark Past* and *The House at the End of the Road: The Story of Three Generations of an Interracial Family in the American South*. A 2007 Guggenheim Fellow, he is currently a visiting professor of English and Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi.



Ralph Eubanks

## NOVEMBER 12

Thursday, 5:00 p.m. • Virtual Event

**VISITING DOCUMENTARIANS SERIES**

*Always in Season*

**Jacqueline Olive**

Jacqueline Olive is an independent filmmaker and immersive media producer with fifteen years of experience in journalism and film. *Always in Season*, her debut feature documentary, explores the lingering impact of more than a century of lynching and connects this form of racial terrorism with racial violence today. The film follows Claudia Lacy as she moves from paralyzing grief to leading the fight for justice for her son, Lennon Lacy, who was found hanging from a swing set in rural North Carolina in 2014. As the film unfolds, Lennon's case—and the suspicions surrounding it—intersect with stories of other communities committed to breaking the silence of their own recent histories and leading the way to justice. Olive will discuss the film, its themes and representation in the industry as well as take questions from viewers. This virtual event is cosponsored by the Oxford Film Festival.



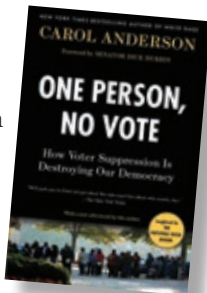
Jacqueline Olive



Carol Anderson

## Carol Anderson to Present Gilder-Jordan Lecture

Carol Anderson, the Charles Howard Candler Professor and Chair of African American Studies at Emory University, will deliver the 2020 Gilder-Jordan Lecture. She is the author of *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955*, *Bourgeois Radicals: The NAACP and the Struggle for Colonial Liberation, 1941–1960*, and *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of our Racial Divide*. Her most recent book, *One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression Is Destroying Our Democracy*, will be the subject of her lecture.



In addition to numerous teaching awards, Anderson's research has garnered fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies, the Ford Foundation, National Humanities Center, Harvard University's Charles Warren Center, and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation. She is a regular contributor to the *Guardian* and advisor for its yearlong series on voting rights.

Anderson was a member of the US State Department's Historical Advisory Committee. She earned her PhD in history from The Ohio State University.

## Journalist Jelani Cobb to Speak as Part of the Center's Future of the South Initiative

Journalist, educator, and diversity speaker Jelani Cobb writes about the enormous complexity of race in America. As recipient of the Sidney Hillman Prize for Opinion and Analysis Journalism for his *New Yorker* columns, Cobb was praised for combining “the strengths of an



Jelani Cobb

on-the-scene reporter, a public intellectual, a teacher, a vivid writer, a subtle moralist, and an accomplished professional historian”—qualities he brings to his gripping talks. In this event, Cobb will deliver the talk, “The Half-Life of Freedom, Race and Justice in America Today.”

At the 2015 Hillman Prize ceremony, presenter and journalist Hendrik Hertzberg described the work of Jelani Cobb as combining the “rigor and depth of a professional historian with the alertness of a reporter, the liberal passion of an engaged public intellectual and the literary flair of a fine writer.” So it is with Cobb's riveting, auspicious keynotes: up-to-the-moment meditations and breakdowns of the complex dynamics of race and racism in America. Whether speaking on Black Lives Matter and activism, the battle zones of Ferguson or Baltimore, the legacy of a Black presidency, or the implications of the Trump era—or, more generally, on the history of civil rights, violence, and inequality in employment, housing, or incarceration in the US—Cobb speaks with the surety and passion of America's best journalists.

Jelani Cobb joined Columbia University's Journalism School faculty in 2016. He has contributed to the *New Yorker* since 2012 and became a staff writer in 2015. Prior to joining the faculty at Columbia University, Cobb was an associate professor of history and director of the Africana Studies Institute at the University of Connecticut where he specialized in post-Civil War African American history, twentieth-century American politics, and the history of the Cold War. Cobb is also a recipient of fellowships from the Fulbright and Ford Foundations.

Cobb is the author of *The Substance of Hope: Barack Obama and the Paradox of Progress* and *To the Break of Dawn: A Freestyle on the Hip Hop Aesthetic*. His articles and essays have appeared in the *Washington Post*, the *New Republic*, *Essence*, *Vibe*, the *Progressive*, and *The Root*. His collection *The Devil and Dave Chappelle: And Other Essays* was published in 2007. This event is part of the Center's Future of the South Initiative and cosponsored by the UM Departments of English, History, Sociology and Anthropology, and Political Science; the UM School of Journalism; the Division for Diversity and Community Engagement; and the Sherman L. Muths Jr. Lecture Series in Law Endowment.

# The Center Welcomes the First-Year Southern Studies MA and MFA Students

Each year the Center welcomes incoming graduate students to Barnard during an orientation session in the week before the beginning of classes. It's a thrilling time for students, faculty, and staff as we each look around the room in anticipation of the next two years. Following friendly introductions and info sessions about what to expect as a

Southern Studies graduate student, the Center hosts lunch and the customary group photo is made.

This year, however, the orientation session was held via Zoom, and that group photo would have more closely resembled an episode of *Hollywood Squares* than the usual portrait on the front steps of Barnard Observatory. Instead, incoming students have sent

in a photo of their choice and a short bio as a way to introduce themselves to our readers. We look forward to getting to know them in person very soon, and we welcome this year's first-year MA and MFA students to Barnard Observatory and to the University of Mississippi campus. Some we are even welcoming back to begin the MFA program.

## Incoming MA Students

### Mikayla Michelle Adams



Born and raised in Memphis, Tennessee, **Mikayla Michelle Adams** earned her BA from the University of Memphis where she studied women's and gender studies and history. During her time there she dedicated her spare time to running the Student History Society and being a peer educator for the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Coalition. Adams took a gap year to work in Memphis before coming to the University of Mississippi to continue her education.

### Danielle Buckingham

**Danielle Buckingham** is a Black southern writer from Louisville, Mississippi. She received her BA in psychology from Millsaps



College, and her MA in sociology from the University of Mississippi. A 2017 Voices of Our Nation Fellow, her writing has been published or is forthcoming in *Raising Mothers*, *Black Stew*, *Linden Avenue Literary Journal*, and elsewhere. As a first-year Southern Studies MA student, Buckingham hopes to create work that centers Black families, Black women, and Black queer folks surviving and thriving in the Deep South.

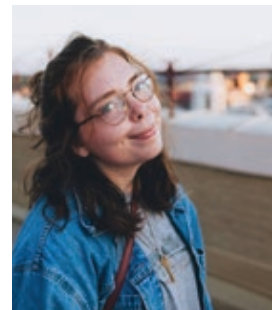
### Cam Calisch

**Cam Calisch** has a BA in anthropology from the University of Mississippi, where they are now pursuing an MA in Southern Studies. As a UM undergraduate, Calisch organized, studied with, and struggled alongside students and workers across the state with the United Campus Workers of Mississippi, which had a profound impact on the way that



they see higher education. Calisch's research centers around documenting ways that communities organize, survive, and take care of each other in pursuit of collective liberation.

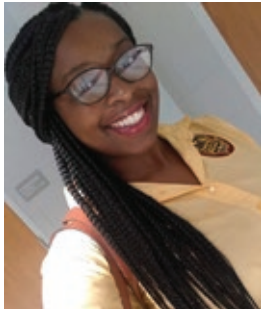
### Bethany Fitts



**Bethany Fitts** was raised in Tupelo, Mississippi, and graduated from the University of Mississippi in 2019 with a BA in English and creative writing. Her senior thesis, advised by Kiese Laymon, used hybrid nonfiction

and poetry to explore family, religion, and grief within the southern context. She has interned with the Sunflower County Freedom Project in Sunflower, Mississippi, and the Merwin Conservancy in Kahului, Hawaii. Following graduation, she received a Fulbright scholarship and taught English in the Czech Republic during the 2019–20 academic year.

## Janeth Jackson



A native of Moss Point, Mississippi, **Janeth Jackson** recently earned her BA from Tougaloo College in English. During her undergraduate career, Jackson was a Tom Joyner, Marcus D. Hughes, UNCF, and Presidential Scholar. While attending Tougaloo, she served as the vice president of the Alpha Delta Alpha Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, where she implemented service projects for students in the Jackson metro area to ensure their academic success. She also volunteered for TRiO Student Support Services and the Michelle Obama Early College High School, forming alliances with teachers to assist students in low-income areas. Additionally, Janeth participated in Howard University's Pre-PhD Summer Enrichment program, where she reported on the portrayal of African American women in the media. Her current research focuses on Black communities and southern literature.

## Catherine Jessee

A Virginia native, Catherine Jessee holds a BA in American studies and English from the University of Virginia. She comes to Mississippi by



way of New York City and the San Francisco Bay Area, where she has worked on editorial and communications teams at multiple publications and companies. With a focus on Appalachian history, she is interested in digging deeper where food systems intersect with or diverge from social movement, justice, and activism in the South.

## David Larson



**David Larson** is from the Southern California town of Temecula. He earned a BA in English from University of California–Berkeley. Among other things, he hopes to focus on the interaction between blues music and culture and the literary works that existed beside them. The primary authors he hopes to examine are Flannery O'Connor, William Faulkner, and Cormac McCarthy.

## Mitchell Robinson

Land, race, and placemaking are converging threads that drew **Mitchell Robinson** back to his native Mississippi in 2013. He spent a decade across the country exploring the consilience of ecology, historiography, and community dynamics, such as the conflicts of endangered



species management and rampant habitat development in Austin, Texas. Currently residing in Holly Springs in an 1843 Greek Revival home with his wife, Kendall, Robinson spent the last seven years managing Strawberry Plains Audubon Center, a 2,600-acre wilderness sanctuary and former slave and sharecropper plantation. With a BS in natural resources from Sewanee, the University of the South, his research investigates the intersections of land-use history, biodiversity, race, and dominator culture in Mississippi.

## Lilly Slaughter



Originally from Louisville, Kentucky, **Lilly Slaughter** is pursuing an MA in Southern Studies with an interest in food systems. She holds a BA in psychology from the University of Louisville, where she spent two years working in a behavioral health psychology research lab. Her interests in how food is grown, accessed, and prepared stem from her previous experiences working on organic farms and for food justice organizations in rural communities.

## Matthew Streets

Rooted in family and community, **Matthew Streets** is coming to Oxford



from his hometown of Pittsboro, North Carolina. Streets graduated in May 2020 as an Honors College student at Appalachian State University, where he earned a BA in history and minors in Spanish and Africana studies. Along with his studies and employment with the university student union, Streets was heavily involved in voter-turnout initiatives, and he received local recognition for his volunteer efforts. While his main interests and past studies have related more directly to American slavery and the antebellum South, Streets's experiences in Warsaw, Poland, and Havana, Cuba, provided him with unique local, regional, national, and global perspectives. Regardless of subject, Streets usually finds himself returning to the infinitely rich history of the South.

### Braxton Thomas



A Tupelo, Mississippi, native, **Braxton Thomas**, is a 2019 graduate of Millsaps College where she earned a BA in history with a minor in sociology. She is pursuing an MA in Southern Studies on the documentary track. While at Millsaps, Thomas served as a research assistant with the Kellogg Foundation, researching methods to incorporate the Mississippi civil rights movement into the Jackson Public School District's lesson plans.

She also interned with House of Ruth Maryland, in Baltimore, shadowing attorneys who represented battered women and children. Prior to Thomas's graduate studies, she was a CBCF intern on Capitol Hill before accepting a staff position in the office of Congressman Bennie G. Thompson.

## Incoming MFA Students

### Katherine Aberle

**Katherine Aberle** has a BA in classics and Southern Studies and is a recent graduate of the Southern Studies MA program. She defended her master's thesis, "Black Power at Mississippi Valley: The Untold Story of the Largest Mass Arrest of Students in American History," this July.

### Annemarie Anderson



A Florida native, **Annemarie Anderson** received a master's degree in oral history from the University of Florida in 2017, the first graduate of that program. She also earned her bachelor's degree in English and history from the University of Florida. She is the Southern Foodways Alliance's oral historian and travels across the South collecting stories of people who grow, cook, eat, and serve southern food.

### Michelle Bright

When she isn't working as an actress on film sets, **Michelle Bright** aspires to make her own films, so she is pursuing an MFA in Documentary Expression. She earned a BA in English and journalism in 2009 and an MA in Southern Studies



in 2012, both from the University of Mississippi, and has been teaching writing for the Department of Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Mississippi since 2013. Her publications are as varied as an article in the *Mississippi Encyclopedia* on hunting camps and an essay in *Ms. Magazine* analyzing the 1999 film *Cruel Intentions* in the #MeToo era. Before joining the MFA program, she helped collect oral histories for the Black Families of Yalobusha project and looks forward to continuing that work this fall.

### Kelly Spivey



Originally from North Carolina, **Kelly Spivey** has lived in Georgia, Louisiana, and currently resides in Memphis, Tennessee. She holds a BFA in photography from SCAD and spent ten years as a pastry chef in multiple award-winning restaurants prior to entering the Southern Studies program at the University of Mississippi. She earned her MA for her thesis "Raised in Their Mothers' Kitchens": The Southern Evolution of Domestic Science" in 2020. Her current research and writing focuses on baking within southern foodways and its intersection with labor, gender, and race in domestic and professional kitchen spaces.

## SFA Fall Symposium Goes Multiplatform

In 2020, the Southern Foodways Alliance looks forward. We use food to imagine, construct, and interrogate the futures of the American South.

This year's symposium will look and feel different, because our moment requires it. Instead of staging talks and meals over one October weekend in Oxford, and on the campus of the University of Mississippi, our twenty-third fall symposium goes multimedia. We broadcast filmed presentations and menus over four Saturdays in October, with digital and print companions, podcast amplification, and local gatherings to complement.

From a smart TV or laptop, see contemporary photography that reframes our image of the South, guided by teacher and essayist Ralph Eubanks. Visionary poet Ada Limón shares original verse invoking chocolate sunflowers, cast-iron cornbread, and scrapbook recipes heavy with intent. Journalist José Ralat maps the topography of Sur-Mex, the integrated cuisines of the American South and Mexico. Cookbook author Chandra Ram asks how a celebration of Indian and southern food connections might move beyond hard questions to inspire real action. And more. Lots more.

