

# THE SOUTHERN REGISTER

A Publication of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture

The University of Mississippi

NEWSLETTER

OXFORD, MISSISSIPPI, U.S.A.

WINTER 2019







If you'll pardon a personal memory, I remember hearing a short news piece on the radio in, it had to have been 1972, when I was twelve. It started, "And here's a story you may be hearing more about." Of course it was about the break-in at Democratic headquarters at the Watergate Hotel.

For the next year and a half, I heard and read a lot more about that story. As a kid who wanted to be a serious person, I was a fan of politics and political history as much as baseball, and I knew the names and parties of all of the presidents and their vice presidents, who ran against them, and some of the major issues of their presidencies. As a twelve year old, that's what I assumed history was. So I followed the Watergate news as I followed baseball, every day and with great detail. If there had been box scores or trading cards for politicians, I would have read and collected them.

Because the president said he was not a crook, I assumed—at age twelve—he was telling the truth. But as a young teenager, I was horrified by the Nixon tapes, with their reports of profanity, racist insults, and the lying crookedness of it all. In response, I started rethinking both what it meant to be a serious person and what I thought of as history. Surely there was far more to history than the respectable-looking men who had government jobs and lied a lot. Like so many people, I had the feeling that the people and everyday things in my little town mattered as much as the topics discussed by the news-defining people on the nightly news. Loving baseball as much as politics, I knew that sports mattered not as time away from important things but as something that captivated people's interests and passions. And every Sunday morning I was part of a group that sang, prayed, and listened to sermons about things that seemed far more important than anything Nixon, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and those guys could ever do.

Just a few years later, two of those topics—recreation and religion—became the focus of my history dissertation. In the early 1980s I arrived in the history profession at a time when the most exciting innovations came from the

people who studied households, work and leisure, popular religion, and what some French scholars were calling *mentalités*. Avoiding kings, queens, and presidents, this was scholarship about things that mattered to me, especially in wake of how Watergate encouraged me to doubt not just the self-righteousness but the very importance of the powerful. I could have taken an alternative approach, writing for example, about Watergate and southern history (and now that sounds like an intriguing conference), but in the 1980s my first US history survey classes rarely said much about presidents and people like them.

Pretty quickly there were scholars challenging parts of that approach. Some critics said that too much of that scholarship went looking for the exotic and extraordinary, and even more critics feared that in trying to get beyond the study of people *in* power, some of that scholarship simply ignored issues *of* power. I'm pleased that much of today's scholarship takes power seriously to study a kind of everyday politics.

It's reasonable to wonder how scholarship may change in response to current crises. I keep hearing people say the current presidency is unprecedented. Will scholars take on the concept of precedent with the kind of vigor the past generation addressed the concept of social construction? Will scholars assume they can make sense of things, or will they take new approaches to things that seem chaotic or ridiculous? I tend to think that most scholars who write about the late 2010s will concentrate far less on the president and the people around him than on issues of climate, violence and peace, sexuality and gender, race, work, and globalization. At least on this topic, I'm pretty confident about today's twelve-year-olds, most of whom seem likely to deal with political scandals without facing the kind of disillusionment I did.

To return to the personal: I am thinking even more than usual about the relationships among my own stories, contemporary issues, and academic communities. 2019 will be my last year as director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture. The university, with a committee of faculty and staff colleagues, is running an internal search for a new director, and I look forward to having a part in new directions the Center will be taking. As a faculty member—a professor of Southern Studies and history—and not a director, I imagine I'll have more time for scholarly work and academic experimenting to figure out what I want to study, why, and how. Not all that different from when I was twelve and thirteen, I'll keep trying to figure out how to live as a serious person.

Ted Ownby

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# Alumni News—A Year in Review

## *The Center Looks Back on Alumni Accomplishments in 2018*

One way to see the variety of interests and accomplishments of Southern Studies alumni is to consider their newsworthy moments over the last twelve months. With apologies to the many alumni whose equally noteworthy moments are not included, here's a year in the life of some SST alums in the news.

In January, *Time* named the Silence Breakers of the #MeToo movement as its persons of the year. Lindsey Reynolds of New Orleans was one of the featured persons.

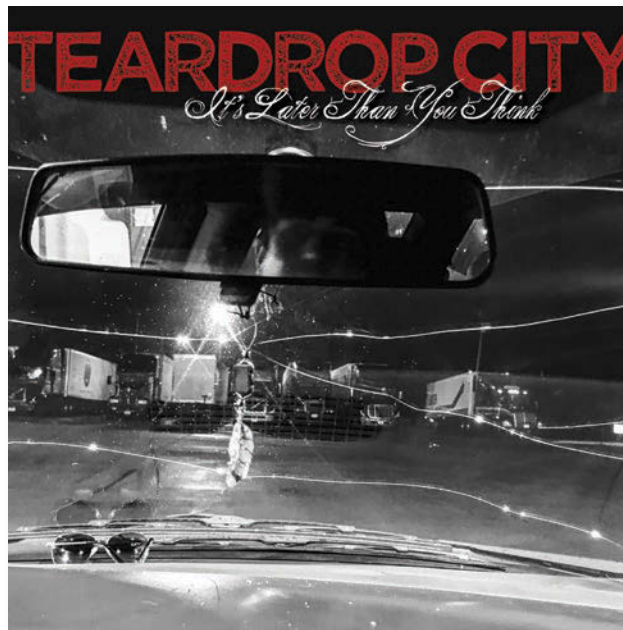
Early in 2018, Jon Peede, who had been serving as acting chair, was nominated and then confirmed as chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities. His position brought him back to Mississippi for multiple events.

In January, the Nashville Reads program started reading and discussing John T. Edge's *The Potlikker Papers*. In June, the Mississippi Institute for Arts and Letters gave the book its award for the year's best work of nonfiction.

In February, Jennifer "Bingo" Gunter started a new job as the director of the South Carolina Collaborative on Race and Reconciliation at the University of South Carolina.

In March, just in time for their appearances at the Oxford Conference for the Book, *Delta Epiphany: Robert F. Kennedy in Mississippi* by Ellen Meacham and *Anatomy of a Miracle* by Jonathan Miles were published.

In April, Joshua Haynes, historian at University of Southern Mississippi, published *Patrolling the*



*Border: Theft and Violence on the Creek-Georgia Frontier, 1770–1796*, and Sarah Condon was one of several priests serving at Barbara Bush's funeral in Houston. In December she was part of the funeral of George H. W. Bush.

In May, Mary Margaret Miller White began a new position as executive director of *Mississippi Today*, and Schuyler Dickson began a new podcast called *The Daring* with a discussion with author Michael Farris Smith.

In June, in a large ceremony in Memphis, Miranda Cully Griffin was ordained as an Episcopal deacon.

In July, Susie Penman defended her thesis film and thesis to become the first graduate of the Center's new MFA degree in documentary expression. She entered the American Studies PhD program at the University of North Carolina in the fall.

In August, *Time* named Stanfield Gray, CEO of Dig South in

Charleston, as one of the "31 People Changing the South."

In September, Becca Walton headed to London for a ten-month residency with the Community of St. Anselm.

In October, the University Press of Mississippi released the fourth edition of Steve Cheseborough's *Blues Travelin': The Holy Sites of the Delta Blues*.

Throughout the fall, Kevin Mitchell was in the news multiple times discussing his scholarship on African American chefs in nineteenth-century Charleston. During the fall election season, Ford O'Connell

appeared several times on Fox News as a political commentator.

In November, as part of her work as president of the Southeastern American Studies Association, Molly McGehee of Emory University's Oxford College, welcomed members to the American Studies Association meeting in Atlanta, and Susan Glisson gave the keynote address at the Equity Summit, an event at the University of South Carolina.

In December, Caroline Herring released a new CD, *Verse by Verse*, and Tyler Keith and his colleagues in Teardrop City released an album, *It's Later Than You Think*. That same month, Preston Lauterbach published *Bluff City: The Secret Life of Photographer Ernest Withers*, and Jimmy Thomas published an edited collection honoring Charles Reagan Wilson, *Southern Religion, Southern Culture*, with Ted Ownby and Darren Grem.



# Brown Bag Lecture Series and Visiting Documentarians Series

## Spring 2019

The Brown Bag Lecture Series takes place on Wednesdays at noon in the Tupelo Room in Barnard Observatory unless otherwise noted. The Visiting Documentarians Series also takes place in the Tupelo Room in Barnard Observatory unless otherwise noted. Visit the Center's website for up-to-date-information on all Center events.

### JANUARY 23

#### BROWN BAG LECTURE

Adam Ganuchau and Ryan Nave

**"Mississippi Today: Covering the Fall 2018 Senate Race: A Discussion"**

*Mississippi Today* is a news and media company with a forward-facing mission of civic engagement and public dialog through service journalism, live events, and digital outreach. This talk will explain why eliminating "fake news" will take more than just journalists. Misinformation is abundant and spreads rapidly in our society, but the problem needs to be solved in classrooms and boardrooms—not newsrooms.

Adam Ganuchau covers politics and state government for *Mississippi Today*. Ryan "R. L." Nave is the editor-in-chief of *Mississippi Today*.

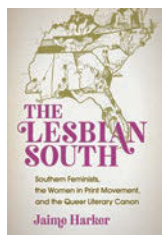
### FEBRUARY 6

#### BROWN BAG LECTURE

Jaime Harker

***The Lesbian South: Southern Feminists, the Women in Print Movement, and the Queer Literary Canon***

Jaime Harker is a professor of English and the director of the Sarah Isom Center for Women and Gender Studies at the University of Mississippi, where she teaches American literature, LGBTQ literature, and gender studies. She has published essays on Japanese translation, popular women writers of the interwar period, Oprah's book club, William Faulkner, Cold War gay literature, and women's liberation and gay liberation literature. Her talk will be on her new book, *The Lesbian South: Southern Feminists, the Women in Print Movement, and the Queer Literary Canon*.



### FEBRUARY 13

#### BROWN BAG LECTURE

Joshua S. Haynes

***Patrolling the Border: Theft and Violence on the Creek-Georgia Frontier, 1770–1796***

Joshua S. Haynes is an ethnohistorian at the University of Southern Mississippi who researches, publishes, and teaches early American and Native American history focusing on themes such as colonialism, violence, and state formation. His book, *Patrolling the Border: Theft and Violence on the Creek-Georgia Border, 1770–1796*, was published by the University of Georgia Press in 2018.

### FEBRUARY 19

#### VISITING DOCUMENTARIANS SERIES

Lynne Sachs

***The Washing Society and Tip of My Tongue***

**Time and location TBA**

Lynne Sachs will screen her film *The Washing Society* and a portion of her film *Tip of My Tongue*. Following the screenings, Sachs will talk about experimental documentary, investigations of history and historiography, and how we examine and refract the past, with a special emphasis on the connections to the South, including the Washerwomen's Strike of 1881 in Atlanta, as explored in *The Washing Society*, and responses to Martin Luther King's life and death from the perspective of a child living in Memphis (*Tip of My Tongue*).

Sachs's recent work embraces a hybrid form combining the nonfiction, experimental, and fiction modes. She lives in Brooklyn, New York, and teaches part-time in the Art Department at Princeton University.