Two chefs carry these themes from page to plate. Oscar Diaz, the James Beard semifinalist behind Raleigh restaurants Cortez and Jose and Sons, offers new ways to meld traditional southern cooking with his family's Mexican cuisine. You'll never cook a kettle of Brunswick stew the same. As chef and owner of Virtue in Chicago, Erick Williams connects the South, the Black diaspora, and the future of national foodways. Think Tabasco-brined Cornish game hen and cucumber salad with biscuit croutons.

SFA augments these presentations with digital question-and-answer sessions. And a special print issue of *Gravy* that features text from the talks. Attendees also receive a Symposium in a Box, delivered to their doorsteps, filled with ingredients, tools, recipes, and more, to bring the Southern Foodways Symposium experience home. Finally, after the month of presentations wraps, we aim to facilitate a series of safe, local, in-person gatherings, and guided discussions in early November using *Gravy* texts as prompts.

SFA invites members and nonmembers to attend the fall symposium. All may purchase tickets at the price of \$50, which includes early access to all symposium programming, the opportunity to participate in Q&As, a customized discussion guide, and the Symposium in a Box delivery.

Registration opens Tuesday, September 8, at noon CST at [southernfoodwaysalliance.org](http://southernfoodwaysalliance.org). The first two hundred attendees to purchase a ticket before Tuesday, September 22, will receive the Symposium in a Box.

The Symposium will begin on Saturday, October 3, and continue on October 10, 17, and 24. If you purchase a ticket and are unable to watch the live talks, recordings will be archived and made available to you.

We wish we could greet you in person. But from our couches to yours, we welcome you to the Twenty-Third Southern Foodways Symposium. Pajamas welcome.



## SFA Collaborators Win James Beard, Association of Food Journalists Awards

Writers and podcast producers for SFA's *Gravy* podcast and *Gravy* quarterly journal took home multiple awards for work released in 2019. Betsy Shepherd, a journalist and audio producer, won a James Beard Foundation Award for Audio Reporting for "Mahalia Jackson's Glori-fried Chicken," from the summer 2019 season of *Gravy* podcasts. *Gravy* was also represented in four award categories from the Association of Food Journalists, including third place in the Best Food Coverage (All Platforms) category. Tommy Tomlinson won third place for Best Food Essay for "We the People Are Larger Than We Used to Be," which appeared in the winter 2019 issue of *Gravy* journal. Tomlinson is a veteran journalist based in Charlotte, North Carolina, and the author of a memoir, *The Elephant in the Room: One Fat Man's Quest to Get Smaller in a Growing America*. Michael Graff, also based in Charlotte, North Carolina, won third place for Best Non-Newspaper Food Feature for "Recipes in Black and White," from the Fall 2019 issue, about a community cookbook project between two Baptist churches in Wilmington, North Carolina—one predominately Black, the other white. Irina Zhorov, a reporter and photographer based in Boone, North Carolina, won first place for Best Audio Food Journalism for "Are Prison Diets Punitive?" from the fall 2019 season of *Gravy*. Betsy Shepherd won second place in the same category for "Mahalia Jackson's Glori-fried Chicken."

All of these essays and podcast episodes—along with the entire *Gravy* catalog—are available at [southernfoodways.org](http://southernfoodways.org).

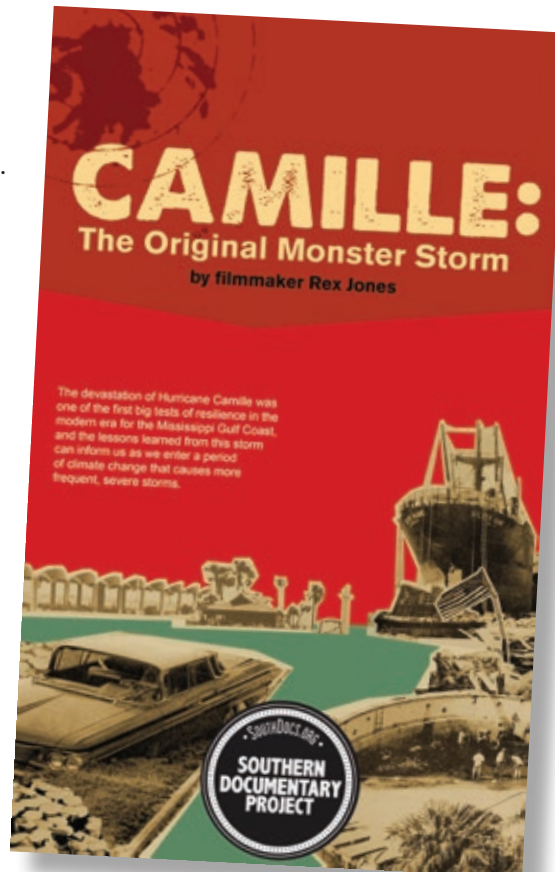
# *Camille: The Original Monster Storm*

## SouthDocs Filmmaker Releases New Documentary

In the late hours of August 17, 1969, one of the deadliest and most catastrophic natural disasters in recorded history made landfall in Waveland, Mississippi. Throughout that night and into the early hours of August 18, the Mississippi Gulf Coast was utterly ravaged by Hurricane Camille, a category-five storm whose short but incredibly powerful path of destruction took the lives of 256 people and caused \$1 billion in damage in her wake. With an estimated atmospheric pressure of 900 mb and with gusts that are estimated to have reached 200 mph, Camille is ranked as the second-most intense hurricane ever recorded in the continental US, second only to the Labor Day Hurricane of 1935 in the Florida Keys.

Rex Jones, who has been a documentary filmmaker with the Southern Documentary Project since 2011, produced his most recent film, *Camille: The Original Monster Storm*, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Hurricane Camille and its impact on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Jones, a native of Hickory, Mississippi, with an MFA in science and natural history filmmaking, is particularly “interested in the intersection of nature and culture.” He noted, “Given my position with SouthDocs at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, a film about the fiftieth anniversary of Hurricane Camille was a good fit for my background and interests.”

In spite of her monster wrath, Camille’s legacy, especially when juxtaposed with that of the much more recent Hurricane Katrina, is an overshadowed, if not forgotten event in Mississippi history. As Jones remarked, “Camille was really one of the first big tests of resilience for the Mississippi Gulf Coast and in many ways prepared the Coast for Hurricane Katrina. When Camille hit, there was no such thing as NEMA, there was no such thing as FEMA, there were no cell phones. Radar was just beginning to be used. So, the lack of technology, or the more



primitive technology, provoked a very different response during Camille than it did during Katrina.”

Although both hurricanes were brutal in their own right, the film highlights how they were notably different from each other. Jones explained, “Camille was more of a wind event and Katrina was more of a water event. With Camille, you did have storm surges and tidal waves and that sort of thing, but it was really the winds that did the damage. It was a very fast-moving storm with a small eye, so it blew right through, whereas Hurricane Katrina had a very large eye and was a very slow-moving storm, so it brought a lot of rain. It was Katrina’s water damage that was so devastating.”

*Camille*’s world premiere took place in three sold-out screenings at the Premiere LUX Cinema in Biloxi on August 16, 2019. *Camille* then had its television premiere on Mississippi Public Broadcasting

Television on August 28 and is now accessible online though the Southern Documentary Project. It is currently being distributed by the National Educational Television Association (NETA) and has shown on several PBS stations nationwide.

Jones hopes his film can serve as a frank teacher and reminder of the past. Natural disasters are bound to repeat themselves—though our responses to them may not. “Learn from the past to prepare for the future,” Jones said, “because it’s a matter of not *if*, but *when* the next storm comes.” His words may ring especially true for those living on the Gulf Coast, but even for those who reside more inland the lesson is no less valuable. “The devastation of Hurricane Camille was one of the first big tests of resilience in the modern era for the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and the lessons learned from this storm can inform us as we enter a period of climate change that causes more frequent severe storms.”

Katherine Aberle

# Center Partners with Walter Anderson Museum of Art on Digital Humanities Project

## *Zaire Love Named Curatorial Fellow in the Humanities*

The Walter Anderson Museum of Art (WAMA) announces Southern Art/Wider World, a digital humanities project made possible by a CARES Act grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), with additional support from the Mississippi Humanities Council. Southern Art/Wider World empowers dialogue about the historical and cultural themes present in WAMA's collection and the southern land, through live-streamed public programs, a mobile app, and a continued education course. Live-streamed programs will be presented between August and December 2020.

The Center for the Study of Southern Culture is a project partner and will help identify participating scholars and advise WAMA on the development of the digital continuing education course. "The Center is delighted to partner with the Walter Anderson Museum of Art," said Center director Katie McKee. "The museum's innovative plans to make their holdings virtually accessible, supplemented with the interdisciplinary insights of scholars at our Center, promise to secure an even wider reach for their collection that will extend beyond the short term."

The Mississippi Humanities Council will further advise WAMA on digital strategies. Its existing support of WAMA's humanities programming augments that of the NEH. "This grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities will help support one of our state's leading cultural institutions and enable them to respond to the current crisis in innovative ways," said Stuart Rockoff, director of the Mississippi Humanities Council. "The Mississippi Humanities Council is excited to be an advisory partner in the project."

Southern Art/Wider World also supports a new position, the Curatorial Fellow in the Humanities, who will help



**Recent alumnus Zaire Love is the new Curatorial Fellow in the Humanities at the Walter Anderson Museum of Art.**



manage media production, research, and program design related to the project. The position will be held by Zaire Love, a multidisciplinary artist and filmmaker, whose work is an ode to being Black and southern in America. Love earned a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre at Spelman College, a Master of Education from Houston Baptist University, and, in May

of 2020, a Master of Fine Arts in Documentary Expression from the University of Mississippi.

"This is an exciting time to bring my love of southern storytelling through many mediums to the Walter Anderson Museum of Art," said Love. "Mississippi has always been a land of great innovation, art, and culture, and it's time to let the world in on it through diverse lenses."

"Through his coastal lens, Walter Inglis Anderson sought to make sense of the worlds around him, engaging themes from transcendentalism and environmental history to foodways and Depression-era labor," said Julian Rankin, director of the Walter Anderson Museum of Art. "We are committed to increasing access to the treasured collection in service to new contemporary voices and understandings that speak to the interconnectedness of southern and American ways of life."

# University Presents First Diversity Innovator Awards

*Jodi Skipper Recognized for Commitment to Equity in the Community, Classroom, and Research*

The inaugural class of University of Mississippi Diversity Innovator Award recipients are professors who have found ways to not only serve their communities, but also strive to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion principles into their teaching and research, as well as the lives of their students.

One of the recipients is Jodi Skipper, associate professor of anthropology and Southern Studies. Carrie Smith, an assistant professor of psychology, and James M. “J. T.” Thomas, an associate professor of sociology and anthropology, are the other two recipients.

“The recipients of the inaugural Diversity Innovator award have made exemplary contributions to the University of Mississippi and are all very deserving of this distinction,” said Shawnboda Mead, interim vice chancellor for diversity and community engagement. “Each of them has promoted diversity, equity, and inclusion in their scholarship and service to the university.”

Skipper, who also was nominated for the 2020 Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning Award for Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion, was recognized for her work on Behind the Big House, a slavery interpretation program based in Holly Springs. Since 2012 she has been working with friends Chelius Carter and Jenifer Eggleston, who own an antebellum home in downtown Holly Springs that includes a slave-connected dwelling.

Skipper and her students help develop program content and guide tours. They also work with Gracing the Table, a group that helps facilitate conversations about healing the impacts of slavery in the present. “It’s nice to be recognized for work that I have been privileged to do,” Skipper said. “Thanks to interested students, colleagues like Drs. Carolyn Freiwald and Shennette Garrett-Scott, and a supportive network in Holly Springs, I have been able to keep going.”

“This work is not easy but can be made a lot easier with institutional structures that fully understand and support faculty, staff, and students who want to see the university’s mission to transform communities through. This award signals one of more recent university attempts to do just that, since the establishment of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement.”

Recipients of the award get a \$1,000 grant to support

Jodi Skipper



their professional development and research efforts. “Our division is committed to the elevation of faculty and staff who are meaningfully committed to engaging principles of diversity and community engagement in their work,” Mead said. “Often, this work requires thoughtful planning, preparation, and relationship building to execute well. This award and the corresponding professional development funding is one way we want to honor that work.”

J. B. Clark

# A Fall Semester in a Virtual World

## Center Faculty Discuss Teaching during a Pandemic

When classes were abruptly canceled in March, most people believed the fall would return to normal. However, Covid-19 numbers continue to climb, and most Southern Studies classes are either entirely remote or hybrid for this semester.

Brian Foster is teaching the SST 101 course remotely, with the theme of “The ‘Sipp.” Foster, assistant professor of sociology and Southern Studies, will have the class divided into four sections, each corresponding to the major geographic areas of the state: the Gulf Coast, the Piney Woods, the Delta, and the Hill Country.

“We’ll read, watch, and listen to material (scholarship, oral histories, documentaries, podcasts, music) that, if things go well, will teach us about the history and culture of these regions, with attention to their significance for the state at large,” Foster said.

The main thing he learned from going remote earlier this year is that regular communication with students is important. “Over the summer I sent daily morning announcement emails. This semester, I suspect I’ll do something similar. Maybe biweekly emails with announcements, reminders, resources, and favorite quotes,” Foster said.

He also emphasized giving students how-to instructions for what they need to do. “Don’t assume they’ll know,” he said. “And, even if you assume they’ll know, still give instructions.” Also, he says no single-method approach is sufficient. “Synchronous only isn’t enough. Asynchronous only isn’t enough. There should be elements of both. Prerecorded mini-lectures, links to YouTube, Blackboard quizzes, all supplemented with periodic synchronous Zoom calls, supplemented with

the option of one-on-one or small-group office hours,” Foster said.

Another tip is the use of batch assignments, by giving students big blocks of time to work on several types of assignments, all to be submitted on a given date. “For instance, in my summer courses, I gave students three due dates, all on Friday,” Foster said. “On each due date, students had three or four reading responses and one other assignment due. Some students worked ahead. Some waited until the day of to do everything, but they really appreciated the flexibility. And it made my job so much easier by not having to keep up with a hundred due dates, emails about due dates, and emails about missed deadlines.”