*The Washing Society*

**FEBRUARY 20**

**BROWN BAG LECTURE**

**Charles McKinney and  
Aram Goudsouzian**

*An Unseen Light: Black  
Struggles for Freedom in  
Memphis, Tennessee*



Charles McKinney is Neville Frierson Bryan Chair of Africana Studies and an associate professor of history at Rhodes College. In addition to *An Unseen Light*, he is the author of *Greater Freedom: The Evolution of the Civil Rights Struggle in Wilson, North Carolina*. Aram Goudsouzian is chair of the Department of History at the University of Memphis. He is the author of *Down to the Crossroads: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Meredith March against Fear*, *King of the Court: Bill Russell and the Basketball Revolution*, *The Hurricane of 1938*, and *Sidney Poitier: Man, Actor, Icon*. McKinney and Goudsouzian will discuss their edited book, *An Unseen Light: Black Struggles for Freedom in Memphis, Tennessee*.

**FEBRUARY 25**

**(MONDAY)**

**BROWN BAG LECTURE**

**Matt Eich and Ralph Eubanks**

*Sin and Salvation in Baptist Town*

With *Sin and Salvation in Baptist Town* Matt Eich has documented life in Baptist Town, one of Greenwood, Mississippi's oldest African American neighborhoods, where the legacies of racism continue to impact the people economically and culturally. *Sin and Salvation* is the culmination of seven years of photographic work and engagement with the residents of the Baptist Town

neighborhood. Consisting of both documentary portraiture and landscape, Eich narrates the long, twisted, and complicated history of Baptist Town into a contemporary context. *Sin & Salvation* is the second volume of Eich's four-part photo series *Invisible Yoke*. Ralph Eubanks is a visiting professor of Southern Studies and English at the University of Mississippi. He also teaches courses in the UM Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

**FEBRUARY 27**

**BROWN BAG LECTURE**

**Ansley L. Quiros**

*God with Us: Lived Theology and the  
Freedom Struggle in Americus, Georgia,  
1942–1976*



Ansley L. Quiros is an assistant professor of history at the University of North Alabama, specializing in US history, African American history, the history of immigration, and the history of race and religion. She is a native of Atlanta and a graduate of Furman University and Vanderbilt University. Quiros will discuss her new book, *God with Us: Lived Theology and the Freedom Struggle in Americus, Georgia, 1942–1976*.

**MARCH 7**

**(THURSDAY)**

**VISITING DOCUMENTARIANS  
SERIES**

**John Biewen**

**“Turning the Lens”**

**Barnard Observatory, 4:00 p.m.**



In his lecture John Biewen, host and producer of the *Scene on Radio* podcast, will play clips from the past two series of the show, *Seeing White* and *Men*, and describe how he and his collaborators arrived at a fresh documentary approach to looking at racism and sexism. In these episodes Biewen puts himself, and people like him, in the frame. He takes deep historical dives and interrogates white people (along with the notion of “whiteness” itself) as the inventors of race and racism, and men as the creators and protectors of sexism and patriarchy.

John Biewen is audio program director at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University (CDS). He teaches audio to undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education students at CDS. He is co-editor of the book, *Reality Radio: Telling True Stories in Sound*.

*continued on page 6*

**MARCH 18**  
**(MONDAY, 4:00–5:30)**

**BROWN BAG LECTURE**

**Anne Balay**

*Semi Queer: Inside the World of Gay, Trans, and Black Truck Drivers*

Cosponsored by the Center, the Sarah Isom Center for Women and Gender Studies, and the UM History Department as part of Women's History Month

Long-haul trucking is linked to almost every industry in America, yet somehow the working-class drivers behind big rigs remain largely hidden from public view. Gritty, inspiring, and often devastating oral histories of gay, transsexual, and minority truck drivers allow award-winning author Anne Balay to shed new light on the harsh realities of truckers' lives behind the wheel.

Anne Balay teaches in gender and sexuality studies at Haverford College and is the author of *Steel Closets*.



During the Twenty-Sixth Oxford Conference for the Book, photographer-filmmaker-geographer David Zurick will present an illustrated talk based on his new book *A Fantastic State of Ruin: The Painted Towns of Rajasthan*. A Q&A will follow his talk.



Zurick earned his PhD in geography from the University of Hawaii and the East-West Center, Honolulu. His books and photography have won numerous awards, including the National Outdoor Book Award and Kentucky Arts Council Al Smith Visual Artist Fellowship Award (twice). In 2014 he began *A Fantastic State of Ruin*, a series of color photographs in India, which was published in 2018. His documentary film *Crossing Sacred Ground* was completed in 2017 and was screened in multiple film festivals.

**MARCH 20**

**BROWN BAG LECTURE**

**Muhammad Fraser-Rahim**

**“Spiritual Wayfarers, Enslaved and Indigenous Muslims: Past, Present, and Future of American Muslims”**

American Muslims have been in the US since its inception, and the enslaved African Muslim population is part of the first wave of American Muslims in our republic. This lecture will navigate through the past, present, and future state of American Muslims and place special emphasis on the rich legacy of American Muslims in the American South who were part of the original Muslim community in America.

Muhammad Fraser-Rahim is an assistant professor in the Department of Intelligence and Security Studies at the Citadel and executive director, North America for Quilliam International, the world's oldest counter-extremist organization. He served for more than a decade in the US government writing strategic analytical products for the White House and National Security Council. He holds a PhD from Howard University.



**APRIL 3**

**BROWN BAG LECTURE**

**Joye Hardiman**

**“A Soul Comes Home to Her Mississippi Roots”**

Joye Hardiman is an educational architect, cultural custodian, world traveler, and ancestral storyteller. She served as the executive director of the Evergreen State College's Tacoma Campus from 1990 to 2008 and is the interim director of the Washington Center for Improvement in Higher Education. She has done extensive research on Africana history, cultural continuity and spirituality in Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Mali, the Gambia, Ghana, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, South Africa, India, the Yucatan, Trinidad, Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, and Cuba. Her current research focus is on Cameroonian Nile Valley linguistic, cultural, symbolic, and spiritual retentions.

Hardiman will present “A Soul Comes Home to Her Mississippi Roots,” documenting her first return trip to Mississippi. Her family left shortly after Emmett Till's murder. She will place this trip within the broader context of displaced African Americans reconnecting with their roots in the US South.



**MARCH 27**

**OXFORD CONFERENCE FOR THE BOOK VISITING DOCUMENTARIAN**

**David Zurick**

*A Fantastic State of Ruin: The Painted Towns of Rajasthan*  
**Overby Center Auditorium, 3:00 p.m.**

**APRIL 10**

**BROWN BAG LECTURE**

**Jerusa Leão**

**“Saravah! A Trip to the World of Samba de Roda from Bahia”**

Samba de Roda, which involves music, dance, and poetry, is a popular festive event that took place in the State of Bahia, in the region





of the Recôncavo and Sertão in the seventeenth century. The dance is performed on several occasions, such as popular festivities or Afro-Brazilian religious ceremonies, but also performed in more spontaneous contexts.

Jerusa Leão is a Brazilian artist, singer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist. Originally from Bahia, Jerusa grew up in the cities of this arid province, beginning her artistic career in 1995. Leão resides in Brazil, performing as a travelling solo singer and researcher of Brazilian culture.

## APRIL 11 (THURSDAY)

### VISITING DOCUMENTARIANS SERIES

**Rachel Boillot**

*Moon Shine: Photographs of the  
Cumberland Plateau*

**Barnard Observatory, 4:00 p.m.**

*Moon Shine* is a collection of photographs by Rachel Boillot that focuses on the unique musical traditions of the Cumberland Plateau. This region is home to a rich storytelling heritage, showcased in historic fiddle tunes, balladry, religious gospel pieces, and other songs passed down as part of a formidable oral tradition. This project celebrates the creative impulses within the Cumberland Plateau and seeks to document its disappearing traditions. Boillot's photographs will exhibit in Gammill Gallery in Barnard Observatory from March 4 to April 12. Her lecture will take place on April 11 in the Tupelo Room in Barnard Observatory.

Rachel Boillot is a photographer, filmmaker, and educator based in Nashville, Tennessee. Her work explores American culture and narrative traditions. She holds a BA in sociology from Tufts University, a BFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, and an MFA in experimental and documentary arts from Duke University.

She recently joined the team at the Kentucky Documentary Photography Project and teaches at Belmont University.



*A Prayer for Evelyn, Cumberland Gap, Tennessee, 2016*

## APRIL 17

### BROWN BAG LECTURE

**Angie Maxwell**

**“The Long Southern Strategy: How  
Chasing Voters in the White South  
Changed American Politics”**



Beginning with Barry Goldwater's Operation Dixie in 1964, the Republican Party targeted disaffected white voters in the Democratic stronghold of the American South. To realign these voters with the GOP, the party capitalized on the white racial angst that threatened southern white control. However—and this is critical—that decision was but one in a series of decisions the GOP made not just on race, but on feminism and religion as well, in what is called here the “long southern strategy.” In the wake of second-wave feminism, the GOP dropped the Equal Rights Amendment from its platform and promoted traditional gender roles in an effort to appeal to antifeminist white southerners, and it politicized evangelical fundamentalist Christianity represented by the Southern Baptist Convention. Over time, that made the party southern, not in terms of place, but in its vision, in its demands, in its rhetoric, and in its spirit. In doing so, it nationalized southern white identity, and that has changed American politics.

Angie Maxwell is the director of the Diane Blair Center of Southern Politics and Society and is the Diane D. Blair Associate Professor of Southern Studies in the political science department at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville.

## APRIL 24

### BROWN BAG LECTURE

**Mark Yacovone**

**“Jazz at Noon”**

Mark Yacovone, originally from Providence, Rhode Island, now makes his home in Oxford, Mississippi, where he holds a key position in the Yalobushwhackers, the house band for Mississippi Public Radio's weekly, live, and unrehearsed *Thacker Mountain Radio* show. Yacovone studied jazz under three-time Latin Grammy nominee Gustavo Casenave and has shared the stage and/or the studio with musical greats Mojo Nixon, Jody Williams, Buddy Cage, Maria Muldaur, Jeff Daniels, Charlie Musselwhite, and Jack Sonni, just to name a few. Yacovone will end the semester's Brown Bag series by playing jazz standards and jazz interpretations of several songs you might not expect to hear on piano.



# The Twenty-Sixth Oxford Conference for the Book

The Center's longest-running event is gearing up for another three days of readings, panel discussions, and lectures by notable writers, first-time novelists, and celebrated scholars. The Oxford Conference for the Book is one of the University of Mississippi's and Oxford's most popular events and will take place March 27–29, when poets, novelists, journalists, scholars, and readers will flock to Oxford and the university campus from far and wide to celebrate the Twenty-Sixth Oxford Conference for the Book.

The event is always free and open to the public. Events will take place on the UM campus and at various sites across town. Beginning the conference at 11:00 a.m. on Wednesday, Travis McDade, author of the recently published *Torn from Their Bindings: A Story of Art, Science, and the Pillaging of American University Libraries*, will give the keynote lecture on his book at a free luncheon sponsored by the Friends of the Library in the Faulkner Room in Archives and Special Collections in the J. D. Williams Library on the UM campus. The lunch is free, but reservations are appreciated.