Catarina Passidomo will be teaching her usual SST 555 Southern Foodways course and says that she feels like the spring semester taught her much about what not to do, but this time, there is the benefit of planning for disaster rather than it just sneaking up out of the blue. “I’m trying to come around to thinking of remote teaching from something other than a deficit perspective; when, like me, you are accustomed to teaching and learning in person, moving things online feels like giving up a lot of what has worked reasonably well in the past,” said Passidomo, Southern Foodways Alliance Associate Professor of Southern Studies. “But I can imagine framing it differently—thinking of remote teaching as opening up new possibilities and forcing all of us to do things a little or a lot differently. For my foodways

seminar, this could mean more interactive Zooming into one another’s kitchens and eating spaces—something we’re not able to do in a traditional classroom. We’ll still be doing a lot of reading, of course, but we won’t be sitting around a table talking for three hours, and maybe that’s a good thing.”

Ralph Eubanks decided to teach his two courses in person. The first, an honors section of SST 101, focuses on southern identity and memory, and the second is ENG 349, a special-topics English course called *Must the Writer Crusade: Civil Rights and Literature*, which is a course he developed while at Millsaps and has taught at UM before.

“My decision to teach in person was motivated by the events of this past summer,” Eubanks said. “There has been so much debate on issues surrounding statues, cultural memory, and the whole idea of southern identity and exceptionalism, I thought this called for being able to have the discussions in person. We read quite a variety of texts, including excerpts from Grace Elizabeth Hale’s *Making Whiteness*, Albert Murray’s *The Omni-Americans*, and Lewis Nordan’s *Wolf Whistle*, alongside Dave Tell’s writings on the geography of the Emmett Till murder. I worried that I would have a difficult time reaching these students virtually on a topic that in so many ways demands in-person discussion.”

Eubanks says that for him, teaching in person this fall is a form of activism. “I have not been to a single protest even though I have been living in an epicenter of protest and even can walk two miles from

my house to Washington DC's Black Lives Matter Plaza," Eubanks said. "Since I have students who want to engage on these difficult topics, I want to do that by looking at them directly, even if it is masked and with six feet of social distance."

Ted Ownby will be teaching a hybrid version of the new SST 107: Introduction to Southern Studies through Gender and Sexuality. Ownby knows the health conditions continue to be uncertain, and will mix online instruction through Zoom and Blackboard with some face-to-face instruction when the latter seems a healthy possibility. "The goal is to broaden the perspective of students and to encourage people to think of those things in a way they haven't before," Ownby said. "I'm trying to find a strategy where students can show they are learning from readings without just rehashing them. It will be my first time to assign the *Gender* volume of the *New Encyclopedia for Southern Culture*, and I want to ask students to show they understand some basic concepts and representations by summarizing some kind of reference to something they know or can research."

Ownby's other texts include Lillian Smith's *Killers of the Dream*, Ida B. Wells, *The Light of Truth*, and John Marszalek III's *Coming out of the Magnolia Closet: Same-Sex Couples in Mississippi*. "I think it will be an intriguing semester since there are things we can't do, like go to the library or talk to people, so we won't do an oral history project," Ownby said. "I'm trying to plan, but not to be so specific that I can't turn it around. And I encourage people to stay as safe as possible."

Rebecca Lauck Cleary



## *Mississippi Encyclopedia* Partners on Tri-state Mapping Project, Publishes New Entries

For the past year, the *Mississippi Encyclopedia* has teamed up with the Southern Literary Trail, the *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, and the *Encyclopedia of Alabama* to create an online collaborative encyclopedic story map that lets viewers explore the literary South from Savannah, Georgia, to Natchez, Mississippi, without even leaving home. This story map lets you visit the homes and landmarks that shaped and inspired the South's most celebrated authors, with links included that take the reader directly to the author's entry in each online encyclopedia. The project can be found online at [www.georgiahumanities.org/southern-literary-trail-story-map](http://www.georgiahumanities.org/southern-literary-trail-story-map).

The Southern Literary Trail celebrates acclaimed twentieth-century writers and playwrights of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. Those Mississippi authors included in the project are Shelby Foote (Greenville), Walker Percy (Greenville), Stark Young (Como), William Faulkner (Oxford and New Albany), Borden Deal (New Albany), Richard Wright (Natchez and Jackson), Margaret Walker Alexander (Jackson), Eudora Welty (Jackson and Columbus), and Tennessee Williams (Clarksdale and Columbus).

In addition to teaming with the *New Georgia Encyclopedia* and the *Encyclopedia of Alabama* on the mapping project, the *Mississippi Encyclopedia* has recently published several new entries online, including the overview essay "Architecture" and entries on the 1969 Supreme Court school-desegregation ruling in *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education*, on writer and educator Blanche Colton Williams, on civil rights activist Benjamin Murph, on professional wrestler James "Kamala, the Ugandan Giant" Harris, on Franklin Delano Roosevelt's visits to Mississippi, on journalist and University of Mississippi professor Curtis Wilkie, and on the tornado that devastated Tupelo in 1936.

Visit the *Mississippi Encyclopedia* online at [www.mississippiencyclopedia.org](http://www.mississippiencyclopedia.org).

# Telling the Stories of Home

## Christina Huff Begins Assistantship with Emmett Till Interpretive Center

Christina Huff will be the first Southern Studies graduate assistant to work with the Emmett Till Interpretive Center (ETIC). Beginning this fall, Huff will primarily assist the Emmett Till Interpretive Center with several documentary projects. The Center for the Study of Southern Culture, as well as the University of Mississippi, collaborated with the ETIC in order to make this assistantship come to fruition.

“The goal of this project is to bring more awareness to the history of Emmett Till and what ultimately sparked the civil rights movement during the 1950s through the Emmett Till Memory Project app,” said Huff, a second-year grad student. “While working at the Emmett Till Interpretive Center, I will be assisting with the media portion of the app, such as working with other filmmakers on short documentaries, oral histories, as well as doing archival and research work.”

One of Huff’s professors mentioned the possibility of this internship last fall, and she expressed interest. Previously, she was the graduate assistant at Ole Miss Sports Productions as the sports archivist. While there, she was in charge of digitizing and archiving sports-related 16mm film, VHS, Betacam footage, and photos dating as far back as the 1930s. “Along with digitizing and archiving these materials, I also worked in the control room as a technical director during live Ole Miss soccer and basketball games,” Huff said.

ETIC executive director Patrick Weems, a 2014 graduate of the Southern Studies program, said he is excited to have Huff join his team in Sumner, Mississippi, and thanked Katie McKee for her support in



Emmett Till Interpretive Center

ASHLEIGH COLEMAN

helping with this partnership. “We are appreciative of Christina sharing her documentary talents with us this semester,” Weems said. “Her work will help share the story of Emmett Till in a new medium and will help to document the reconciliation process taking place today in Tallahatchie County and the Delta.”

The funding for the assistantship is provided by a grant through the Institute of Museum and Library Services, as well as funds from the UM College of Liberal Arts, the Division for Diversity and Community Engagement, the Graduate School, the Provost’s Office, and the Center for the Study of Southern Culture.

The three-year grant is providing funds to develop the Emmett Till Memory Project, a mobile app that provides a virtual tour of the sites involved in the Emmett Till murder. “Christina will work with our documentarian, Dr. Pablo Correa from the University of Saint Joseph, and help produce ten short films about ten sites on the app, including the Tallahatchie

County courthouse where the trial of Emmett Till’s murderers was held in 1955 and the river site where Till’s body was found,” Weems said. “She will also assist in an oral history project documenting the commemoration of Emmett Till’s murder in the Delta. She will help conduct and record oral histories, all of which will be preserved in the oral history archives at the University of Southern Mississippi, as well as in the Emmett Till Archives at Florida State University.”

Huff said she is incredibly excited about this opportunity. “Being able to utilize my documentary skills to tell incredible stories about communities in my home state of Mississippi fits right into my vision of wanting to work in academia,” Huff said. “This assistantship is going to give me the tools to not only become a better documentarian, but to become a better listener and a better friend to the communities I hope one day to work closely with.”

Rebecca Lauck Cleary

# New Endowment Supports MA and MFA Students

## Bethany Fitts Named First Joyner Fellow

In 2017 Ernest Joyner III of Tupelo surprised his wife, Jamie, on her birthday with the creation of the Jamie Joyner Endowment in Southern Studies. The endowment provides funds that contribute to a graduate fellowship in the Southern Studies MA or MFA program.

Jamie Joyner, a Tupelo resident who was a member of the advisory committee for the Center for the Study of Southern Culture for twenty years, first became interested in the Center when she met former director Bill Ferris. “I decided to create the endowment because of her dedication to the Southern Studies program,” Ernie Joyner said in 2017.

“We are deeply grateful to the Joyners for their support,” said Katie McKee, director of the Center. “The number of applicants to our graduate program continues to grow, and resources like those provided by the Joyners help us attract and retain top students.”

Thanks to their generous gift, Bethany Fitts is the first Joyner Fellow this fall. Fitts is a Tupelo native who graduated in May 2019 with a double major in English and history from the University of Mississippi’s Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College, and her assistantship will be working with the Southern Foodways Alliance.

“My favorite courses from my senior year of college focused on southern literature, history, and documentary,” Fitts said. “I was also super blessed to be able to work with Kiese Laymon and write a senior thesis that tried to press against



Bethany Fitts

structures of both literary form and southernness. As a writer and life-long Mississippi resident, I decided I wanted to continue learning and growing in these areas.”

In 2018 Fitts received the Barksdale Award, which was established in 2005 to encourage students to test themselves in environments beyond the classroom, teaching lab, or library. Fitts spent time in Washington state and in Hawaii, gaining ground-level experience with several kindred topics: poetry publication, conservation, and W. S. Merwin, two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize for poetry and a founder of a conservancy housing more than four hundred species of endangered palm trees.

In Washington, with the well-respected Copper Canyon Press, she gained hands-on experience with everything about poetry publication, from helping to organize community events to editing and marketing.

At the Merwin Conservancy in Maui, Fitts worked in its education program and alongside the conservancy’s gardener.

While an undergraduate at UM, Fitts served as editorial assistant for the *Alumni Review* and as creative content editor for the undergraduate *Populi* magazine. She won the English department’s Campbell Award and was named the English department’s October Student of the Month. She also volunteers with Mississippi Votes and, in 2017, was an intern with the Sunflower County Freedom Project, where she taught literacy, gardening, and creative writing.

Additionally, she received a 2019 teaching assistantship to the Czech Republic through the Fulbright US Student Program. Recipients of Fulbright grants are selected on the basis of academic or professional achievement, as well as demonstrated leadership potential in their fields.

“We are delighted that Bethany is joining our program,” McKee said. “I was on her Honors College thesis committee, and I knew then that she would make a good fit with our curriculum. Her varied interests and strong academic performance make her an ideal inaugural Joyner fellow.”

To make a gift to the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, contact Claire Moss, associate director of development at [ccmoss1@olemiss.edu](mailto:ccmoss1@olemiss.edu) or 662-915-3086. Checks also can be mailed to the University of Mississippi Foundation-CSSC, 406 University Ave., Oxford, MS 38655.

Rebecca Lauck Cleary

# Staying Grounded to Finish

Photographs by Andrea Morales

Social Distance Portraits with  
2020 Southern Studies Graduates

Covid-19 has impacted graduate students across the nation, each at various points in their academic careers. Many were trying to finish their degree programs, and this past spring had all of us at one point or another asking, “What can I do to remain productive and creative during this time of stress and anxiety?”

In her own attempt to remain creative, Andrea Morales, Southern Documentary Project producer, photographer, and current MFA in Documentary Expression student, photographed recent Southern Studies graduates at their homes, and this past summer the Center highlighted our May MA and MFA graduates online by sharing Morales’s collection of photographs and their comments on how they stayed grounded during a pandemic while finishing up their projects.

Those May graduates included Olivia Terenzio, James G. Thomas, Jr., Hilary Word, Hooper Schultz, and Zaire Love. Summer MA and MFA graduates included Tyler Keith, Katherine Aberle, Chelsea Loper, Elliot Grime, Kelly Spivey, and Carlynn Crosby.



## Zaire Love

“It was tough. However, I had to get some additional footage of [my subjects] the first week of April. So I rode down on them at my granny’s house, and the spirit and the energy of that fieldwork energized me to finish. I realized that I was not creating solely for a degree and screenings. I was documenting this story because it’s needed on all fronts. I’m doing this work because I love to tell great stories. This reminder got me to the finish line.”

**THESIS:** “*The Black Men I Know*”

## Hilary Word

“First, I realized that I had to be willing to forgive myself if I wasn’t as productive every day as I would have liked. At the same time, my family’s love and support, as well as encouragement from my committee members, helped keep me focused and grounded enough to finish my thesis.”

**THESIS:** “*Post-Soul Speculation: An Exploration of Afro-Southern Speculative Fiction*”



“

## James G. Thomas, Jr.

One of the things that's kept me grounded enough to finish my thesis and to propel me forward in so many ways has been my time spent outdoors, away from the computer and the electric whirl of all these devices. I've been exploring some of the forests in Lafayette County surrounding Oxford, watching the world come back to life after a long winter, and that solitude has given me a lot of quiet time to slow down and think, not only about my work and other projects, but about how we choose to live our lives—about what we find important in this world and why. My wife and daughter joining me for some of those walks in nature has reinforced and helped shape the conclusions of those Arcadian musings and ruminations.”

**THESIS:** “The Lebanese in Mississippi: An Oral History”



“

## Hooper Schultz

Working on mutual aid through the United Campus Workers kept me in touch with my community and enabled me to feel instantly connected despite physical isolation.”

**THESIS:** “The Southern Front: Gay Liberation Activists in the US South and Public History through Audiovisual Exhibition”

“

## Olivia Terenzio

I feel like I'm cheating because I really finished pre-pandemic, so I'm not sure if I would have had the same experience working in the current climate. But for me, there is some comfort in just putting your head down and doing the work, and (hopefully) getting into a flow. It's a semblance of control when everything feels uncertain.”