In addition to book historians, this year's participants include novelists, poets, literary critics and cultural studies scholars, sociologists, essayists and memoirists, literature scholars, editors and publishers, and even a decision strategist/former professional poker player. Conference panels, sessions, and readings will explore a wide range of topics, such as crime noir, foodways poetry, the US-Mexican border controversy, decision making, the life of Frederick Douglass, three hundred years of New Orleans history, the Appalachian South, and the spiritual South.



Although authors and sessions are still being added to the schedule, the OCB has begun releasing the list of participants, including Edmund White; Ralph Eubanks and Dennis Covington; Jessica Wilkerson, with Karida Brown, Elizabeth Catte, and Meredith McCarroll; Jason Berry; David Blight; Annie Duke; Mark Hains and Rex Jones; William Boyle with Willy Vlautin, Elle Nash, Gabino Iglesias; David Zurick; and Kiese Laymon. Each afternoon Square Books will host book signings for that day's authors at Off Square Books.

On Wednesday evening the Book Conference Authors Party will be held at the Memory House on the university campus and cohosted again this year by the Friends of the J. D. Williams Library. This much-loved opening dinner reception is a lively fundraiser with wonderful food, drinks, music, and conversation between fellow conference attendees and guest writers. A portion of the \$50 ticket proceeds is tax deductible. All reservations can be made online on the conference

website ([www.oxfordconference-forthebook.com](http://www.oxfordconference-forthebook.com)) or by calling 662-915-3369.

As in years past, *Thacker Mountain Radio* will host a special Oxford Conference for the Book show at the Lyric Theatre on the Oxford Square. The show will include conference authors and visiting musicians, and begins at 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 28. Following *Thacker Mountain Radio*, SouthDocs filmmaker Rex Jones will screen his film *La Frontera* with Mark Hains, author of *Border Walk*. Both the film and the book document Hains's one thousand-mile walk along the entire stretch of US-Mexican border.

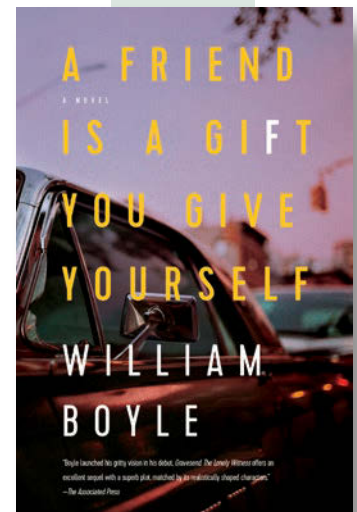
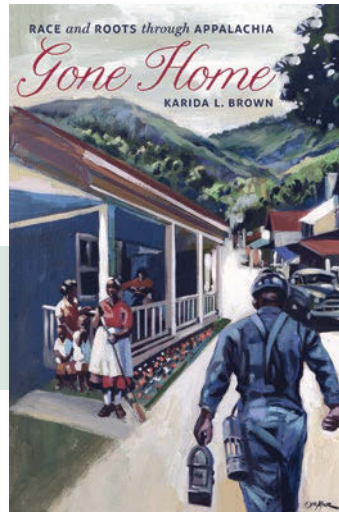
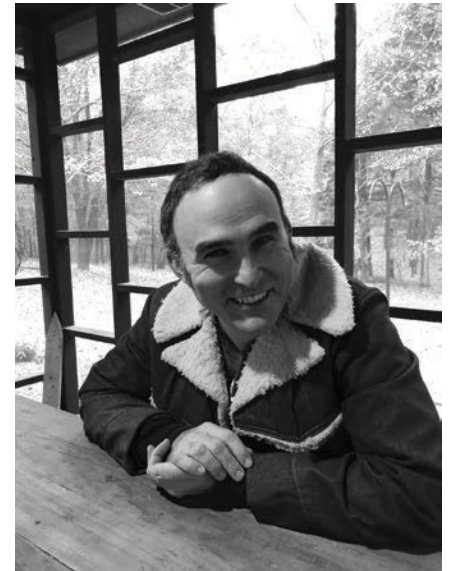
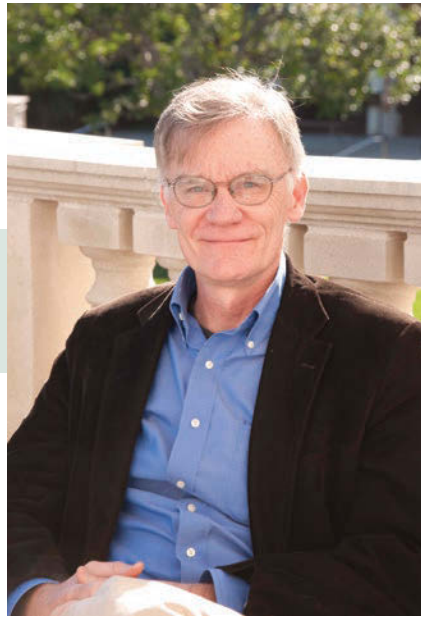
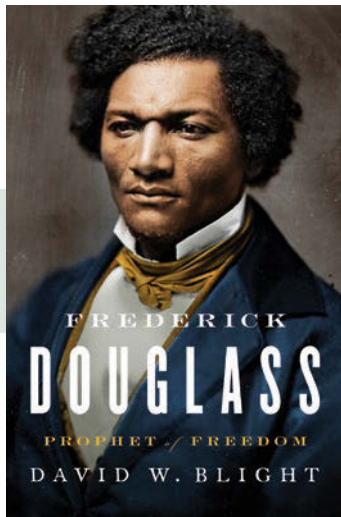
At noon on Friday, the Lafayette County and Oxford Public Library will host a poetry talk and lunch with poet Dave Lucas (*Weather*). Both the lunch and talk are free, but reservations are required.

The 2019 Children's Book Festival, held in conjunction with the Oxford Conference for the Book, will be held again at the Ford Center for the Performing Arts on Friday, March 29, with more than 1,200 first and fifth graders from the schools of Lafayette County and Oxford in attendance. Dan Santat will talk to the first graders about his book *After the Fall* at 9:00 a.m., and Sharon Draper will talk to the fifth graders about her book *Out of My Mind* at 10:30. The Lafayette County Literacy Council sponsors the first-grade program and the Junior Auxiliary of Oxford sponsors the fifth-grade program. All 1,200 children will receive their own copy of their grade's book.

Campus visitors may purchase parking passes for \$3/day at the welcome center on University Avenue, adjacent to the Grove, upon arrival at the conference each day.

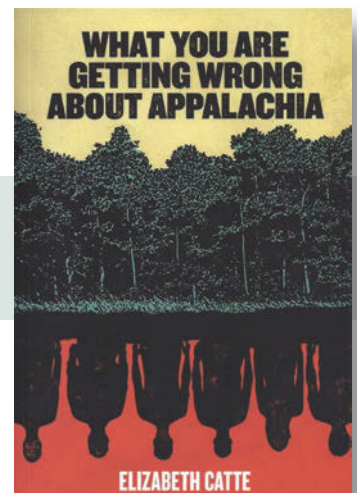
The Oxford Conference for the Book is sponsored by the Center



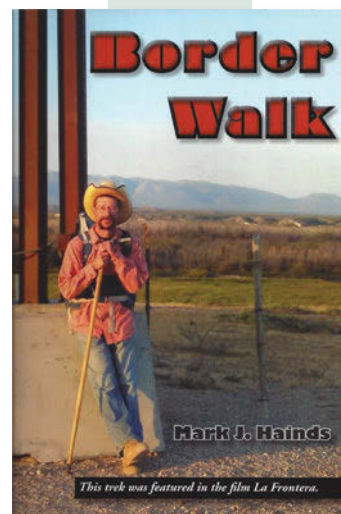
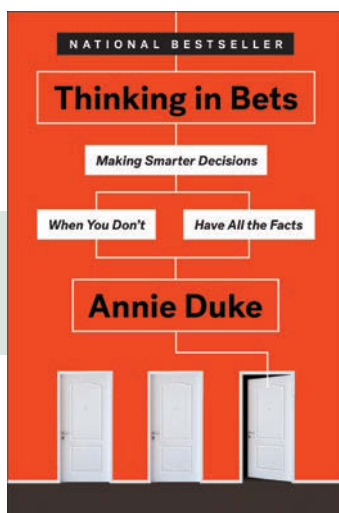
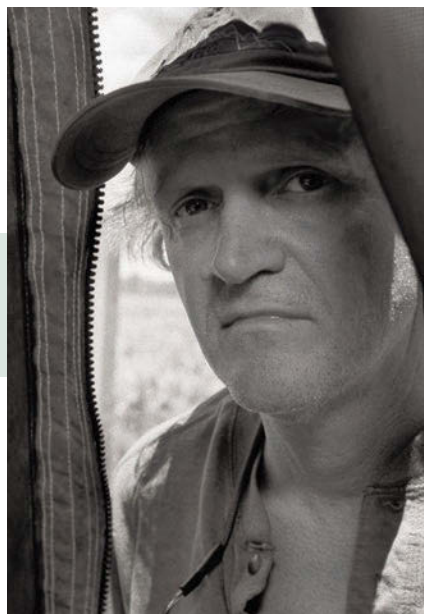
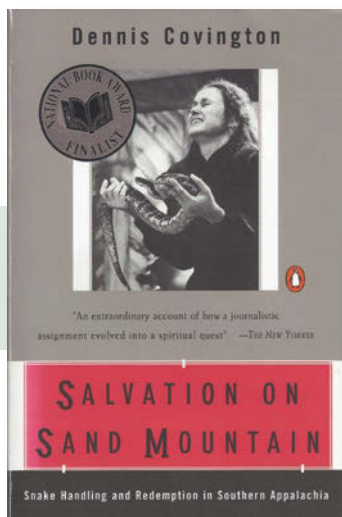


for the Study of Southern Culture and Square Books, and supported by the Lafayette County Literacy Council, the J. D. Williams Library, the Friends of the J. D. Williams Library, the Overby Center for Southern Journalism and Politics, the John and Renée Grisham Visiting Writers Fund, the Junior Auxiliary of Oxford, the Southern Foodways Alliance, the Southern Documentary Project, the University of Mississippi Department of Philosophy and Religion, and the Lafayette County & Oxford Public Library.

The conference is partially funded

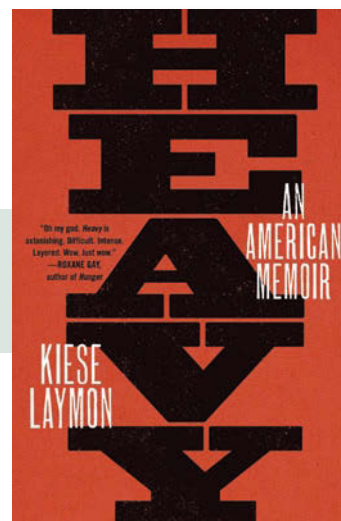






by the University of Mississippi, a contribution from the R&B Feder Foundation for the Beaux Arts, a grant from the Mississippi Humanities Council, and promotional support from Visit Oxford.

To learn more about the guest authors, please visit the conference's new website ([www.oxford-conferenceforthebook.com](http://www.oxford-conferenceforthebook.com)) and the conference's Facebook page. You can register for special events on the conference website or by contacting Rebecca Cleary at 662-915-3369 or by email at [rebeccac@olemiss.edu](mailto:rebeccac@olemiss.edu). For other inquiries, contact James G. Thomas, Jr., conference director, at [jgthomas@olemiss.edu](mailto:jgthomas@olemiss.edu).





# The Twenty-Sixth Oxford Conference for the Book

Please note that the schedule is subject to change due to the addition of unconfirmed programming at time of press. Check the conference website, [www.oxfordconferenceforthebook.com](http://www.oxfordconferenceforthebook.com), for up-to-date information.

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

- 11:00 a.m. Welcome Lunch at Archives and Special Collections  
Hosted by the Friends of the Library  
Archives and Special Collections  
J. D. Williams Library
- 11:30 a.m. Travis McDade: *Torn from the Their Bindings*  
Archives and Special Collections  
J. D. Williams Library
- 1:00 p.m. Edmund White: *The Unpunished Vice: A Life of Reading*  
Overby Center for Southern Journalism and Politics
- 3:00 p.m. David Zurick: *A Fantastic State of Ruin: The Painted Towns of Rajasthan*  
Overby Center for Southern Journalism and Politics
- 5:00 p.m. Leanne Shapton: *Guest Book*  
Off Square Books on the Oxford Square
- 6:30 p.m. Book Conference Authors Party  
Co-hosted by the Friends of the Library  
The Memory House  
406 University Ave.  
(Advance Ticket Required)

## THURSDAY, MARCH 28

- 9:30 a.m. "The Spiritual South"  
Ralph Eubanks in conversation with Dennis Covington: *Salvation on Sand Mountain*  
Overby Center for Southern Journalism and Politics
- 11:00 a.m. "The Appalachian South"  
Jessica Wilkerson, Karida Brown, Elizabeth Catte, and Meredith McCarroll  
Overby Center for Southern Journalism and Politics
- Lunch on Your Own
- 1:00 p.m. Jason Berry: *City of a Million Dreams: A History of New Orleans at Year 300*  
Overby Center for Southern Journalism and Politics

- 2:30 p.m. David Blight: *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*  
Overby Center for Southern Journalism and Politics
- 4:00 p.m. Annie Duke: *Thinking in Bets: Making Smarter Decisions When You Don't Have All the Facts*  
Overby Center for Southern Journalism and Politics
- 6:00 p.m. *Thacker Mountain Radio*  
Guest author: Leanne Shapton  
Lyric Theatre on the Oxford Square
- 8:00 p.m. A Book and a Movie  
*Border Walk* and *La Frontera*  
Mark Hains and Rex Jones  
Location to be announced

## FRIDAY, MARCH 29

- 9:00 a.m. To Be Announced  
Lafayette County Courthouse on the Oxford Square
- 10:30 a.m. Southern Foodways Alliance Presents: *Vinegar and Char: Verse from the Southern Foodways Alliance*  
Lafayette County Courthouse on the Oxford Square
- 12:00 p.m. Poetry Talk and Lunch  
Dave Lucas, *Weather*  
Lafayette County and Oxford Public Library  
Sponsored by the Lafayette County and Oxford Public Library  
(Advance Registration Appreciated)
- 1:15 p.m. "On the Fringes of Noir"  
William Boyle, Willy Vlautin, Elle Nash, and Gabino Iglesias  
Lafayette County Courthouse on the Oxford Square
- 2:30 p.m. Kiese Laymon, *Heavy*  
Lafayette County Courthouse on the Oxford Square
- 3:45 p.m. Salvatore Scibona: *The Volunteer*  
Lafayette County Courthouse on the Oxford Square
- 5:00 p.m. Reception and Book Signing  
Off Square Books on the Oxford Square

# *Deep South: Particular Places*

## Gammill Gallery to Exhibit Photographs of the Vernacular South

*Don Norris has a fine eye for elegance, simplicity, light, and composition, and for the givenness of things as they are. This work invites meditation, contemplation, repose for the eye.*

—John Wall, *The Southern Photographer*, Raleigh, NC

This fall, the Gammill Gallery hosts works of photography from Don Norris, documentary photographer and emeritus professor of biological sciences at the University of Southern Mississippi. The exhibition, *Deep South: Particular Places*, will draw images from ten rural counties in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama that Norris has visited and photographed over the last decade. The show, which runs from January 21 to February 28, will display twenty-three framed prints of landscapes, historic vernacular buildings, and architectural details.

Norris is a native of northwestern Indiana and an emeritus professor of biological sciences at the University of Southern Mississippi. As a landscape photographer, he likes the commonplace, what he might see every day. “My portfolios center on our vernacular architecture, our broad landscapes, our local and familiar detail,” he writes

in his artist’s statement for *Deep South*. “My photography is formalist, and its images are clean and specific.”

Norris describes his work from the South as mainstream southern photography: images as vessels for narrative; about the old and the ordinary; faithful to its subjects; and sobered by the gravitas of southern history.

“I am drawn especially to southern rural vernacular architecture,” Norris writes, “particularly of the mid-nineteenth century. These forthright, simple, and dignified buildings continue to reflect their days and places.”

Don Norris is a graduate of Indiana State University (BS) and Tulane University (MS, PhD). His images, mostly in black and white, are quiet and precise. His work has been shown in more than fifty juried, gallery, and museum exhibitions and have won nine regional and national awards. His prints are part of the permanent collections of the Ogden Museum of Southern Art (New Orleans), the Mississippi Museum of Art (Jackson), Alabama’s Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, and Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art (Auburn), and other public collections and archives.

*Sunset Field, Hinds County, Mississippi*







*Plantation Quarters, Springfield, Jefferson County, Mississippi*

*Newbern Presbyterian Church, Newbern, Alabama*



# Final Cuts

## *MFA Showcase Gives Students Experience Presenting Their Work*

As a finale to the fall semester, the students in the MFA for Documentary Expression program showcased recently completed film and photography projects. John Rash, producer-director for the Southern Documentary Project, said the event was an impressive exhibition of the multiple talents of all of the MFA students and what they were able to accomplish in a single semester.

“Many of them were first-time filmmakers, and they impressively succeeded in the difficult task of completing short documentaries on their own in a very short period of



time,” Rash said. “We look forward to hosting similar events every semester in an effort to share the impressive works of our MFA students with the Oxford community.”

This event provided an opportunity for students to gain experience presenting their films and photographs in a public exhibition and to engage in dialogue with an audience. Filmmakers and photographers included Jimmy Thomas, Jonathan Smith, Mary Knight,

Je’monda Roy, Zaire Love, Ellie Campbell, and Chi Kalu.

Jimmy Thomas chose the Mississippi Delta as his subject in *Along the Blues Highway*. His non-narrative documentary film serves as a meditation on permanence, particularly within the Mississippi Delta along Highway 61, a road often called Mississippi’s “blues highway.” “The Mississippi Delta landscape is as ancient as time, yet the structures that stand upon that

landscape molder away,” he said, “and its people and their machines pass through it and are gone, as quickly as if they had never existed. The film twins the immutable landscape of the Mississippi Delta with movable artifacts of impermanence in a lush visual soundscape.”

“I’m from the Mississippi Delta, and when I’m there these days I’m usually traveling to or from someplace, rarely stopping to explore the landscape,” Thomas continued. “Making this film gave me an opportunity to do expressly that: to take my time looking, seeing, and listening—paying good attention—to that familiar yet mysterious place.”

His work in Rash’s SST 605 class helped him build upon skills he previously worked on in David Wharton’s classes; in particular, thinking about the message of the work and how to creatively convey that message. “Like David’s class, John’s class pushed me out into the world to hone both those theoretical skills and the practical skills of audio recording, photographing, and filmmaking,” Thomas said.



Jonathan Smith's *Sweet Sorghum* follows two sorghum syrup makers through cooking a batch of syrup. Along the way they discuss the syrup, how it's made, and why they became sorghum makers. Smith selected this topic because it's something he grew up eating, but in talking with other people, he realized it was not well known outside of the rural South, so he wanted to document not just the process, but why people go to the trouble to grow and make sorghum syrup, largely using antique and labor-intensive equipment.



Untitled photo by Je'Monda Roy

importance of contingency plans and alternate ways to tell a story.”

Mary Knight's film *Singing Out* focuses on the experience of two lesbian singer/songwriters as they work on their music careers while living in Mississippi. Knight knew Morgan Pennington from being a fan of her band, And the Echo, and was interested in her reasons for staying in Mississippi. She met Mattie Thrasher through her performance along with And the Echo for Sarafest at Proud Larry's in Oxford.

“Since both are from Mississippi, I thought it would be great to get their different perspectives on what it is like to be openly gay in this state, but also an openly gay musician,” Knight said. “I was very interested in how their coming out stories mirrored their decisions to pursue

Smith is in his third semester of the MFA program, and feels he learned about both the technical and storytelling aspects of creating a documentary work, enabling him to produce a film with a clear story focus.

“You must have multiple backup plans,” he said. “The weather this fall kept the sorghum makers out of the field, so I was rushed at the end, where I'd originally planned to have the filming done by the middle of October at the latest, it was early November before one of the makers in the film was able to get in the fields to harvest and have a cook. That really helped me see the



Filmmakers discuss their works following screenings

Still from Ellie Campbell's *Tupelo Pride*



music as a career in some ways. Both hesitated to tell their families about their sexual identities until they were in their twenties, and both played music or wrote songs long before telling others about their passion.”

In the MFA program so far, Knight learned about focusing on the details when creating a film. “I’ve also learned to give a film the space it needs to breathe and come alive—that may be holding a sound shot for a few seconds longer than I normally would, or letting a soundbite go for a few seconds longer than my first instinct to cut it. I’m from a background that demands a lot of information in a short period of time, so the MFA classes have taught me to slow down and let the film form itself more.”

Je’monda Roy focuses on Cory Blackmon, a University of Mississippi P.O.D. worker. (P.O.D. stands for Provisions on Demand, an on-campus convenience store.) This film project stemmed from David Wharton’s documentary photography class, and she knew she wanted to focus on minority people in these primarily white spaces.

“For my final project, I chose to document the staff and contract workers around the university,” Roy said. “Those included custodial workers, cafe workers, security guards, and landscape workers, including Cory.” Besides working as cashier at the P.O.D., Blackmon also curates the music in the space, sharing tracks he appreciates and even introducing new tunes to some listeners.

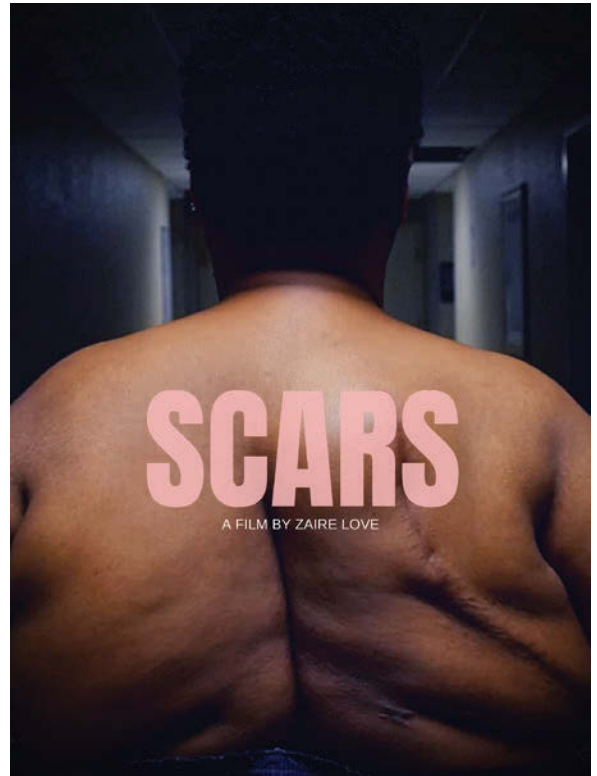
Roy’s photo of him was an

all-around favorite, and she decided to create a film about his presence on campus. “Most importantly, like my documentary photography final project, I wanted to give representation of black people on this campus and their importance in this white space,” Roy said. “Many staff workers are overlooked by our faculty, students, and sports atmosphere on this campus that we forget they play a huge part in our college experiences. Cory is a major part of our college experience, and I wanted to share that message.”