**THESIS:** “Feijoada and Hoppin' John: Foodways, Collective Identity, and Belonging in Brazil and the American South”



# Local Life, Interrupted:

## Pandemic Views of Northern Mississippi

This summer, students in David Wharton's 534 Documentary Photography class showcased a virtual exhibit of a collection of photographs via the Center's Facebook page and Vimeo. Students in the class were Annemarie Anderson, Eli Buguey, Parker Galloway, and Shea Stewart.

The photographs, taken in the spring of 2020, were part of a group project focusing on the effects of the pandemic on our north Mississippi surroundings. Themes included were Signs of the Times, Restrictions, and An Empty World.

"Just as students were about to start their 'up close and personal' photography of human activity, the pandemic surfaced, along with social distancing and the subsequent lockdown," said Wharton. "Personal contact was out of the question. We held the remainder of our class meetings online via Zoom. Fairly quickly, we decided to forego the individual projects and instead focus, as a group, on the effects of the pandemic on our north Mississippi surroundings."

The full exhibition, *Local Life, Interrupted: Pandemic Views of Northern Mississippi*, can be found at [vimeo.com/436578158](https://vimeo.com/436578158). The cover image for this issue of the *Southern Register* is by Shea Stewart, also from this series. Here are some images from that exhibition.



(left) Eli Buguey, (below) Shea Stewart





Annemarie Anderson

Parker Galloway



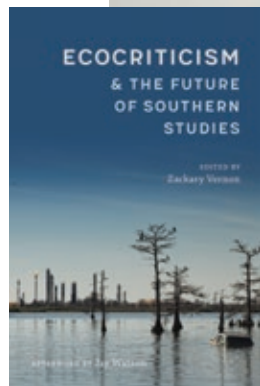
# The Revolution Might Be Televised

## Joey Thompson Teaches about the American South through Popular Music

If you think karaoke can only be performed late night in a bar, Joey Thompson would tell you it can also be used in the classroom—as a way to analyze a song and learn about the meaning behind the words. Thompson, who earned his MA in Southern Studies in 2013, recently became an assistant professor of history at Mississippi State University and taught an undergraduate course on post-1945 US history, as well as a new class he designed called Race and Twentieth-Century Popular Music.

“The music class is a general survey of popular music studies from blackface minstrelsy through the rise of MTV with an emphasis on the way the music industry can both challenge and perpetuate white supremacy,” said Thompson.

When his class abruptly went online this spring due to the Covid-19 pandemic, he had to pivot to make the transition to remote teaching and learning as seamless as possible for the students. So, he recorded his lectures and met with students through Zoom whenever they needed to talk. “Fortunately, I had assigned final papers and projects rather than in-class tests, so I did not have to adapt final exams to the online format,” Thompson said. “This included a digital project for the music class called ‘Critical Karaoke’ in which students recorded



Joey Thompson

themselves reading/performing their close analysis of a song while the song played. They can only speak for the length of the song, so they had to tailor

their analysis to fit their chosen song. That turned out to be a fun assignment for them to record, and it gave us a way to connect virtually, even if it wasn't in real time.”

He says his time at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture influenced his doctorate work and his research by teaching him how to read closely. “What I mean is that, because we read everything from novels to critical theory to historical works, I learned to analyze different kinds of texts about the South,” Thompson said. “That training prepared me for the diversity of scholarship I encountered at the doctoral level and helped me teach about a wide range of sources in the classroom. I also think it made

me a better researcher because it taught me to see and hear the South outside of its geographical borders. I might not have thought about what it means for country music to spread around the world, which was part of my dissertation work, if not for my training in Southern Studies.”

While an undergraduate at the University of Alabama in the early 2000s, his advisor, Jim Salem, told him about the Southern Studies program because he thought Thompson's interests aligned with what was happening at the Center, and Salem even gave him his old copies of the *Southern Register*. However, instead of heading straight to Oxford after he earned his BA in American studies and anthropology from the University of Alabama in 2002, he took a nine-year break from school. “When I felt like I wanted to return, the Southern Studies program seemed like the perfect place to do the kind of research I wanted to do,” Thompson said. “It also seemed like the kind of



program that would give me options. If I wanted to pursue public history or museum work, Southern Studies could give me that. If I wanted to combine academics with something creative like documentary making, Southern Studies could give me that. As it turned out, I took to the academic route and landed at the University of Virginia for my doctorate after finishing the Southern Studies program.”

His Southern Studies thesis tracked the 150-year history of a song called “The Good Old Rebel” and how popular music informs and perpetuates white supremacist, anti-government politics. “An ex-Confederate poet named Innes Randolph wrote the ‘Good Old Rebel’ as a joke to poke fun at uneducated, unreconstructed white southerners,” Thompson said. “Ironically, people have adopted this song as a sincere anthem of neo-Confederate sentiment ever since. My thesis created a kind of genealogy for the song, showing how white southerners incorporated it as part of their folklore in the early twentieth century, all the way up to its life on YouTube in our current day.”

Thompson, who plays the mandolin and is always interested in listening to new music, expanded on his zeal for the topic in a recent volume of *Ecocriticism and the Future of Southern Studies*, edited by Zackary Vernon, with his chapter, “‘Home Is Where the Hatred Is’: Gil Scott-Heron’s Toxic Domestic Spaces and the Rhizomatic South.” “I had already conducted some research into Scott-Heron and the way he used his music to critique the military-industrial complex, which I presented at the American Studies Association conference in 2016,” Thompson said. “Initially, I planned to include that material in my dissertation. When that project took a more concentrated focus on the country music industry, I had to cut the Scott-Heron section. I saw a call for chapters that Zackary Vernon

issued for *Ecocriticism and the Future of Southern Studies*, and I knew I had a good fit that just needed some additional research. I’m very thankful he decided to include it.”

Thompson’s research on Scott-Heron began while he was a teaching assistant for Claudrena Harold’s course “From Motown to Hip-Hop” at the University of Virginia, where he earned another MA degree in 2015 and his doctorate in 2019. “I had loved Scott-Heron’s music for a long time, but Professor Harold taught and wrote about him as a southerner, which was new to me,” Thompson said. “Because of her, I began seeing the ways his music connected to my research on the Pentagon and southern culture.”

In the *Ecocriticism* chapter, Thompson points out the structure of the rhizome, a botanical term for roots sending up shoots progressively from the upper surface. “My use of the rhizome as a way to think about culture came from reading *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari,” Thompson said. “Mel Lassiter, my friend and fellow Southern Studies alum, recommended it to me after reading it in her doctoral program at UNC. I might have read it too simplistically—I’m certainly no theoretician—but I found that the way those writers described culture as a rhizomatic root system that spreads undetected and then sends shoots up into the world as a helpful way of thinking about how elements of the South spread over spaces and time. It helps us see and hear southern culture in places outside of the geographical South.”

With such a successful base of knowledge from Southern Studies, Thompson said he challenges upcoming students to think about what the South was, is, and will become. “It might sound straightforward, but I think people need a reminder that there are multiple Souths existing within—and beyond—this one geographical region. That can

make studying a region, or regional identity, a tricky scholarly endeavor,” he said. “How are you going to write about the ‘South’ with any specificity or authority when there are so many Souths to explore? There isn’t an easy solution to that, but I think that the Southern Studies program, at its best, gives students a chance to find an answer for themselves. To that end, I would also encourage students to take classes outside of their comfort zone. Are you more inclined towards historical studies? Then take a class with a sociologist. Are you more interested in literary analysis? Take a documentary photography class. One of the great strengths of this program is that it allows us to explore different styles and approaches to scholarship. Taking advantage of that helps students grow as scholars and creators.”

At the moment, Thompson is expanding his dissertation, “Cold War Country: Music Row, the Pentagon, and the Sound of American Patriotism,” into a book. He examines how the Defense Department and Nashville’s country music industry created a business relationship during the last half of the twentieth century. “In the early 1950s, the Pentagon began using country music to create recruitment campaigns that targeted white southern men and women to join the military. This connection to the armed forces allowed the country music industry to use the military’s global network of installations to sell its products and promote its artists to service members,” Thompson said. “The military also created country music entertainment by airing thousands of hours of the genre over the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service. I trace this story over forty years of Cold War history to show how white southerners learned to embrace the military-industrial complex because of this connection between the Pentagon and Music Row.”

Rebecca Lauck Cleary

# AT HOME IN THE *Sunshine State*

## A CONVERSATION WITH SIMONE DELERME

*By James G. Thomas, Jr.*

Simone Delorme is the McMullan Associate Professor of Southern Studies and associate professor of anthropology at the University of Mississippi. Her new book, *Latino Orlando: Suburban Transformation and Racial Conflict*, published in February 2020 by the University Press of Florida, investigates the migration of Puerto Ricans and other Latinos to Central Florida and the ways in which they have shaped the landscape and soundscape in the region. Focusing on the four counties that comprise the Greater Orlando area, Delorme describes the push/pull factors that made those counties the leading destination for Puerto Rican migrants since the 1990s, and she uncovers ways in which those Latinos have both retained their Latin American culture while forming and embracing a white, middle-class racial identity.

I caught up with Delorme this summer to discuss her new book, as well as to ask her about her current project in Memphis, Tennessee.

**James G. Thomas, Jr.:** In the prologue you say you want to “explain your subjectivities and positionality so [your] connections to the diasporic community are clear.” As a way of doing so here, will you tell me about how you came to this project?

**Simone Delorme:** My research was always personal to me. My family is Puerto Rican and Haitian. My grandparents migrated from the Caribbean and settled in New York City, and I became fascinated by the Puerto Rican-concentrated ethnic enclave in East Harlem where they settled. The place-identity was distinct because of the cultural influence of Puerto Ricans, and so I initially intended to research Latinization and Puerto Rican community formation where my family lived. However, when I started to look at census data it became clear that

Simone Delorme



Puerto Ricans were increasingly moving to the US South, to Orlando, Florida, in particular. So, I decided to follow the migration south and do fieldwork in what was identified by social scientists as one of the largest Puerto Rican concentrated suburbs in the region.

**JGT:** I’m always interested in researchers’ methodologies, especially those from across disciplines, and you use a wide variety of sources in your investigation, including new media.

**SD:** I always use a mixed-methods approach when doing my research. I’m trained as a cultural anthropologist, so I do rely heavily on participant observation and both semi-structured and informal interviews. However, I started with the archives and went through newspaper coverage of the Puerto Rican migration beginning in the early ’80s until the contemporary moment. Then I moved to Buenaventura Lakes, the Puerto Rican-concentrated suburb I mentioned earlier, and had a roommate from Venezuela and one from Mexico. I moved to various houses and rented rooms throughout the two-plus years of my fieldwork to build my social networks and gain informants to help me learn about social and cultural life in Orlando. New media came in when I tried to understand how the suburban community and the Puerto Ricans who resided there were perceived by others. I used virtual forums and blogs about the community to document the type of commentary that was circulating online, when individuals were protected by anonymous user names.

**JGT:** You mention your Venezulealan and Mexican roommates, but in the book you focus primarily on the Puerto Rican experience in the Greater Orlando area. Did you discover that other Hispanic groups’ experiences were different enough to either complicate the Puerto Rican story there or make the Puerto Rican experience unique? In other words, if you opened this study up to

investigate a broader spectrum of Latinos, would you draw the same or similar conclusions?

**SD:** I think the Puerto Rican experience is unique because of the population's citizenship status. During my interviews with other Latinos and while living in homes with undocumented Latino immigrants it became clear that Puerto Ricans were perceived as privileged because they are US citizens and can therefore access resources and services easier.

**JGT:** You began this project with questions about how "social class identities and social status of Puerto Rican residents in Buenaventura Lakes [were] articulated, interpreted, defended, and performed." What surprising questions did these questions lead to, and were some of the answers to these questions surprising as well?

**SD:** Part of the reason I selected Buenaventura Lakes for my field site was because it contained a large number of Puerto Rican homeowners. Social scientists described the community as middle class and when it was initially constructed it was marketed as a luxurious subdivision with a golf course and country club. By the time I arrived in 2010 all that was shut down and the reputation of the community was very negative. I was surprised to find that the perception was of a "suburban slum."

**JGT:** Tell me about your choice to use the first-person voice in your writing. How was this story your story as well?

**SD:** I never imagined writing the book any other way. I think in the discipline of anthropology we are encouraged to be self-reflexive about our own identities, positionality, and the ways that impacts our research process. And we tend to write ourselves into our ethnography since we are constructing and shaping the narrative. Writing the book was a way to tell not only a story about Latino migration to Orlando, but also a way to write about my experiences living and conducting research in Orlando.

**JGT:** In the book you write, "In the years that followed the development of the Buenaventura Lakes suburb, an ethnic enclave formed, expanded, and contributed to the Latinization and globalization of Greater Orlando." How did this enclave transform the culture of this part of Central Florida?

**SD:** The migration of Latinos to Buenaventura Lakes transformed the landscape and the soundscape. Some of my informants would say it felt like you were in Puerto Rico when you came to Buenaventura Lakes and the surrounding community. You could go into a local store and be greeted in Spanish and hear nothing but the Spanish language being spoken, for example.

**JGT:** You tell us that there was—perhaps still is—a non-Hispanic white insistence that Latinos "speak English."

In what ways have Latinos in the Greater Orlando area resisted that push to assimilate? Did you find that push to assimilate unique to that part of Florida, as opposed to, for example, South Florida?

**SD:** I don't think the push to assimilate is unique. It happens all over the country because of language ideologies people have that equate being American with speaking English. However, Latinos were able to resist because of the size of the population in Central Florida. In Osceola County, where Buenaventura Lakes is located, Latinos are the majority. Therefore, the Spanish language became a part of everyday life, and it was an asset to be bilingual. At times it felt like a necessity.

**JGT:** Ultimately, *Latino Orlando* is about Hispanic social-class formation, social-class mobility, and identity formation. In the book you say, "Hispanics in Florida were far more likely to identify as white than Hispanics in New York and New Jersey." In the non-Hispanic white-dominated culture of Greater Orlando, did you find Puerto Ricans often attempting to avoid, escape, or circumnavigate their Latino identity?

**SD:** I found that some of the upper class, wealthier Latinos I interviewed tried to distance themselves from Latinos they considered "lower class." I saw that separation when it came to residential choices, organizational membership, and choices about where to socialize. I don't think they were rejecting their Latino identity, though. They didn't automatically feel solidarity with other Latinos based on their ethnic identity. Social class mattered, too.