Zaire Love had two short films, *Trees* and *Scars*. In *Scars*, after her mother lost her lung to a common disease in the South, Love created a film that captures her mother’s journey of discovering her condition and her fight to defy her scars.

“I chose *Scars* to honor my mother’s story of being diagnosed with a common disease that took her right lung and rib cage, and I chose *Trees* to celebrate the brilliance of southern black women,” Love said. “Southern trees are the griots of the South. They hold wisdom and knowledge of the godly and the terror in the region. Listen as the trees talk, chile.”

Love learned that she can make films that people enjoy. “I’m a storyteller who is passionate about telling the stories of southern black women at all costs,” she said. “I have the dopest community of peers and professors who are so willing to help



me create, and I’m truly grateful.”

Ellie Campbell showed *Tupelo Pride*, which is about the first-ever LGBTQ pride event in Tupelo, Mississippi. Campbell wanted to make the film because she saw many pride events pop up around Mississippi in the past few years—Oxford started having a regular pride parade three years ago, Starkville had their first last year, and there have been short films about each one, so she thought Tupelo deserved one too.

“After taking Dr. Wilkerson’s class on LGBTQ oral histories last spring, I’m interested in doing more work documenting LGBTQ organizing in Mississippi, so this was a great way to get started,” Campbell said.

The MFA class helped her shape the film, in particular learning about the editing software. “It was also helpful to watch a lot of other documentary films and think through the choices they made in terms of topic, narrative, sound editing, etc.,” Campbell said. “Plus, I got to see and be inspired by my classmates’ terrific work!”

Rebecca Lauck Cleary



# Living Blues News

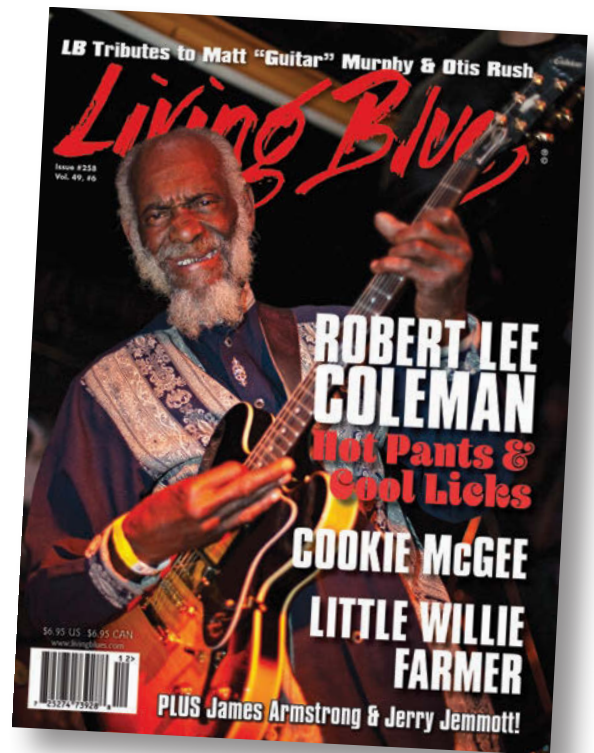
I want to start by saying thank you to all of the readers who commented on the *LB* #256 “Blues and Protest” issue. It was a powerful issue to produce and put out there, and the responses were equally powerful. Besides the few naysayer trolls (calling us “aging hippies”) the comments were very positive. One subscriber shared: “I have been reading *Living Blues* since the 1970 Ann Arbor Blues Festival. The last two issues have had some of the most interesting writing yet. That protest issue could have been expanded to a book.” Thanks to everyone who helped with the issue.

I was hesitant at first to include two lengthy tributes in this issue (#258) of a magazine that, by definition, was designed to focus on living artists. On the other hand, I wanted to celebrate the lives of two of the greatest blues guitarists of the postwar blues era: Matt “Guitar” Murphy and Otis Rush. We had been working on a cover story on Murphy over the last year. Though we knew his health was failing, we hoped to have him on the cover before he passed; unfortunately, things did not work out that way. We decided to turn his feature into a tribute and include some of the details that Jim O’Neal had begun to uncover. Otis Rush had been in poor health since his stroke in 2003. His celebrated appearance at the 2016 Chicago Blues Festival was his last appearance in public. Rush’s impact on modern blues cannot be overstated. His raw emotional intensity permeates every note he ever played. I hope readers will appreciate our special tributes to Murphy and Rush.

Our three other features in this issue represent what I love best about creating *LB*—presenting unheralded

blues players that are as real deal as you can get, and yet all three, for one reason or another, never achieved a fan base beyond their local communities. Macon, Georgia, native Robert Lee Coleman toured with Percy Sledge and James Brown in the 1960s and ’70s but wound up coming home and working a day job over much of the last forty years. Dallas’s Cookie McGee, who grew up with Freddie King as a neighbor and formed bands with his children, grew disgruntled with the music business and put her career on hold to care for her aging parents. Duck Hill, Mississippian Little Willie Farmer has played locally for decades, but a job as an auto mechanic and providing for his family kept his aspirations on the back burner until recently. Finally, all three of these artists have reached a point in life where they are able and want to pursue their music careers and follow those paths wherever they lead. Coleman has teamed with the Music Maker Relief Foundation and is traveling the world with their touring groups. McGee’s profile has risen, and she is securing spots on festivals around the country. And Farmer has just finished recording a new CD for Big Legal Mess that is sure to raise his profile far beyond the confines of Duck Hill.

As many of you may know, the Center for the Study of Southern Culture owns and publishes *Living Blues*. Many Southern Studies graduate students come to the program to study the music of the Deep South. Most semesters I have a graduate student as an editorial assistant. I



try to show them what working at a music magazine is like and offer them the opportunity to write for a national publication. Students’ knowledge and interest in the blues varies, as does their ambition to write about it. Over my fifteen years as editor, there have been a few students who have really immersed themselves in the blues, and in *LB*, and have continued to work with us after their graduations. For example, my former graduate assistant Melanie Young wrote the recent Rhiannon Giddens cover story and is also the circulation manager for *LB*. I am also proud to say that two of my former Southern Studies graduate assistants wrote features in this issue—the Robert Lee Coleman feature by Mark Coltrain and the Little Willie Farmer feature by Keerthi Chandrashekar. I see it as one of my roles as the editor of *LB* to bring excited new writers into the fold of *LB*, and this issue is a great example of that.

Brett J. Bonner



# South Beach, 1977–1986

An essay and photographs by Gary Monroe

On November 7, 2018, *Study the South* published a new essay by photographer Gary Monroe. The essay includes text and eighteen of Monroe's photographs, with descriptive captions, taken between 1977 and 1986 on South Beach, Miami.

Gary Monroe was born and raised in South Beach, a neighborhood located on the tip of the island of Miami Beach, Florida. Between 1977 and 1986 Monroe made it his mission to photograph the aging—and disappearing—Jewish community there. “The lifestyle vanished like it had never happened,” he writes in the short essay that precedes this collection of photographs. “In fact, every year of that decade I photographed the New Year’s Eve parties that hoteliers had thrown for their guests along Ocean Drive and Collins Avenue, and by the eighth year I noticed the celebrations becoming fewer and less celebratory.” Monroe’s photographs that follow his essay reveal a community that existed, at least in hints, until as recently as the early years of the



twenty-first century, but one that is all but imperceptible today.

Monroe, a native of Miami Beach, received a master’s degree in fine arts from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 1977. Upon returning home, he photographed the old-world Jewish community that characterized South Beach.

(above)

## *Morning Prayer, 1982*

There was considerable orthodoxy in South Beach. Many of the hotels along Ocean Drive, Collins Avenue, and Washington Avenue converted card rooms and social halls into makeshift *shuls* (synagogues) to accommodate their clientele’s needs of twice-daily prayer. The *shuls* are gone, replaced by bars and restaurants and clubs.

(left)

## *Sunrise Swimmers, 1978*

People congregated regularly at Tenth Street Beach to begin the morning in a therapeutic ocean. This practice ceased in 1981, soon after the Mariel boat-lift. At that time South Beach offered the cheapest real estate in Greater Miami. So refugees located there, and crime soared. Then the elderly were easy pickings. They no longer made their ways to the beach for sunrise.





*New Year's Eve, 1983*

With the proverbial foot in the grave, it is noteworthy, if not moving, that these elderly people who had seen and often endured too much, would greet both the days and the new year joyously, with optimism and a zest for life. Most hoteliers threw New Year's Eve parties for their guests, making South Beach especially lively that night of the year.



*Man in His Room at the An-Nell Hotel, 1984*

The interior of South Beach was lined with street after street of modest apartment buildings, from Washington Avenue all the way west to Biscayne Bay.

Since 1984 he has photographed throughout Haiti, and later looked at tourism across Florida, especially the “rite of passage” of vacationers at Disney World. He also wanders aimlessly to photograph in other countries—Brazil, Israel, Cuba, India, Trinidad, Poland, France, Russia, and Egypt, to name a few. Recently he has been looking at the landscape, especially the transformation of place as a result

of corporate-driven planning. His website is [www.garymonroe.net](http://www.garymonroe.net).

*Study the South* 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. The journal publishes a variety

of works by institutionally affiliated and independent scholars. Like the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, *Study the South* embraces a diversity of media, including written essays with accompanying audio, video, and photography components; documentary photography; and video projects.

Read Monroe’s essay and view his photographs at [www.StudytheSouth.com](http://www.StudytheSouth.com).

# Making a Space for Conversation

## *Jennifer Gunter Directs Collaborative on Race and Reconciliation*

In the wake of the massacre at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015, the University of South Carolina developed a relationship with William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation founding director Susan Glisson and Winter Institute associate director Charles Tucker. They trained faculty members at USC in how to facilitate the Welcome Table process started by the Institute, which promotes dialogue and community building around improved race relations.

Jennifer Gunter was one of the many people who knew they had to participate in that conversation. She was working on her doctorate in American history at USC at the time and came on board in December 2017. By May of 2018 she was in a full-time position as the director of the South Carolina Collaborative on Race and Reconciliation (SCCRR).

“SCCRR works in communities and classrooms across the state to support those seeking greater civic engagement, civil discourse, and active understanding to lessen the divides created by our differences,” Gunter said. “For now, I’m a collaborative of one, though I’ve recently hired a project coordinator who will start in 2019. So far, my role as director has given me the freedom to plan initiatives and programming, facilitate Welcome Table South Carolina discussions, work in advancing public history initiatives, and expand the reach of the university into the communities surrounding our campuses.”

Gunter, who earned her MA in Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi in 2012, realized that her Southern Studies coursework had made her comfortable discussing race



Jennifer Gunter

and how it intersects with all other identities. Earning the degree reinforced her understanding that history is more than the sum of its parts.

“It impressed on me an empathetic understanding of the past,” Gunter said. For Gunter, a deep understanding of southern history was necessary in order to do her job. “I have to see what lies behind the words ‘Heritage Not Hate’ as well as ‘Black Lives Matter,’” she said.

Gunter believes open dialogue is vitally important, particularly because the violence of the past continues to visit the present. “People are literally dying over misconceptions of history and race,” Gunter said. “I hope to see a reckoning with the past, something that goes beyond apologies. I hope to see the power of conversations and listening transform our understandings of each other.”

In addition to her work with SCCRR, she also is an adjunct

instructor for the Institute for Southern Studies at the University of South Carolina, directed by former University of Mississippi professor Bob Brinkmeyer, where she teaches an Introduction to Southern Studies course. “I try to incorporate as much interdisciplinary study as I can and have been using book chapters and articles, primary documents, movies like *13th*, *The Patriot*, and *The Free State of Jones*, and field trips to local sites like the Woodrow Wilson Family Home, which was built in 1871 and has been turned into a museum of Reconstruction,” she said.

“I let the kids lead the discussions during class time and urge them to delve deeper into the documents and artifacts. I feel it’s my duty to make sure that they leave my class with a clear understanding of how our histories continue to impact the present.”

One way to do that includes taking her class to visit the South Carolina State House on a field trip. “The grounds are populated by monuments to men who enacted monstrous acts against South Carolinians,” Gunter said. “I hope to see the power of conversations and listening transform our understandings of each other,” she said.

Between teaching and her duties at SCCRR, she said she hopes that one day she will work herself out a job and end racism. “It’s my job to figure out the best path toward that goal, which I don’t think is unobtainable,” Gunter said. “It was a system that was created by humanity. Therefore, it is a system that can be destroyed by humanity.”

Rebecca Lauck Cleary



# Landscape in Art and Literature

## *UM Museum Honors Center Advisory Committee Member with Symposium*

Poet Natasha Trethewey will present “A Lyrical Landscape” on the afternoon of March 25, preceding the next day’s symposium that will examine the landscape in art and literature. These presentations open the exhibition *Meditations on the Landscape in Art and Literature*, which will run March 25 through July 27 at the University of Mississippi Museum in Oxford. The occasion is the unveiling of William Dunlap’s *Meditations on the Origins of Agriculture in America*, an acquisition made with support from the Mississippi Arts Commission’s Dille Fund, Friends of the Museum, and the artist. Dunlap’s painting/construction, the centerpiece of the exhibition, presents a complicated and unsanitized landscape/history of agriculture in America, referencing the displacement and genocide of Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans. Dunlap, a member of the Center’s advisory committee, is also a curator of the exhibition.

Trethewey will read from her work and comment on her perceptions of history during “The Lyrical Landscape” program at Nutt Auditorium on Monday, March 25, at 5:00 p.m. A native of Gulfport, Mississippi, she is the author of five collections of poetry, including *Native Guard*, winner of the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in poetry, and *Monument: Poems New and Selected*, published in December 2018. Trethewey has served as poet laureate of Mississippi and for two terms as poet laureate of the United States. The Academy of American Poets recently named her to its Board of Chancellors, one of only 115 poets thus honored in its 73-year history.

The symposium on March 26 will be a full day of talks and panels focusing on landscape in art and

William Dunlap



ELMO THAMM

literature. Art historian and curator J. Richard Gruber will present the keynote address at ten o’clock that morning, and in the afternoon, he will moderate a panel with artists John Alexander, a native Texan who lives in New York, and Mississippi painters Jason Bouldin and Carlyle Wolfe. A veteran curator and director of several art museums including, from 1991 to 2001, the Ogden Museum of Southern Art in New Orleans, Gruber has authored many books and catalogs, among them *Dunlap: William Dunlap*, and has been executive director of four award-winning documentary films on American artists, including *William Dunlap: Objects Found and Fashioned*.

Dunlap will present his views on landscapes in painting and literature in conversation with Ralph Eubanks and Curtis Wilkie. Eubanks is a former director of publishing at the Library of Congress and currently visiting professor of English and Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi. He also teaches classes for the UM Sally McDonnell

Barksdale Honors College. Wilkie was a national and foreign correspondent for the *Boston Globe* from 1975 until 2000 and has taught journalism at the University of Mississippi since 2002.

Jane Livingston and others will discuss landscape photography. Since leaving the Corcoran Gallery of Art, where she was associate director and chief curator from 1975 to 1989, Livingston has been an independent curator and has also authored or coauthored nearly two dozen books and catalogs, among them *Black Folk Art in America*, *The New York School: Photographs, 1936–1963*, and *John Alexander: A Retrospective*.

Museum directors Betsy Bradley, of the Mississippi Museum of Art in Jackson, and Julian Rankin, of the Walter Anderson Museum in Ocean Springs will be joined by two prolific writers whose work captures cultural landscapes: Julia Reed and Jessica Harris. Julia Reed is a contributing editor at *Elle Décor* and *Garden &*

*continued on page 47*

# Bringing Stories to Life

## *Caity Maddox Now Leads Tours at National Civil Rights Museum*

On Saturday, December 9, 2018, Caity Maddox led a group from Rust College, four students—Baylee Champion, Hailey Douglas, Adam Nabors, and Keith Pearson—and their professor, Derrick Lanois, on a two-and-a-half-hour tour of the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee. Maddox later admitted she was somewhat nervous to give the tour to college students from a one of Mississippi's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and their professor. She was able to overcome her fears because of her training at the museum, but also because of her MA in Southern Studies from the University of Mississippi. "The thing about the Southern Studies program is so much of it is conversation based, and we are having discussions about these difficult topics. And that is what works for me here at the museum" Maddox said. The nervousness came from her recognizing her positionality. Maddox explains, "So part of it is, I have to recognize the privilege that I have [because] I have white privilege when I am talking about civil rights. I have to be cognizant of not only how that affects African American audiences that I am talking to, but also how it affects white audiences that I am talking to."

Baylee Champion, a junior at Rust College, had to admit she held "preconceived ideas about her [Maddox] by assuming that she could not connect to the history." Champion continued, [Maddox] helped me pay attention to details by using the museum as a visual history book. She knew what was important yet can often get overlooked. She was aware of her audience and was able to involve us by exploring our

understanding and interpretations of civil rights."

"I have been to the National Civil Rights Museum several times traversing being a secondary student, college student, and a graduate student, but this was my first time going through the museum as a professor and with a tour guide," Lanois reveals. "Caity knew her stuff and was able to connect the whole of African American history to the Modern Civil Rights movement within three hours. We covered the two semesters on African American history, and she relayed the story in an entertaining and engaging way using the museum's technology. As a historian, I usually have problems with the way museums tell history, but with Caity guiding us and filling in the gap, it was truly a worthwhile and informative visit. I will bring more students to the museum to have a tour specifically with her."

Maddox earned her Southern Studies MA in May 2017. She recalls that the courses that were particularly helpful in preparing for work in this museum were Katie McKee's Women in the South and, surprisingly, an English class on the Haitian Revolution. "When I was going through Southern Studies, I did an internship at Rowan Oak, and that started me towards the museum path" Maddox said. The opportunity to have the internship allowed her to combine her background in formal education and use it in an informal setting giving her a new career path. As a native Memphian, she grew up in the shadows of the National Civil Rights Museum and was hired in February 2018, only two months prior to the MLK 50 commemorations. "Southern Studies gave me the opportunity to see what that would

be like, and when I got my job here at the museum, this is exactly what I want to do. I want to be educating in these informal spaces. Meeting guests where they are and by sharing a specific story with them, hoping that will impact their lives going forward."

As Maddox thinks about her future, first she wants to remain within the museum profession, moving her way up to being a museum educator. She has a strong desire to stay at the National Civil Rights Museum, and as a museum educator she wants to "work with our visitors to see how they can have a more educational and more impactful experience each and every time they come to the museum." The Southern Studies education she obtained will serve her for her long career. "I came to the Southern Studies program because of how interdisciplinary it is. I came because I didn't want to be pigeonholed into thinking that I have to go into academia or any one particular profession. I came to Southern Studies with the hope that it would open up options for me, and that is what it has done. You can take a Southern Studies degree and do anything with it."

I asked Maddox if she would recommend the Southern Studies program, and her response was "Absolutely! I would recommend Southern Studies because the program itself is rigorous and thought-provoking." She adds that the people who come to the program are genuine people who you connect with, and she is in touch with many of her cohort after graduating and leaving Oxford.

Derrick Lanois



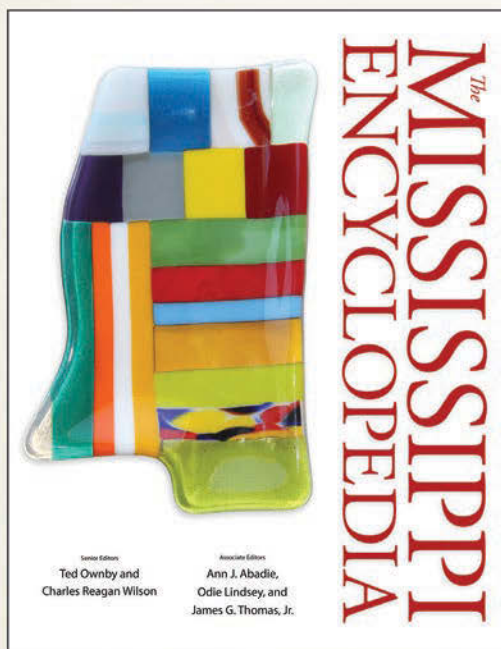
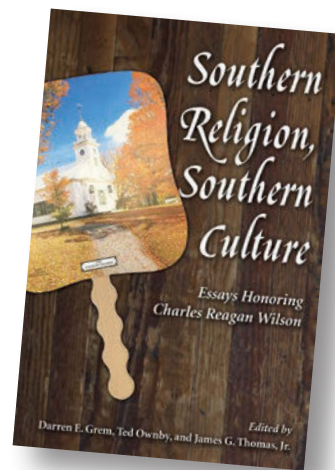
# University Press of Mississippi Publishes *Southern Religion, Southern Culture: Essays Honoring Charles Reagan Wilson*

On February 27–28, 2015, the Porter L. Fortune History Symposium honored past Center director Charles Reagan Wilson with a series of talks and panel discussions on the topic of southern religion and southern culture. Some of Wilson's former students were involved in the symposium as moderators, and others helped discuss his work as scholar and mentor.

This past December, the University Press of Mississippi published a new book from papers delivered at that conference, *Southern Religion, Southern Culture: Essays Honoring Charles Reagan Wilson*. Using certain episodes and moments in southern religious history, the essays examine the place and power of religion in southern communities and society. It emulates Wilson's model, featuring both majority and minority voices from archives and applying a variety of methods to explain the South's religious diversity and how religion mattered in many arenas of private and public life, often with life-or-death stakes.

The volume first concentrates on churches and ministers, and then considers religious and cultural constructions outside formal religious bodies and institutions. It examines the faiths expressed via the region's fields, streets, homes, public squares, recreational venues, roadsides, and stages. In doing so, this book shows that Wilson's groundbreaking work on religion is an essential part of Southern Studies and crucial for fostering deeper understanding of the South's complicated history and culture.