**JGT:** In that case, in your conclusion you ask the question, "Will the category of whiteness expand to include some Latinos?" Do you believe that potential inclusion is dependent on social class, or is it more closely connected to other factors? Is the data trending toward that expansion?

**SD:** I definitely think social class matters! There are other factors that I explore, too, like language. Individuals who spoke Spanish were perceived as non-white despite their claims to a white racial identity. I think the category of whiteness will include some Latinos, but probably not the majority.

**JGT:** Finally, have you kept in touch with any of your informants? And how is your current work in West Tennessee an extension of your work in Central Florida?

**SD:** Yes, via social media primarily. My methodology between the two projects is very similar, and the questions I'm asking are similar. I'm trying to document the experience of migrants that have concentrated in particular parts of Memphis. However, the experiences of individuals are place-specific.

# Promoting, Producing, and Performing the Arts

## Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters Announces Winners and Nominees

This year the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters (MIAL) honored several artists, musicians, and writers with connections to the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, including Ann Abadie, Jimmy Cajoleas, and Susan Bauer Lee.

Center associate director emerita Ann Abadie won the 2020 Noel Polk Lifetime Achievement Award. “Since 1975 Ann Abadie has been a driving force at the University of Mississippi’s Center for the Study of Southern Culture, contributing to its success as the institution’s associate director, as the editor of numerous book projects, and as the cofounder of the Center’s annual Oxford Conference for the Book,” a statement on the MIAL website reads. “Now the Center’s associate director emerita, Abadie has spent the past five decades—and counting—working mostly behind the scenes on educational and literary projects across our state. A devoted ally to the arts and to the written word, she is most deserving of this award.”

Abadie says she has admired the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters since 1978 when literature scholar and gifted author Noel Polk proposed that twenty-four prominent leaders throughout the state join him in founding an organization to recognize individuals for their contributions to the literary, musical, and visual arts.

Two years later, at its first annual meeting, MIAL presented three awards. Since then, the number and categories of awards have grown



from three to eight, with occasional awards for special and lifetime achievements. MIAL has presented 254 awards to individuals and 10 for groups and special projects, like Mississippi Public Broadcasting, the University Press of Mississippi, and the *Mississippi Encyclopedia*.

“Being a member of this marvelous organization has brought me infinite pleasure, and I am deeply touched and greatly honored to receive the MIAL 2020 award named in honor of Noel Polk, my longtime friend, an internationally celebrated scholar and author, and one of Mississippi’s most significant leaders in arts and letters,” Abadie said.

In addition to the Lifetime Achievement Award, there are eight categories, including Fiction, Nonfiction, Youth Literature, Visual Art, Music Composition (Classical), Music Composition (Contemporary), Photography, and Poetry.

Jimmy Cajoleas, who was born in Jackson, Mississippi, earned his BA in Southern Studies and his MFA in creative writing from the University of Mississippi. He was nominated in the Youth Literature category for his novels *Minor Prophets* and *The Rambling*, both published in 2019. After their mother’s death, two siblings in Cajoleas’s *Minor Prophets* must navigate the strange world



Jimmy Cajoleas



of the occult, and *The Rambling* is middle grade fantasy about family and the power of storytelling.

Cajoleas has been a celebrated young adult writer since he published his first book *Goldeline* in 2017. Of *Minor Prophets*, *Booklist* said, “The narrative is steeped in unsettling mystery and surreal mysticism as truth bleeds into a fever dream indecipherable from reality. This is a fascinating, well-written examination of family bonds and religious fervor stretched just to the point of snapping,” and of *The Rambling*, *Kirkus Reviews* said, “Vivid imagery and thought-provoking musings make this an ideal read-aloud adventure.”

“This was my first time to be nominated, and it’s quite the honor,” said Cajoleas, who currently lives in New York.

In the Music Composition (Contemporary) category, Tim Lee and Susan Bauer Lee of the duo Bark won for their *Terminal Everything* album.

Tim Lee said this album is a slight departure for them, and that the whole project was quite cathartic and satisfying.

“In addition to the fact that we’ve grown as a recording entity, which is pretty different for a duo versus a larger combo, the subject matter is more personal,” Tim said. “These ten songs were all written in the

aftermath of the loss of Susan’s dad, my mom, some close friends, and longtime canine companions. We opted to take a fairly unflinching approach to documenting that time, and I like to think it comes through in the songs.”

Susan says “This World” and “Walk Small” are her two favorite songs.

“I remember when Tim brought ‘This World’ in and we started working on it. It made me cry,” she said. “And ‘Walk Small,’ when we started playing that song live I always introduced it by saying that it’s about being humbled by someone you loved very much and losing them. Both songs are mostly about Tim’s mom.”

Susan, a graphic designer (the graphic designer of the *Southern Register*, in fact), created the cover art for *Terminal Everything*, and says she knew before the record was finished what she had in mind for the artwork. It turned out exactly how she wanted.

“I had never cut linoleum or made a print in my life, but the label that put out the record is also a letterpress and everyone was generous with helping me get started and shepherding me through the process,” she said. “The art basically symbolizes our

worlds being blown apart and the two of us hanging on to each other. Our parents are represented in the art by two tiny marks . . . a red dot on Tim’s hand represents his mother, whose name was Dot, and a diamond shape on my hand, which references a ham radio logo. My dad was a ham radio guy for as long as I could remember. The printing was a hot, sweaty, physical, cathartic thing, and when it was done, we were very happy with the results.”

When they first saw the nomination list, Tim and Susan saw many names of friends and artists of whom they were fans.

“When we found out we won, it was really a great feeling,” Tim said. “This is not a popularity contest, but an award based on the artistry of your work. We’re rock ‘n’ roll folks, and I think it’s easy to overlook the art in that form. It’s very gratifying.

“It is a super cool honor, and I was thrilled when we got the news.” Susan said.

The Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters’ juried competition is one of a kind in the state, with carefully selected judges, chosen from out of state, who are prominent in their field. Supported by members,

MIAL is privately funded, self-perpetuating, and non-profit.

Although the 2020 Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters banquet has been cancelled as a result of the Covid-19 virus, there are plans to

recognize the accomplishments of the award recipients. Among these plans is a joint celebration of the 2020 and 2021 winners in early June 2021 in Pass Christian, Mississippi.

To learn more about the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters and other 2020 winners, visit [www.ms-arts-letters.org](http://www.ms-arts-letters.org).

Rebecca Lauck Cleary



LOST ART PHOTOGRAPHY

Tim Lee and Susan Bauer Lee of Bark

# Surrender to the Beat Temptation: Tyler Keith's *The Last Drag*

The best rock and roll records always have a push/pull dichotomy. There's a desire to break free, to break away, to get clear of whoever and whatever is doing the holding back, but there's also a yearning for love, acceptance, understanding. The first song on Tyler Keith's *The Last Drag*, "You Can't Go Home Again," is a raucous take on that old Thomas Wolfe-ism. It's a song that recognizes how impossible it is to return to the place that spit you out or that you ran screaming from, to return to a past that can't be and maybe never was. But three songs later, in "Take Me Home," Keith sings, "I'm tired of feeling so alone, yeah, yeah / Trying to make a connection on my telephone / All I want is for you to take me home." It's a song born of exhaustion, the kind that comes from a life spent on the road or scraping by in dead-end jobs, and Keith makes it sound especially desperate, given the first track's declaration that there is no home to go to. It perfectly sets up the album's conflicted, existential tone.

Elsewhere, Keith takes the language of religion and twists it in the name of black humor. "I'm a born again virgin," he sings on the second track, tongue firmly in cheek. "I'm saving myself." Phony virtue and hypocrisy are the qualities he rails against most. One song later: "Shame, lies, and cruelty are the burdens I must bear." He has it out for preachers sick with hate, and he sees them everywhere. Keith's from Pensacola, Florida, but has lived in the North Mississippi Hill Country for thirty years (and earned his master's in Southern Studies in 2011 and his MFA in Documentary Expression in 2020), and his songs are hung with the heaviness of existing in a place where traditional notions of sin crunch like gravel under your feet. Constant calls for repentance poison the water.

The album evokes feelings of nostalgia without ever coming off as saccharine or damp-hearted. This is gut-level stuff. Raw, profound. We're threaded into the narratives, lit up by sensory details. Parking lots, roads, rivers, bars, stages, haunted houses of the mind. It's thoroughly carnivalesque and even more thoroughly rooted in folk savagery. When "Down by the . . ." riffs on



"Stagger Lee," Keith rips magic from a battered old hat. "Beat Temptation" is a standout on an album full of exceptional tracks. It sounds like something that could've drifted off a record by the Shangri-Las, all hazy wonder and stained glass sparkle. "In the Parking Lot" is another song full of great yearning, focusing on a moment of purpose. "And when I tasted your tongue, I felt so undone," Keith sings, returning to that pure dream of radio love that sifts down like white powder on black chrome.

*The Last Drag* is a deeply cinematic work. At times, it feels like a lost soundtrack to a '60s biker movie or some dusty B Western where nameless men in cowboy hats haunt border towns for revenge. There are doses of Johnny Thunders in the moments when Keith sounds like he's fronting the band on stage at a sad junkie prom ("The Last Drag"), and the ghost of Jerry Lee Lewis inhabits Keith's frantic energy and even his voice. He's got the thundering confidence and compassion of a young Dion DiMucci. Suicide's masterpieces "Dream Baby Dream" and "Surrender" come to mind when Keith lets his voice wander into the ether. This is the kind of album every garage band dreams of making. Electric and muscled up and crowded with good ideas. The sound is expansive and echoey, made of leather and grease and broken hearts and lonely teardrops. Keith's skill as a songwriter is such that he can knife open a can of tropes and conventions you've heard before and make them fresh.

In the end, what *The Last Drag* most reminds me of is a pulp crime novel with one of those great covers—maybe a man in a prison jump suit, strung up to a ball and chain, headed for a woman in heels on a motorcycle—and crumbling bone-colored pages full of dark, sharp words. The kind of book you read in a fever, afraid the pages will dissipate before you discover what bad roads the protagonist will take to nowhere. Keith's protagonists are on those same bad roads, and the album's a masterpiece about the longing and desperation underpinning the Big Bad Damaged American Dream.

William Boyle

# Dreams and Visions

## Theora Hamblett's *Angel's Request* #2

*This issue marks the first installment of a regular column investigating southern artwork found in the University of Mississippi permanent collection.*

Born in Paris, Mississippi, in 1895, Theora Hamblett had an early interest in art, but didn't start painting until the age of fifty-five after taking an oil painting class in the newly formed art department at the University of Mississippi. Her paintings can be divided into three categories. Her Children's Games series are vibrant landscapes featuring her famously intricate and colorful trees. She would paint each leaf individually, layering colors to add depth. Because she felt that people brought life to a painting, this series always included children playing jump rope or climbing trees. Another series, Old Home Memories, depicts scenes from her youth, growing up on her family's chicken farm in Paris. These scenes portray daily life in rural Mississippi, picking pears and tending to the animals. Her third series of paintings, which she began after breaking her hip in 1954, depict her Dreams and Visions. Most of these paintings she bequeathed to the University of Mississippi, and include religious symbols, visions of religious figures, and loved ones who had passed.

While attending Blue Mountain College in Blue Mountain, Mississippi, Hamblett had a dream of her late father that compelled her to go back to Paris: "He told me, 'I'll be with you when you go home.' And I went home at the end of the second semester, it was a three-semester year. [ . . . ] When we got to the yard lock gate I got out to open the gate, and then I realized Papa



THEORA HAMBLETT, ANGEL'S REQUEST #2, 1956, DREAMS AND VISIONS SERIES #80, OIL ON MASONITE, 22" X 28" (COLLECTION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM)

would not be there." That summer was very difficult for Hamblett, who missed her father dearly. It was then that her visions of him began. She explained, "It was in the summer then, in June or early July, that I had the vision of Papa. My first real vision of him as an angel."

The vision she is referring to is captured in *Angel's Request* #2 (1956). In it, young Theora is standing at an ironing board, planning on going to a ball game later that day. In those days, children were discouraged from playing ball games on Saturdays, but she was determined to go regardless. While ironing, she looked up to see her father, bathed in light with giant angel wings. He told her, "Baby, for my sake, don't go." She abided her father's request, and that moment changed her life. She said of the experience, "After that, when I needed to make a decision, I would get off to myself and

wonder, *Would Papa be pleased with what I was doing?* And really I think what I am today is from that."

Hamblett's Dreams and Visions paintings were her most treasured, and she refused to sell them. She started having visions at the age of seventeen, and they continued throughout her life. Angels, stars, butterflies, and chariots all hold religious significance in her paintings, but Theora spoke most dearly of the visions of her father.

Amanda Malloy

*Amanda Malloy received her MA in Southern Studies from the University of Mississippi, focusing on southern photography. During this time she completed an assistantship with the University of Mississippi Museum. She is currently the visual arts editor of Mississippi Folklife.*



## *Study the South* Publishes Two Essays This Summer

### New Work Focuses on the Economic South and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice

In his essay “More Pricks Than Kicks: The Southern Economy in the Long Twentieth Century,” Peter A. Coclanis traces the evolution of the southern economy over the “long twentieth century,” which in his view began around 1865 and is not yet over. During this lengthy period, the economy of the region was shaped—and limited—by factors that originated much earlier with the creation of an economic order based upon racial slavery and export-oriented plantation agriculture. His argument is that it has been very tough for the South to deviate from the “path” taken early in the region’s history.

To Coclanis, the region’s difficulties in developing economically are usefully framed in Beckettian terms.

“We are incredibly pleased to publish this illuminating work on the history of the southern economy,” said James G. Thomas,

Jr., editor of *Study the South*. “In this long-form essay, Coclanis exposes how ‘the legacy of plantations and racial slavery have limited the South’s developmental possibilities ever since,’ shedding new light on how the historical problems of the southern past continue to affect the southern present.”