Wilson's friends, erstwhile students, and colleagues all contributed to the volume, including Ryan L. Fletcher, Darren E. Grem, Paul Harvey, Alicia Jackson, Ted Ownby, Otis W. Pickett, Arthur Remillard, Chad Seales, and Randall J. Stephens. Ted Ownby, Darren Grem, and James G. Thomas, Jr. edited the volume.



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# A View from the Table

## *Filmmaker Ava Lowrey Uses Her Camera to Tell Stories*

Curiosity has never been a problem for Ava Lowrey, who uses her appetite for questions to spread the word about southern food.

As the Pihakis Foodways Documentary Filmmaker for the Southern Foodways Alliance, Lowrey tells stories onscreen about a diversity of people and places, such as James Beard award-winner Dolester Miles, Craig Claiborne award-winner Hugo Ortega, and the history of Carolina fish camps, just to name a few. Most recently, she completed *Marcie Cohen Ferris Does the Work*, a film about the professor, cookbook author, and historian who earned the Lifetime Achievement award at the 2018 SFA Symposium.

“Working with Marcie Cohen Ferris was an incredibly rewarding and inspiring experience,” Lowrey said. “Her work and knowledge in the field of foodways and southern Jewish studies is amazing, but her mentorship of young scholars, particularly women and people of color, is particularly inspiring to me as both a filmmaker and educator. Her work also reminds us of the importance of southern voices in movements for change and progress.

Lowrey’s biggest challenge in making the film about Ferris was creating a short film about the accomplished scholar. “She could easily be the subject of a feature

film, and the hardest cuts I’ve had to make as a filmmaker so far were the cuts I made to shorten her two-and-half-hour interview down to an eight minute film,” Lowrey said.

That film, along with *Collection and Collage: In the Studio with Ghost of a Dream*, a short film about artists Adam Eckstrom, Lauren Was, and their stunning art installation *Traveling through the Dawn of Day*, was shown at the 2018 SFA Symposium, held in Oxford in October. The artists work in collaboration under the name Ghosts of a Dream.

Since Ghost of a Dream’s work is often large-scale, Lowrey’s role as the filmmaker meant she had to show not only the size and scale







of the completed work, but also to balance those images with the details that make their work so intricate and beautiful.

During the past few years, Lowrey has created new programs and classes that explore how food can be used as a lens to tell stories. “Through the SFA, I created a summer internship program that has produced some amazing films and helped grow the skills of emerging filmmakers,” Lowrey said. “We also have a summer workshop that collaborates with our oral history workshop to create multifaceted projects through weeklong field-work assignments. One of the most rewarding parts of my job, in addition to telling such important stories, is watching the growth of our students and interns as storytellers and media makers.”

For the spring, Lowrey is working on a film about Birmingham’s West End neighborhood, including the history of that neighborhood and the current efforts of locals in the food and urban farming community. “I will be teaching Advanced Documentary at the Center and cannot wait to see what ideas students bring to the classroom,” Lowrey said. “Additionally, I am fortunate to work with some amazing thesis students in the Center’s MFA program.”

To check out her work, visit [southernfoodways.org](http://southernfoodways.org).

*Lowrey, a native of Alexander City, Alabama, is a graduate of New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts and earned her MFA in Experimental and Documentary Arts at Duke University.*

Rebecca Lauck Cleary

## The Center Welcomes New Associate Director for Programs

The Center for the Study of Southern Culture welcomes Afton Thomas to the position of associate director for programs. For the past four and a half years, Thomas held the position of project coordinator with the Southern Foodways Alliance. She brings a wealth of experience to the position, and we are excited about her new role at the Center.

Thomas earned an MA in theatre from Sacramento State University and holds a BA in theatre from the University of Missouri. She and her family moved to Oxford in 2012 and have fallen in love with the community’s charm and family-centered feel. Before joining the SFA, Afton worked in human resources and for a nonprofit local theater in Missouri.



Afton Thomas

JAMES G. THOMAS, JR.

# Amplifying Voices, Telling Stories

## *Southern Foodways Alliance Oral Historian Talks about Her Work*

The first day I met him, Mike Prince and I did not talk about sorghum. Instead, I listened to him. He recounted stories from his upbringing in Sherwood, Tennessee. He told me about the heirloom plants his family grew and the seeds he had stored in his freezer. Prince shared with me stories of the many times he led researchers from the University of Tennessee across his family's land in search of a snail that only lived in the hills surrounding Sherwood.

Prince's home was filled with family heirlooms and portraits. A photograph of his Aunt Lucy hung in the entrance to the house. He was close to her, and he bought her house after she died. An antique walnut cabinet stood in a corner of the living room. The cabinet had once been used to salt hams. He found it cast off in a trash pile and restored it to its former glory. He opened the cabinet door for me, and a painted iron hog, crockery, and other items were neatly stacked

Mike Prince at home in Sherwood, Tennessee



on the shelves, ready to be used again at a moment's notice. Prince reached into the cabinet and retrieved a small bowl. He tipped it into his cupped hand. Out rolled three stones, smoothed into marbles. "My father made these when he was a boy," he said, showing me. He found rounded stones and put them in a divet he made in a creekbed. In a year's time, the rocks would be spherical like a marble.

A few weeks after our first meeting, I returned to Sherwood to conduct an oral history with Mr. Prince. Mike points out of his living room window. "I plant sorghum in that patch and on the other side of the creek," he noted. The creek separates a small tract of land. I can see to the other side sitting on his couch. He didn't get to make any sorghum this year because winds blew down his crop. We talk about the process

of making sorghum, new pests attacking his crop, and innovations he's implemented along the way.

Sorghum is deeply tied to Prince's family history. "It's a tradition. The Princes have always done sorghum," related Mike Prince. "It's not a burden that, 'Well, we've always done it, so I've got to do it.' No. You do it for the love of your ancestors and your family that's passed." When he crushes cane and boils juice, it is as if his father and grandfather are living again. When he makes sorghum, Prince connects to family members who have passed away. He sustains the practice of sorghum making, but he makes it his own through innovations and technological changes.

In the year I have been the Southern Foodways Alliance's oral historian, I have conducted oral histories from Austin, Texas, to



Annemarie Anderson





**Mike Prince's harvested sorghum field**

Charlotte, North Carolina. One of the most important lessons I've learned along the way is the power of listening. No matter what I know about a subject, the questions I ask are only as good as my ability to listen. Listening enables me to build rapport with narrators. Ultimately, it allows me to ask better questions and produce better oral histories.

Often, oral history opportunities look like serendipity. In reality, they are the product of skill, dogged persistence, and connections made with people along the way. I met Mr. Prince because another narrator believed in the work I was doing. By listening to Prince, I developed a rapport with him and elucidated themes and ideas to tease out in his interview.

Often when I am in the field, I contemplate how others profit from my work. A photograph and recording can only capture so much. I have the benefit of meeting people face to face. I interact with them as they tell their story. I visit the places they talk about in the oral history. But my job doesn't stop at the end of the interview. I process the interviews so they are easy to read, and I contextualize each project with an introduction and narrator biographies so the public can easily read and understand each interview. Once the oral histories are archived, professors, students, journalists, and other interested people can access and use oral histories to learn more about the South's past, present, and future.

Amplifying narrators' voices and their stories is the most rewarding part of my job. Oral histories add value to the historical narrative. Narrators who engage in growing, cooking, and eating southern food not only define themselves, they also define our region. Sometimes the stories they present harmonize with the historical record. More often, they complicate the narratives all southerners are compelled to grapple with. A nuanced portrait of the South and its foodways emerge.

As I wrap up my interview with Mike Prince, I ask if he has anything else he would like to say. "It's nice to know there's gonna be a record of it," he tells me.

Annemarie Anderson

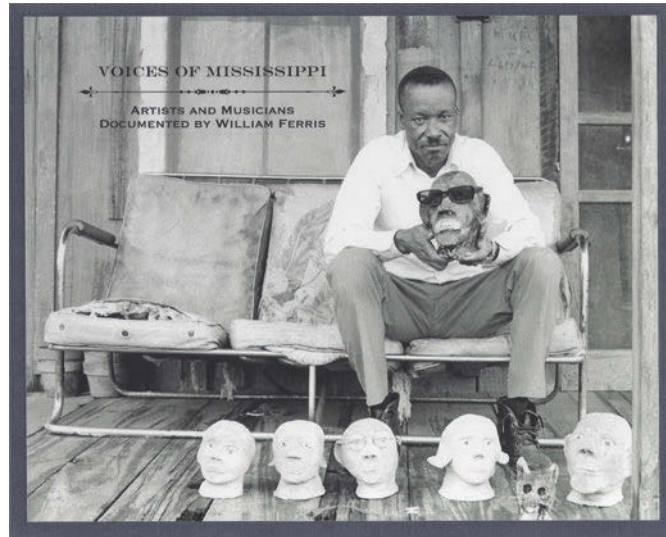
# Made in Mississippi

## *New Boxed Set of Bill Ferris's Films and Field Recordings Released*

William Ferris—"Bill" as he is known to his friends, which are just about all of us—has been richly honored for his work, including France's Chevalier and Officer in the Order of Arts and Letters. Now the CD label Dust-to-Digital has released a set, *Voices of Mississippi: Artists and Musicians Documented by William Ferris*, that is devoted to his field recordings and films. Bill joins distinguished company with Art Rosenbaum, Hugh Tracey, Alan Lomax, and Bruce Jackson in being featured in Dust-to-Digital retrospectives.

For eight years (1993–2001), I supervised the Blues Archive and Music Library branch library in Farley Hall, across Sorority Row from the Center for the Study of Southern Culture.

I should explain that through the 2000s, Bill's photographs, films, and tapes were maintained not at the Blues Archive, but at the Archives and Special Collections division at the John D. Williams Library. In the 1990s Thomas Verich was the university archivist, but the daily maintenance of Bill's archives was handled by Sharron Sarthou. On one of my visits, she allowed me to see that Bill deposited a tremendous amount of source material. Today it is now housed at the Southern Folklife Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. The notes for *Voices of Mississippi* state that five people—Scott Barretta, Jake Fussell, April Ledbetter, Steven Lance Ledbetter, and Matt Payne—selected the tracks for the



Dust-to-Digital set from the many archival reels.

The box's cover photo of James "Son" Thomas holding one of his head sculptures reminds me of the time I tried moving Thomas's sculpture of bluesman Sam Chatmon's

head from a Blues Archive display case. Oof! That head was heavier than it looked, because it was made of concrete. I had to hug it to keep from dropping it, and somehow I heaved it safely to a nearby table.

Thankfully the set itself isn't as heavy. But it contains three CDs of blues, black sacred music of many kinds (not just gospel), and storytelling; a DVD of seven short films; and a hardcover book that includes essays

by blues scholars Scott Barretta and David Evans, and documentarian Tom Rankin. Some of the music was released previously on LPs (including on three of the four LPs that the Center released on Southern Culture Records in the 1980s) and



Pecolia Warner and her quilt, Yazoo City, Mississippi, 1975





Victor "Hickory Stick" Bobb and his cane, Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1976

on the CD accompanying Bill's book *Give My Poor Heart Ease* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2009). But this time, transcripts of these re-released tracks and of all the others are given in the hardcover book.