Peter A. Coclanis is Albert R. Newsome Distinguished Professor and Director of the Global Research Institute at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. He works mainly in the areas of economic history, demographic history, and business history, and has published widely, particularly on the US South and on Southeast Asia, including *The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country, 1670–1920* (1989); with David L. Carlton, *The South, the Nation, and the World: Perspectives on Southern Economic Development* (2003); *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle: Globalization in Southeast Asia over la Longue Durée* (2006); and with Sven Beckert, Barbara Hahn, and Richard Follett, *Plantation Kingdom:*



*The American South and Its Global Commodities* (2016).

In her new *Study the South* essay, “Toward Freedom: A Reading of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice,” Margaret Pless shows how Montgomery, Alabama’s National Memorial for Peace and Justice stands to remedy our national forgetfulness, correcting the false

record that our many Confederate monuments perpetuate. This memorial actively teaches the deep roots of slavery in our nation, how lynchings maintained white supremacy long after slavery ended, and how that white supremacy still operates today. The strange juxtaposition of the memorial’s history lesson with Montgomery’s other monuments forces us to wrestle with our nation’s consistent dishonesty about our past.

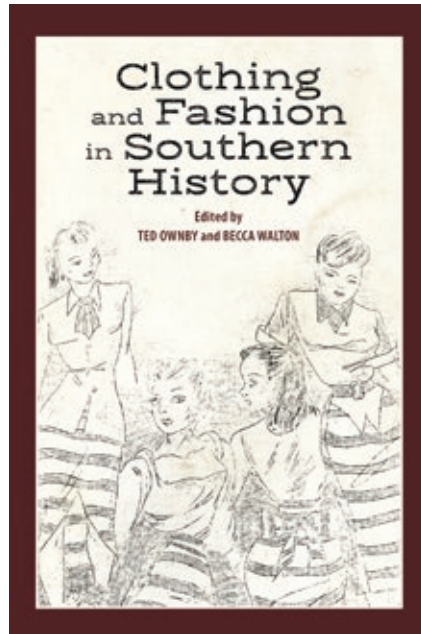
Thomas said that Pless’s essay is a timely one: “We’re glad to publish Pless’s insightful work in *Study the South*, especially during this national reckoning of the power and meaning of memorialization, as well as what we as a society value and feel worthy of commemoration. Pless’s essay describes how the National Memorial for Peace and Justice helps us understand and remember the pain and suffering in our American past, as well as how those who experienced it have fought to overcome it.”

*continued on page 33*

# New Publication Studies the History of Clothing and Its Relationship to Work, Power, and Identity in the South

Fashion studies have long centered on the art and preservation of finely rendered garments of the upper class, and archival resources used in the study of southern history have gaps and silences. Yet, little study has been given to the approach of clothing as something made, worn, and intimately experienced by enslaved people, incarcerated people, and the poor and working class, and by subcultures perceived as transgressive. This new volume, *Clothing and Fashion in Southern History*, edited by Ted Ownby and Becca Walton and published by the University Press of Mississippi, began with the two-day Clothing and Fashion in Southern History Symposium hosted by the Center in February 2016.

During that 2016 symposium, some scholars presented papers and others presented short discussions to encourage discussion. Like the symposium, this volume convenes scholars from the fields of history and cultural studies to use clothing as a point of departure, encouraging readers to imagine the “South’s centuries-long engagement with a global economy through a single garment, with cotton harvested by enslaved laborers in the South, milled in Massachusetts or Manchester, designed with influence from Parisian tastemakers, and



sold in the South by Jewish immigrant peddlers or merchants.”

Essays in the volume explore such topics as how free and enslaved women with few or no legal rights claimed to own clothing in the mid-1800s, how white women in the Confederacy claimed the making of clothing as a form of patriotism, how imprisoned men and women made and imagined their clothing, and clothing cooperatives in civil rights-era Mississippi.

“It’s a short collection, less than

one hundred and fifty pages,” Ownby continues, “and I hope that might make it accessible to people who haven’t read or thought much about clothing in history. The obvious fact is that clothing is part of any story, so the book could have covered far more topics and time periods. Just like the Southern Foodways Alliance has frequently said their work isn’t just about the food, the articles here are not just about the articles of clothing but about the historical issues we can raise by studying clothing.”

“One of my favorite points in the introduction,” said Ownby, “is that, unlike a lot of topics, if one adds the word *southern* to the word *clothing*, it’s not clear where to begin.” An afterword by Jonathan Prude asks how best to conclude. Other contributions to the collection include essays by Grace Elizabeth Hale, Katie Knowles, William Sturkey, Susannah Walker, Becca Walton, and Sarah Jones Weicksel.

Ted Ownby is William F. Winter Professor of History and professor of Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi, as well as author or editor of multiple works of southern history. Becca Walton is former associate director for projects at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi.

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*continued from page 32*

Margaret Pless is a graduate of Vanderbilt University with a BA in English and history, and a minor in art history. She is currently working on her doctorate in English at the University of Mississippi, where she also received her MA in English. She is studying modern and contemporary American literature with an interest in the genre of memoir in southern literature. Before returning

to school for her doctorate, she taught high school history and literature for five years in her hometown of Birmingham, Alabama.

*Study the South* is a peer-reviewed, multimedia, online journal, published and managed by the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi. The journal, founded in 2014, exists to encourage

interdisciplinary academic thought and discourse on the culture of the American South, particularly in the fields of history, anthropology, sociology, music, literature, documentary studies, gender studies, religion, geography, media studies, race studies, ethnicity, folklife, and art. Contact James G. Thomas, Jr. at [jgthomas@olemiss.edu](mailto:jgthomas@olemiss.edu) for more information.

# Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conferences Update

## “Faulkner, Welty, Wright: A Mississippi Confluence” July 18–22, 2021

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the 2020 Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference on “Faulkner’s Modernisms” has been postponed until 2022—repeat, 2022—when it is now scheduled for July 17–21. The five scheduled keynoters, Patricia Chu, Leigh Anne Duck, Susan Stanford Friedman, Sarah Gleeson-White, and Julian Murphet, have been invited back to the 2022 conference reboot, as have the thirty-eight scholars whose submissions to the call for papers were accepted by the program committee. We hope to hear all of these fine speakers in Oxford in 2022!

Meanwhile, plans are proceeding, the good Lord and Covid-19 willing, for the 2021 conference on “Faulkner, Welty, Wright: A Mississippi Confluence,” scheduled for July 18–22. For this event, which will bring together these three giants of Mississippi modernism for five days of discussion, analysis, and perhaps a measure of celebration as well, the program committee is working with representatives from the Eudora Welty Society, the Richard Wright Circle, and the William Faulkner Society to insure that the focus of the conference is truly comparative. The call for papers for the “Faulkner’s Modernisms” conference appeared in the Fall 2019 issue of the *Southern Register*.

To date, three distinguished scholars have accepted invitations

to keynote at the 2021 conference. Trudier Harris is University Distinguished Research Professor at the University of Alabama and the J. Carlyle Sitterson Distinguished Professor emerita at the University of North Carolina. One of the nation’s leading authorities on African American literatures, she has edited or coedited fourteen books and is author of ten books, including, most recently, *Martin Luther King Jr., Heroism, and African American Literature* (2014), *The Scary Mason-Dixon Line: African American Writers and the South* (2009), *Summer Snow: Reflections from a Black Daughter of the South* (2003), and *South of Tradition: Essays on African American Literature* (2002).

Suzanne Marrs is professor emerita of English at Millsaps College, where she taught for twenty-seven years. Throughout that period she has been at the forefront of teaching and scholarship on Eudora Welty. Her many books include *Eudora Welty: A Biography* (2005), *One Writer’s Imagination: The Fiction of Eudora Welty* (2002), and *The Welty Collection: A Guide to the Eudora Welty Manuscripts and Documents at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History* (1988), edited volumes of Welty’s letters to William Maxwell (2011) and to Ross Macdonald (2015), and an important essay collection coedited with Harriet Pollack, *Eudora Welty and Politics: Did*

*the Writer Crusade?* (2001). In 1998 she received the Phoenix Award for distinguished Welty scholarship.

Jerry W. Ward Jr., is emeritus professor of English at Dillard University, where he taught for ten years after a thirty-two-year teaching career at Tougaloo College. An accomplished poet and internationally acclaimed Richard Wright scholar, he is currently working on a biography, *Richard Wright: An Unending Hunger for Life*. He has edited or coedited such important anthologies and essay collections as *Trouble the Water: 250 Years of African American Poetry* (1997), *Redefining American Literary History* (1990), *Black Southern Voices* (1992), *The Richard Wright Encyclopedia* (2008), and *The Cambridge History of African American Literature* (2011). His most recent books include *The Katrina Papers: A Journal of Trauma and Recovery* (2008), *The China Lectures* (2014), *Fractal Song: Poems* (2016), and *Blogs and Other Writings* (2018).

Discount rates for both conferences are available for groups of five or more students. Inexpensive dormitory housing is available for all conference registrants. Contact Mary Leach at [mleach@olemiss.edu](mailto:mleach@olemiss.edu) for details. For other inquiries, or to submit abstracts to the 2021 conference CFP, contact Jay Watson, director, at [jwatson@olemiss.edu](mailto:jwatson@olemiss.edu).

Jay Watson

# READING THE SOUTH

Book Reviews and Notes by Faculty, Staff, Students, and Friends of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture

## *Some Go Home: A Novel*

By Odie Lindsey. New York: Norton, 2020. 295 pages. \$26.95 cloth.

After thirty years since the beginning of the First Gulf War and more than a century and a half into the battle for racial equality in America, we are finding that these conflicts are as alive today—and as resonant today—as ever. In Odie Lindsey's debut novel, *Some Go Home*, we find a constellation of interconnected stories based on traumas that have long plagued the nation, with race and social class fixing the enduring problems of violence and oppression to the American South.

Lindsey's novel draws on the eponymous story of Colleen that appears in Lindsey's 2019 book of stories *We Come to Our Senses* and opens in Pitchlynn, Mississippi, a fictional hill country hamlet draped in humidity and intentionally bathed in the almost sickly sweet scent of magnolias. In a shifting narrative timeline that begins in 1965, Lindsey introduces the reader to a menagerie of characters who have either never left the state or are, for various reasons, drawn back to it.

One of the central characters, Derby Friar, works as a "journeyman builder" in Pitchlynn, hired to help Chicagoan transplant JP remodel the town's most cherished antebellum property, Wallis House, the ancestral home of his suicide wife, Dru, an outcaste expatriate. JP has come to Pitchlynn to fulfill a promise to her, modernizing not only the house but also the town—and the social structures underpinning it—into something other than what had driven Dru to take her own life. "The project had nothing to do with



restoration," Lindsey writes. "The point was to make an assault."

Pitchlynn is struggling to maintain its Old South heritage while fighting to enter a twenty-first century economy, driven by Dru's aunt, mayor Susan George Wallis, the multigenerational Mississippian custodian of the town's cursed cultural inheritance, namely Bel Arbore, a hundred-plus-year-old magnolia tree planted in 1867 by the Ladies' Memorial Association of North Mississippi, "a group soon absorbed by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, before reconvening as the 'LMA' in the 1960s." The Wallis family manor is now in the most immediate danger of being commandeered by northern forces since Gen. A. J. "Whiskey" Smith burned nearby Oxford. Bel Arbore, the imperiled ancient evergreen "in some ways a symbol of what they'd been, . . . their only true *living* link to history," will be the first casualty. Derby, much like poor white Mississippi dirt farmers in 1861, finds himself caught between radical

change and the preservation of a vicious past. As Colleen puts it in Derby's defense, it is a "rich man's war, poor man's fight."

Ultimately, the plot revolves around Hare Hobbs, a white sharecropper once accused and acquitted of the civil rights-era murder of Gabe, his Black landowning neighbor who had refused to relinquish his birthrighted property, but at the heart of the novel are Derby Friar and Colleen. Colleen is Derby's young wife and the mother of their twins. She had served two tours of duty at war in the Middle East before they met and is now back home in Mississippi wrestling with PTSD and other demons she has carried back with her. Yet Colleen is not the only casualty of war: both Gabe and Hobbs had served in World War II, Gabe as a troop in the famed Red Ball Express and Hobbs as an errand boy, "a platoon runt filling canteens like some mascot, some toy held back from combat." Like Colleen, both men came home transformed: Hobbs, the rich man's tool—in more ways than one—and Gabe who "upon his return to Mississippi . . . would no longer tolerate the way things had been. There was victory in Europe. There would be victory at home." In *Some Go Home*, war takes many forms.

Lindsey's characters populate a community riven by racism and classism, and plagued with guilt, shame, depression, and anger. A writer-in-residence at Vanderbilt University's Center for Medicine, Health, and Society, Lindsey shows us the various, often conflicting ways these systems and emotional states can manifest in individuals and in societies, and how the past is an irrepressible force with a stubborn tenacity to exist long after those whose selective legacies have passed

from this place and now exist only as a medley of grotesques, a fading nostalgia. Even Lindsey's white-supremacist Hobbs understands the dark corner he has been willingly led into and wonders aloud, "How do I get out of being me?"

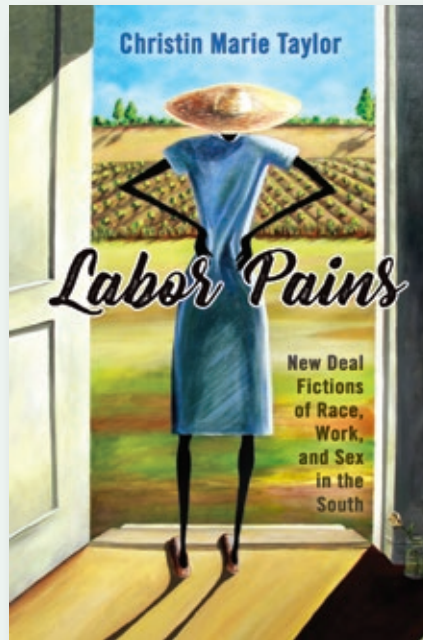
Lindsey is a 2007 graduate of the Center's Southern Studies master's program, and he gives clever nods to his post-graduate work as an associate editor of the Center's *Mississippi Encyclopedia*. *Some Go Home* is the clear result of meticulous research into Mississippi's history, evidenced in the deft reference to people, places, and events, such as architect Calvert Vaux, Gilbert Mason and the Biloxi wade-ins, the Jim Henson Museum in Leland, Lebanese peddlers, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Sen. Jim Eastland. As the title of his recent book indicates, yes, some do go home, and as Lindsey's latest book shows, we find that some carry home with them wherever they go.

James G. Thomas, Jr.

## *Labor Pains: New Deal Fictions of Race, Work, and Sex in the South*

By Christin Marie Taylor.  
Jackson: UP of Mississippi,  
2019. 232 pages. Cloth:  
\$99, paperback, \$30.00.

*Labor Pains* investigates representations of African American folk workers in fiction from the 1930s to the 1960s, a time stretching from New Deal reforms and Popular Front movements to the civil rights era. Christin Marie Taylor addresses how radical Popular Front ideas and sentiments infuse the fiction of four southern writers: George Wylie Henderson's *Ollie Miss* (1935), William Attaway's *Blood on the Forge* (1941), Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples* (1949) and Sarah E. Wright's *This Child's Gonna Live* (1969). Taylor



argues that these writers use the "black folk" trope to engage with labor politics and the legacies of radical aesthetics.

Building on scholarship that examines how African American writers interact with the literary left, Taylor investigates how these authors create a sense of "feeling" in their fiction to carve a "throughway between radical protest and folk traditions." Such an affective dimension is crucial, she argues, because unlike theories of representation that often pin working folk into a narrow category, theories of affect investigate how writers work with feeling to direct readers' responses: "Where representation can be a vehicle for identification and truth seeking, affect underscores unknowability, the truth of nontruth, and the facts of nearness." *Labor Pains* proposes that the writers included use an emotional dimension to offer a complex sense of social and racial subjectivity.

In a quick survey of previous scholarly treatments of Popular Front-era literature by Barbara Foley, Alan Wald, Michael Denning, Paula Rabinowitz, and others, Taylor notes an emphasis on politics but a lack of attention to "feeling." An affective dimension is present, however, especially in works of the African American literary tradition pervaded

by a Black folk aesthetic: W. E. B. Du Bois speaks of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Zora Neale Hurston professes "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" (1923), Langston Hughes, Alain Locke, Richard Wright, and others also use the power of affect to communicate profound pain and plight. By reading for a "common cord of feeling," *Labor Pains* reconfigures the relationship between southern modernism and Popular Front Black radical traditions.

Each chapter in *Labor Pains* centers on a specific author, and together the chapters are organized along a temporal axis. The works included are carefully curated following several winning strategies. *Labor Pains* stretches the canon of leftist writing by introducing authors we may not expect to find there; particularly surprising and provocative is the inclusion of Eudora Welty in a group of African American writers more explicitly committed to political action. Although Welty has often disavowed any political leanings in her work, Taylor argues that despite the lack of "explicit communist undertones" in her fiction, the author can nevertheless be placed "along the spectrum of liberal viewpoints." Welty's Black working-folk characters reveal a "deeply empathetic imagination," and her white characters articulate a politics of fear and desire. Welty's fiction communicates the "unsettling feelings of racial segregation," an accomplishment with "far-reaching implications for larger studies of southern modernism and black radical traditions." By including Welty among the Black radical writers of *Labor Pains*, Taylor not only moves the needle of Welty's literary activism further to the left, but she productively realigns authors within seemingly separate literary traditions.

Some of the authors in *Labor Pains* are firmly located in the writings of the literary left. William Attaway, originally from Greenville, Mississippi, was deeply committed to working-class issues, discourses of communism, and left labor politics when he met other writers of the

Popular Front, including Richard Wright and Margaret Walker, in Chicago. Attaway's novel *Blood on the Forge* centers on Black working-class men from the South in conflict with voracious northern industrial power. Scholars posit this novel's proletarian realism and industrial steel mill setting as central to debates about race and labor representations. Taylor adds to this discussion by exploring the gender dynamics of masculinist competitions grounded in a "steel feeling."

Gender is also the focus in the chapter on George Wylie Henderson's little-known novel *Ollie Miss*, which is generally not part of a leftist roster of fiction. By highlighting Henderson's experiences with Alabama labor politics—especially the Tuskegee Institute, sharecropper unions, and the historical context of the New Deal Agricultural Adjustment Act—Taylor uncovers the political roots of a novel featuring a female agricultural worker in a romantic love triangle. Reading the proletarian underpinnings of this plot as supportive of agricultural work, Taylor argues that the Black woman's field labor does not result in her exploitation or oppression, but, on the contrary, in her empowerment embedded in the act of cultivation. Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* works as a particularly useful comparison in this chapter. Readers familiar with Hurston's novel will certainly need to read *Ollie Miss*.

*Labor Pains* is securely grounded in African American literary history and numerous references to works by Hurston, Hughes, Toomer, Wright, Himes and many others add depth, complexity, and context to the astute analyses of individual novels. The final chapter on Sarah E. Wright's *This Child's Gonna Live* connects with the contemporary "war on poverty" and signifies on the multiple meanings of a Black mother's "labor." A "black radical feminist narrative," this novel deconstructs the trope of the strong Black working-class mother and lays blame

for failure on multiple agents and the complicated intersectionalities of racism, sexism, and classism.

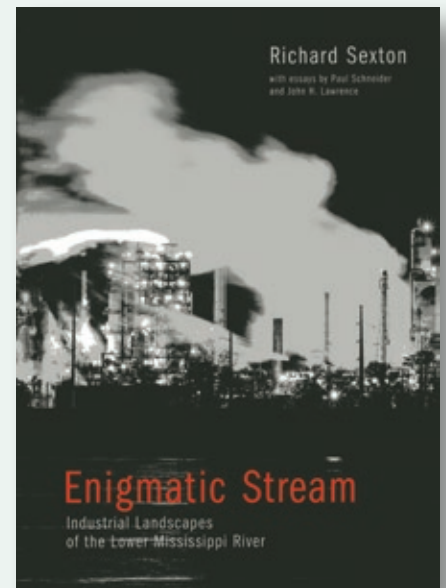
*Labor Pains* traces male and female working-class protagonists in fiction by southern writers with varying affiliations to leftist labor politics. In different ways, Henderson, Attaway, Welty, and S. Wright all use "the power of working folk feeling" to move their readers. Their literary strategies range from idyllic folk pastoral to leftist realism, from modernism to experimental post-modernism, but as *Labor Pains* makes clear these works are permeated by a common politics of feeling for the Black working class. *Labor Pains* significantly expands Popular Front scholarship and is rewarding reading specially for students of southern and African American literature.

Annette Trefzer

### *Enigmatic Stream: Industrial Landscapes of the Lower Mississippi River*

Photographs by James Sexton.  
Essays by Paul Schneider  
and John H. Lawrence. New  
Orleans: The Historic New  
Orleans Collection, 2018.  
137 pages, with 90 black-  
and-white photographs.  
\$40.00 paperback.

Anyone who has traveled along the Mississippi River from Baton Rouge to the Gulf of Mexico knows the passing landscape to be an odd mix of agriculture, industry, and the urban, with an occasional antebellum plantation house thrown in. The agricultural is apparent in vast fields of sugar cane, corporate in scope. The industrial, mostly petroleum-and/or chemical-related, is hyper-industrial, monumental in scale. The



urban landscape, as the river runs through metropolitan New Orleans, is dense, much of it industrial as well and linked to its riverside location. The plantation houses, remnants of a different time, attract a few tourists but now seem out of place.

In *Enigmatic Stream: Industrial Landscapes of the Lower Mississippi River*, photographer Richard Sexton has tried to make visual sense of this unusual part of the world. In some ways he has succeeded; in others he has not. The book's ninety black-and-white photographs relentlessly (and repeatedly) focus on large riverside industrial complexes, some so enormous they almost seem to dwarf the river. Many of the images are strangely beautiful, especially if one is willing to read them as little more than documentary proof of human ingenuity. They also contain, at least to this viewer's eyes, a looming and seemingly ignored menace, evidence of an already accomplished degree of corporate intimidation. To be fair, Sexton does gesture at human life along this portion of the river; several pictures include houses made small by their surroundings, and occasionally we see a tiny person. These images, however, are generally reproduced small (four to a two-page spread) and lack the visual power of the larger industrial pictures, which are often single photographs spread across two facing pages.

The lasting sense the book leaves is one of overly dense compression, both in regard to the book itself and the place depicted. This is a reasonable conclusion to draw about the book; there are simply too many photographs crammed into a space too small for the pictures to breathe or for text to explain them. This jam-packed quality is not the case with most of the actual riverside environment, however. The broad Mississippi River makes it seem spacious, and a frequently bright blue sky sometimes can add a sense of airiness. What is in the air is another matter, of course, an issue largely ignored by *Enigmatic Stream*. This, I think, is the source of the invisible menace that seems to hover even in the most striking of Sexton's photographs. Human achievement, no matter how ingenious or stunning, cannot occur in a vacuum. No action lacks consequences. This is why people living along the Mississippi River, especially between Baton Rouge and New Orleans (the stretch often known as "Cancer Alley") are fifty times more likely than other Americans to develop cancer. Much of the riverside landscape is impressive to look at (and photograph), but it's a tough place to live.

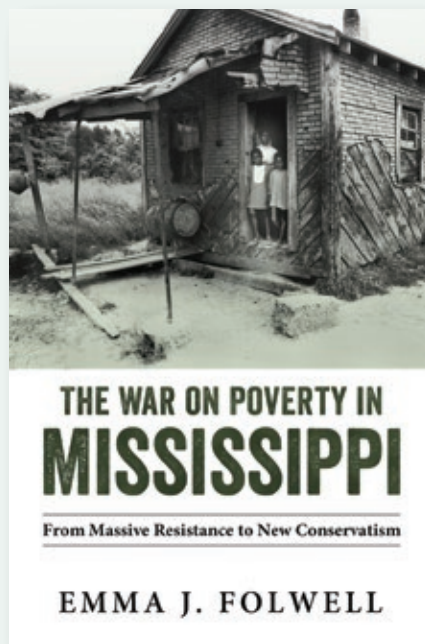
David Wharton

## *The War on Poverty in Mississippi: From Massive Resistance to New Conservatism*

By Emma J. Folwell.

Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020. 312 pages. \$99.00 cloth, \$30.00 paperback.

This book's title, along with the cover photo of a family peering from the doorway of a deteriorating shack, might not suggest a feel-good story,



despite the title's war being waged to free people from destitution. The subtitle, however, clues us that things did not turn out well. Indeed the title probably should be *The War on the War on Poverty in Mississippi*, because that is what the book is about. Poverty won. Or white supremacy won, and poverty remains. And Mississippi's anti-antipoverty struggle went national.

Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson declared War on Poverty in 1964. Mississippi, whose need was greater than any other state, got in on it early. But resistance from whites, in many forms and at many levels, not only crippled the antipoverty effort but set the stage for national neoconservatism.

"This fight against the war on poverty served as a template for white resistance and entrenchment, and as a way to marginalize black political and economic power," writes Emma J. Folwell, the author of *The War on Poverty in Mississippi: From Massive Resistance to New Conservatism* and Fulbright scholar and senior lecturer in history at Newman University in Birmingham, England. "Many white Mississippians forged this resistance into the political, economic, and social structures of the state, contributing to the development of the state's Republican Party and articulating

a new conservatism." Not that this happened only in Mississippi. The state's white resistance methods are "unique and important, [but] they are not exceptional."

The book briefly reviews sharecropping and Jim Crow, the resistance to *Brown v. Board of Education* and the civil rights and voting rights struggles before focusing on the War on Poverty, which arrived "into a maelstrom of intense poverty, grassroots civil rights activism, and threatened-but-still-powerful white power structures." US senators John Stennis and James Eastland opposed the antipoverty programs, as did Gov. Paul Johnson who told US Office of Economic Opportunity director Sargent Shriver, "Blood will flow all over the steps of the Mississippi State Capitol, and it will be on the hands of the OEO, not the state of Mississippi." Such statements by politicians supported actions by their white constituents. Opponents fired gunshots into Head Start classrooms, burned crosses outside program offices, evicted participants, and refused credit to supportive businesses. Newspapers painted antipoverty workers as communists, beatniks, and Black Power advocates, feeding the old southern hatred of federal interference.

OEO regulations stipulated the boards of directors of antipoverty programs reflect the racial makeup of their communities and include 30 percent poor people elected by the community. Whites responded by disputing and disrupting the elections, and intimidating the representatives who managed to get elected. Some of the more "moderate" whites realized that this was federal funds pouring into their needy state, and rather than destroy the programs it might be smarter to take control of them. One of their tactics was to get "local responsible people," i.e. white segregationists, onto the boards.

The book includes a chapter on one white Catholic activist from Natchez: Marjorie Baroni, who grew up in a sharecropper family, married at seventeen to an Italian American

from a sharecropper family, raised six children, and became disgusted at the injustices and lynchings she saw. Baroni and her husband were threatened and ostracized for her work with Strategic Training and Redevelopment, a federal antipov-erty program sponsored by the Diocese of Natchez-Jackson, the only religious institution in the state to sponsor any such program. The church, however, “was unwilling to be an instrument of racial change at the expense of its white parishioners,” Folwell laments. “This luke-warm commitment to pursuing social justice and racial goodwill was not powerful or deep enough to ensure that STAR challenged the institutionalized racism in Mississippi.”

Although the Ku Klux Klan was a brutal part of the state’s resistance, it was not as prevalent in Mississippi as in some other states, and some large areas of Mississippi, including the Delta, were Klan-free (the southwest corner and Neshoba and neighboring counties were Mississippi’s Klan strongholds). However, there was so much violent suppression without the Klan that they were not as necessary to the resistance. FBI efforts weakened the Mississippi Klan to some extent, but there was a resurgence in 1967 to oppose the War on Poverty. White employees of Mississippi Action for Progress, a \$3 million biracial Head Start program, were among the victims of the new wave of Klan violence. Fear of such violence often brought white communities and authorities into compliance with Klan goals. And as antipov-erty programs came under white control, they became “one of the mechanisms used by white Mississippians to control the nature of race relations and the pace of black advancement, obviating the need for Klan violence.”

When a white-controlled group got the governor’s nod over an integrated group to run antipov-erty programs in Jackson, it named itself Community Services Association, which had the same acronym, familiar to all southerners, as the

Confederate States of America. “Whether this relationship is purely accidental is subject to conjecture. But considering the general situation in the city and the county in which it is located, it is probably not,” a federal OEO official noted.

While the CSA had middle-class whites on its board, poor whites declined to participate in its programs like Neighborhood Youth Corps, which provided job training to fifteen to twenty-one year olds, for fear of being treated equally to or supervised by Blacks. The resulting program mostly placed Black youths in menial jobs in public agencies—“free janitors and maids,” as Don Jackson, a Black counselor in the program, called it. Jackson was fired for his efforts to protect the trainees. They responded with a sit-in at the director’s office demanding Jackson’s rehiring, better pay and better working conditions, and the end of abuse by white supervisors. They were arrested and jailed.

Another chapter is devoted to Helen Bass Williams, a Black woman who in 1967 became executive director of Mississippi Action for Progress, the state’s largest Head Start program. Coming in the wake of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party fiasco at the convention, an aide to President Johnson attempted to create a moderate, integrated board to oversee the new program. Activist Fannie Lou Hamer, however, was among those not fooled. She described the board as “a few middle-class bourgeoisie and some of the Uncle Toms who couldn’t care less” turning the War on Poverty into “a war on us.” Other activists likened it to a plantation and called for demonstrations against the new program. Folwell nevertheless calls it “a remarkable feat” that an African American woman was named its director.

Williams had grown up in a tiny Illinois mining community, went to college and became a teacher, married a doctor and helped him with his practice besides teaching.

She later earned a master’s in public health on a full scholarship to the University of North Carolina and worked for the South Carolina Department of Health, Education, and Welfare before taking a teaching position at Tougaloo College. There she became involved in civil rights activism and did consulting for the US Office of Economic Opportunity before the appointment as MAP director. She did not, however, take a class-based position or side with the Freedom Democrats in her work with Head Start, advocating an “integrative approach,” where Blacks would learn from whites.

A campaign against Williams was spearheaded by state Sovereignty Commission director Erle Johnston, a former newspaper editor and PR person for Mississippi politicians. Johnston had a “limited acceptance of Head Start,” based on the idea that it would teach Black children “hygiene, cleanliness, and concern for one another.” He did not like Williams’s ideas about grassroots involvement and considered her a threat to white control of the anti-pov-erty efforts. “Johnston initiated a relentless campaign to secure Williams’s dismissal,” with smears and accusations about her leadership, conduct, and morals. She also suffered threats of violence and harassment, including being attacked by four white men who spat into her mouth. By 1968 Johnston’s accomplice on the MAP board, Owen Cooper, stripped Williams of power. After being demoted, Williams resigned and took a job as the first African American professor at Purdue University. Folwell notes that the Sovereignty Commission was “evolving in response to the racial realities of Mississippi in 1968. No longer orchestrating supremacist violence, the commission was now focusing on character assassination” while helping turn antipov-erty programs “into a mechanism of white control.”

That fall, Republican Richard Nixon became US president. He did not dismantle the Office of

Economic Opportunity, deciding it was “politically impossible” to do so. Instead, he appointed Daniel Moynihan as Counselor for Urban Affairs. Moynihan had been an architect of antipoverty programs, but by then he was a critic whose writings influenced later neoconservatives. As new head of OEO, Nixon appointed Donald Rumsfeld, whom he described as a “ruthless little bastard.” That appointment, Folwell notes, “signaled the fate of the war on poverty” as Nixon and Rumsfeld “quietly undermined anti-poverty programs at the local level.”

In some cases, white Republicans got involved in antipoverty programs in Mississippi, to tap into money that was not controlled by the state Democratic Party. In Lauderdale County—notable for its high number of church burnings—Republican Gil Carmichael, who would later serve in the Bush administration, helped create and develop the local antipoverty program, working alongside Black board chairman Charles L. Young. Despite such Republican attempts to gain money and influence, in general conservative Mississippians opposed the war on poverty “as a target around which opponents of liberalism racial integration and big government could unite.” They learned to avoid mentioning race but describe the programs “as un-American—against God, freedom, and independence.” They threw in “fears of an overweening federal government, the threat of communism, and the spread of immorality.”

A significant part of the War on Poverty was the idea of community action, redistributing power “from city halls to the poor—or at least, to nonprofit organizations representing the poor.” But the 1967 Green Amendment, introduced by US Rep. Edith Green (D-Oregon), required community action boards to be designated by local elected officials. Nixon and Rumsfeld used the amendment to strip the poor of their say. They closed “the last avenue for African Americans to give meaning

to their political rights as the outside support for civil rights and for southern blacks diminished.”

The fight against the War on Poverty thus gave white Mississippians “a conservatism that had national resonance.” It conflated racism, classism, anti-welfare-ism, anticommunism, pro-Americanism, and the supposed meritocracy. Later, when Pres. Ronald Reagan and Gov. Kirk Fordice blew dog whistles, “white Mississippians knew exactly what they were hearing. It was a language of their own.”

After Nixon’s re-election he proceeded to dismantle OEO. By the time of Reagan’s rise, the ideas of Mississippi’s White Citizens’ Council had become mainstream conservative, in Reagan’s references to Cadillac-driving welfare queens “whose race was never mentioned, but never in question.” In 1992 such ideas helped make Fordice the state’s first Republican governor in more than a century.

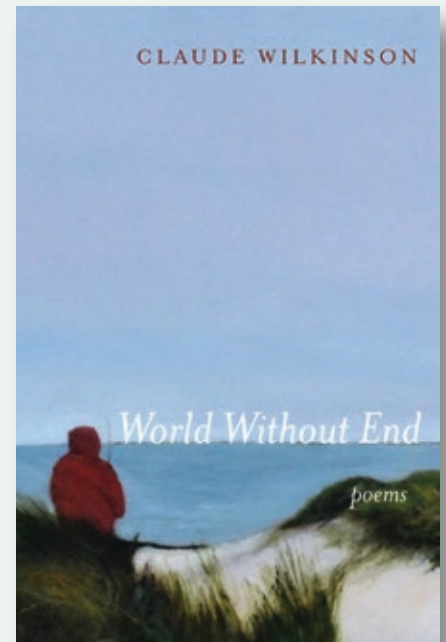
More than fifty years after the war against the War on Poverty, we see the fringe ideas of that era turned even harsher and more mainstream conservative, relabeled “Make America Great Again.” “What great society?” reads a Klan flier from the 1960s quoted in the book. “It appears to be a society of homosexuals, racketeers, socialists, and Communists. We don’t want any great society, we are damn well satisfied with the ‘old time Americanism.’”

Steve Cheseborough

## *World without End: Poems*

By Claude Wilkinson. Eugene, OR: Slant Books, 2020. 86 pages. \$27.00 cloth, \$12.00 paperback, \$9.99 eBook.

Interviewed by his publisher at the Slant Books website, Claude Wilkinson—the first poet selected as Grisham writer-in-residence at the



University of Mississippi—provides the straightforward insights expected by those who have read his work or seen his paintings. Rich in reference to the natural world, from an eclipse to a bird-eating spider, most poems from his fourth collection are accessible without the benefit of commentary, including his own. For example, repeated allusions to autumn, especially toward the end of the book, are consonant with the deaths of family members and friends throughout. The poem “Salvia” points to a reconciliation motif by noting that the flowers “finally” planted “together” by father and son derive their name from the Latin *salvere*, or “to heal.” As Wilkinson reminds his interviewer, nature (whether autumnal shadows or summer salvia) is an “endless source of ever relevant metaphor.” Less obvious, perhaps, is the extent to which every poem in *World without End* is “haunted by its own broken Edenic bond.” Thus, the landscapes of Wilkinson’s visible world invariably speak to a deeper reality. The book’s “overarching theme,” he says, is “the seemingly infinite spiritual implications woven throughout our experiences of the natural world.”

Epigraphs from the Book of Genesis and the Mississippi author and artist Walter Anderson introduce

this interweaving of nature and spirit at the start of the collection. The title poem comes at the end of the book; but “World without End” and *World without End* both resist conclusion. Recalling a train ride on trestles over the green gorges of Wales, this final poem evokes a familiar trope of life as a precarious journey. Mortality intensifies when the train approaches a tunnel, and “an ironic porter emerged” to announce, “Refreshments . . . / refreshments . . . refreshments,” while “looking and sounding / more dead than alive.” In one long sentence spread over twelve lines, the porter’s emergence spans life and death, past and present, hunger and the promise of relief. The “Edenic bond” does seem to be broken; and the poet tries to imagine the old man “young again,” with a bride in a rose-garlanded “beginner’s cottage”—a “halcyon time” that “passed like a breath into this.” Far from his own home, “thousands

of miles away,” the poet faces the “unbearable truth / that none of this would tarry”: neither the porter nor himself, “nor even the young of the hawk / back home” (birds that were still in their eggs before the poet left for Wales). The burden of inevitable loss is lightened, however, by the assurance of the volume’s final words: “yet everything goes on.”

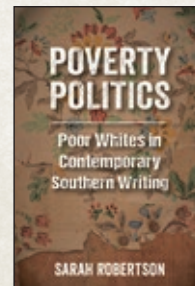
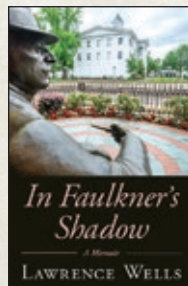
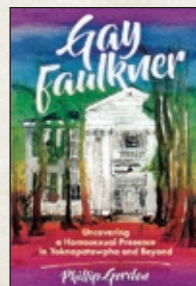
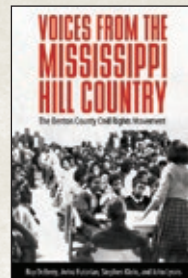
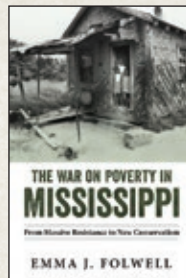
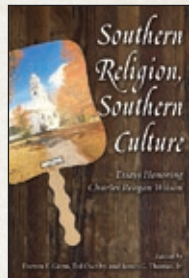
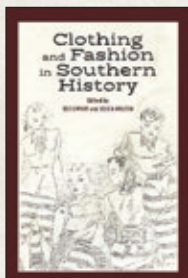
Wilkinson’s title for *World without End* is also a closing phrase; his source is the “Gloria Patri,” or “Glory Be to the Father,” a Christian hymn that praises God as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: “As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.” In his essay for *Southern Writers on Writing* (edited by Susan Cushman, 2018), Wilkinson says that spirituality—more than diction or even setting—is “a litmus test” of “southernness in my poems” and in much other poetry from the South. He explains: “Whether a true southerner opposes, straddles,

or embraces upbringing to do with religion, it’s always wrestled with. [Flannery] O’Connor’s characters never escape it, and neither do we.” The wrestling is evident in “Lenten,” where the poet admits that, on “many a Sunday morning,” he has wondered if it would be better to be a rabbit, a robin, or some other “supposed soulless form of life.” Now, “just a month out / from the full brightness of Easter,” he finds himself “at times only half believing / though this close to the cherry orchards / and dogwoods blooming.”

Doubts are expressed more playfully in a poem titled “Driving Home while Thinking of a Sermon I Had Just Heard on How God Even Looks after All the Animals Too When a Butterfly Collides with My Car’s Windshield.” In the middle stanza, the poet admits that “my butterfly / wasn’t a monarch / with stained glass wings”; yet, he questions: “wasn’t its fragile beauty / enough for sparing,



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/ if simply for its fragility?” Fragility and beauty are frequently paired in *World without End*. Two of the most dramatic cases are the mental fragility of artists in “Walter Anderson Regrets Killing a Sea Turtle” and “Vincent’s Flowers.” The “broken Edenic bond” is shockingly manifest in the contrast between “unintelligible Whitfield sounds” (the asylum where Anderson was hospitalized) and “the thunder and sunsets / of Horn Island paradise” (the Mississippi coastal island that inspired some of Anderson’s most brilliant work). The “cleansing surf / of turquoise tide” and the “iridescence of hummingbirds” cannot undo the “thoughtless, human moment” when Anderson crushed a turtle’s “inconsolable carapace”; and the “sin returns again and again / and again” in the artist’s tortured nightmares of his victim’s “Blakean” gaze.

Similarly, “Vincent’s Flowers” presents the delicate beauty and the dark madness of Vincent Van Gogh, for whom “revelations came and returned / in bursts of ecstasy and despair.” A vivid immersion in the artist’s life and work, this ekphrastic poem translates several of Van Gogh’s paintings into verses artfully spaced across seven pages. At some points, Wilkinson links Van Gogh’s words with images from his paintings; for example, “‘More like music . . . less like sculpture’ / in motifs of cornflowers and chrysanthemums, heliotrope and roses, / poppies and geraniums.” On a smaller scale, Wilkinson takes this approach in a one-page poem, “In the Beginning, Audubon,” where he quotes the artist’s metaphor for hummingbirds as “glittering fragments of rainbows” and then explains the process by which Audubon transformed nature into art. Birds appear almost as often in Wilkinson’s poetry as they do in Audubon’s paintings; for the poet, their song is as important as their appearance. In the poem “Duet,” for instance, the “synchronous antiphony” of male and female wrens in Ecuador is “such an Edenic bond.”

In his essay for *Southern Writers on Writing*, Wilkinson cites music in second place only to spirituality as a mark of southern poetry, adding that blues and spirituals are among his favorite genres. In the poem “Snow,” his taste ranges from Shostakovich to the Clinch Mountain Boys and Blind Lemon Jefferson; and the poem ends with a gathering of “misty little songbirds.” Framed in these musical harmonies, “Snow” memorializes the poet’s mother, who died in winter but is identified with “our summer’s beefy, / red tomatoes cooled with evening shade, / beautifully sliced and plated the way she did.” At the Slant Books website, Wilkinson says: “Foremost, I want my writing to be worthy of genuine poetry’s rich tradition, which to my mind entails the language being accessible, meaningful, uplifting in some way, and rhythmically beautiful.” Faced with snow and death, Wilkinson nevertheless hears music and remembers the essence of summer.

Joan Wylie Hall

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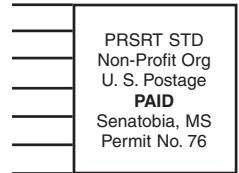
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