I remember one conversation with Bill during which he spoke



James "Son Ford" Thomas walks among the tombstones, 1974

with delight about toasts. They are oral recitations, sometimes rhyming, sometimes metrical, often bawdy, spoken by African American men among their friends. Like blues lyrics and rap, the longer toast a man can give, the more that man is esteemed (and the louder the laughter). Toasts have been captured on discs at least as far back as Alan Lomax's field recordings in the early 1940s, but Bill managed to record toasts as they were embedded in the blues. *Voices of Mississippi* gives two fine examples of toasts as spoken by Joe "Skeet" Skillet

of Leland, Mississippi, and it shows how a toast like "I Dreamed I Went to the UN" may be embedded in a song (by a vocalist now unknown, to guitar accompaniment by the great Fred McDowell). The set's credits don't state how much guidance the compilers received from Bill in making their selections, but their inclusion of toasts is appropriate for one of his favorite topics.

More than his writings and recordings, Bill's films (especially those that he made with Judy Peiser for the Center for Southern Folklore in Memphis) show how wide his interest has been in southern culture: blues, black sacred music, men, women, mules, hogs, small-town commerce, spiritual healing, and southern revelation. Combining the DVD in *Voices of Mississippi* with the DVD included with *Give My Poor Heart Ease*, nearly all of Bill's short films are available again.

*Note:* The Recording Academy has nominated *Voices of Mississippi* for Grammy Awards in the categories of Best Historical Recording and Best Album Notes. Winners will be announced on February 10, 2019.

All photos by Bill Ferris, each appearing in the *Voices of Mississippi* book included in the boxed set.



Tom Johnson

Ed Komara

# Oxford Film Festival Features Screenings by Southern Studies Filmmakers

The Oxford Film Festival has announced the full schedule of films for the 2019 fest, and included in this year's lineup are several Southern Studies filmmakers. Those filmmakers' films include Mary Stanton Knight's *Dear Hubert Creekmore*, Jonathan Smith's *Taming the Tarasque*, Nicole Du Bois's *Vishwesh Bhatt: The South I Love*, Susie Penman's *Bright at Night: North Mississippi's Foxfire Ranch*, and John Rash's *Negro Terror*. Also, professor of Southern Studies and English Adam Gussow is the subject of a feature film, *Satan and Adam*.

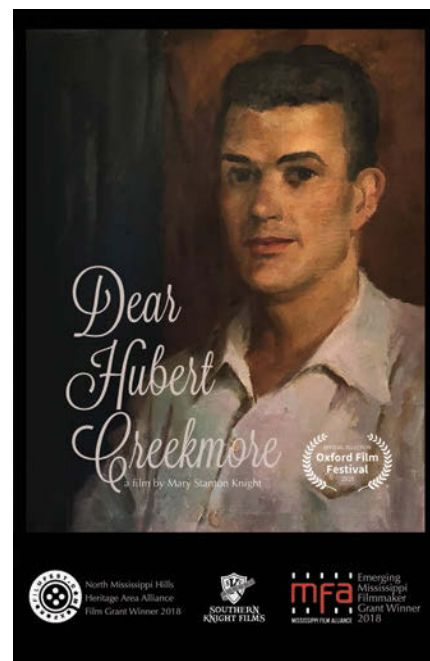
The film chronicles the relationship between Gussow and Sterling "Satan" Magee as they joined up to play the blues on the streets of Harlem, New York, in the 1980s.

The Oxford Film Festival was founded in 2003 to bring exciting, new, and unusual films (and the



people who create them) to North Mississippi. The annual five-day festival screens short and feature-length films in both showcase and competition settings.

"As always, we seek to entertain," Addington said. "But beyond that,



we embrace our cultural and social responsibility and the mission of being one place and one event that Oxford film fans and Oxford Film Festival filmmakers can count on to help build those bridges between different people in the best and most enjoyable way."

The festival begins on February 6th and screens films each day through the 10th. For more information and a complete schedule of all screenings, visit [www.oxfordfilmfest.com](http://www.oxfordfilmfest.com).



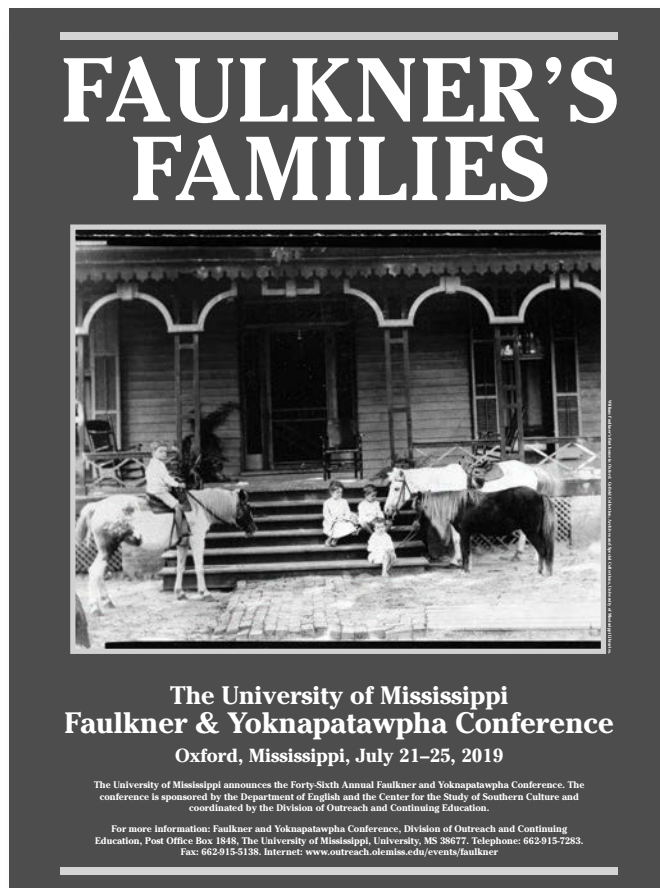
# Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference

## *Kenyatta Berry and Elevator Repair Service Join Lineup for “Faulkner’s Families” Conference*

This summer’s Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha conference on “Faulkner’s Families” (July 21–25) will feature a pair of exciting sessions to complement the regular conference program of keynote lectures, scholarly panels, discussions, and tours.

First, with support from the University of Mississippi Slavery Research Group, Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha is proud to host an evening session by noted writer, lecturer, and genealogist Kenyatta D. Berry. Berry, author of *The Family Tree Toolkit: A Comprehensive Guide to Uncovering Your Ancestry and Researching Genealogy* and host of the popular PBS series *Genealogy Roadshow*, specializes in African American genealogy, including the researching of slave ancestry, and in DNA-based genealogical research. This summer she will lead a ninety-minute workshop, scheduled for Sunday, July 21, at 7:30 p.m., focusing on the challenges and rewards of tracing family history. The workshop will be open to members of the Lafayette-Oxford-University community as well as to conference registrants.

“Faulkner’s Families” is also excited about the return of the Elevator Repair Service (ERS) theater company to Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha. Core members Vin Knight, April Matthis, and Ben Williams will join company director John Collins for a viewing and discussion of ERS’s *The Sound and the Fury*, its word-for-word adaptation, originally staged in 2008, of section 1 of Faulkner’s 1929 saga of the Compson family of Jefferson,



Mississippi. *The Sound and the Fury* is the second in a planned trilogy of literary adaptations that began in 2006 with *Gatz*, the company’s remarkable, eight-hour staging, again word-for-word, of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. Like *Gatz*, *The Sound and the Fury* offers, in the company’s words, “not a retelling of the story but a reenactment of the novel itself.” The session, scheduled for Monday evening, July 22, at 8:00 p.m., will screen a recording of ERS’s 2015 remounting of *The Sound and the Fury*, staged at the Public Theater in New York. Collins, Knight, Matthis, and Williams will provide commentary on the screening, followed by a talkback with audience members. The session will provide a unique experience of, and new insights

into, one of Faulkner’s greatest novels of family.

For more information about keynote speakers and conference registration, please visit the conference website at [www.outreach.olemiss.edu/events/faulkner/](http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/events/faulkner/), or see the Fall 2018 issue of the *Southern Register*. Discount rates for the conference are available for groups of five or more students. Inexpensive dormitory housing is available for all registrants, along with many other local lodging options. Contact Mary Leach at [mleach@olemiss.edu](mailto:mleach@olemiss.edu) for details. For other inquiries, contact Jay Watson, director, at [jwatson@olemiss.edu](mailto:jwatson@olemiss.edu).

Jay Watson

# Three Center Faculty Begin the Year with New Monographs

To kick off the spring semester, three faculty members at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture enjoyed the accomplishment of their books' publication.

At 5:00 p.m. on January 22 at Off Square Books in Oxford, an event featured Jessica Wilkerson, author of *To Live Here, You Have to Fight: How Women Led Appalachian Movements for Social Justice*; Kathryn B. McKee, author of *Reading Reconstruction: Sherwood Bonner and the Literature of the Post-Civil War South*; and Ted Ownby, author of *Hurtin' Words: Debating Family Problems in the Twentieth-Century South*.

In her work *To Live Here, You Have to Fight* (University of Illinois

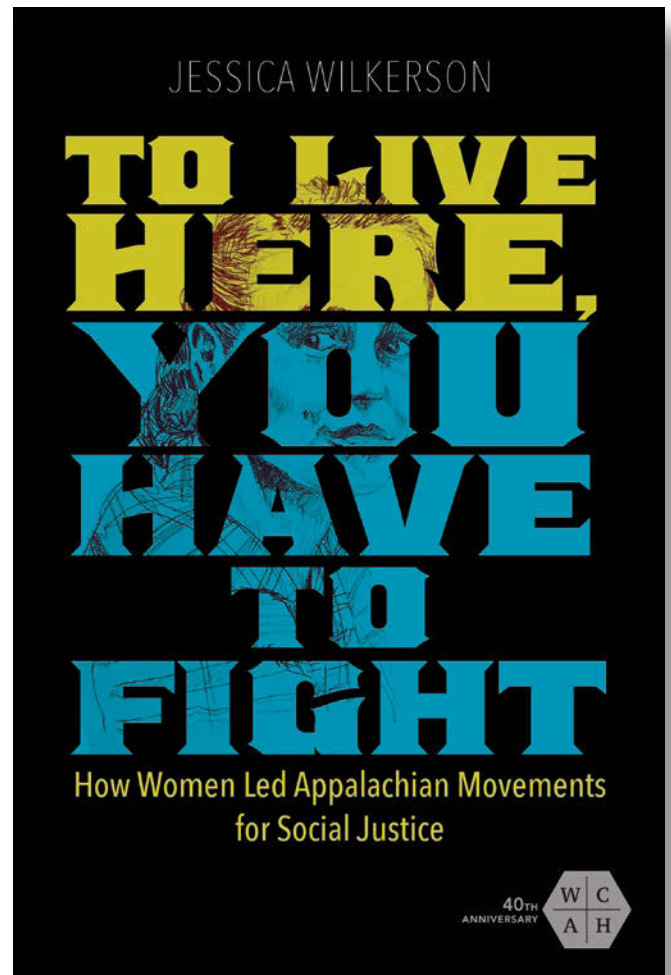
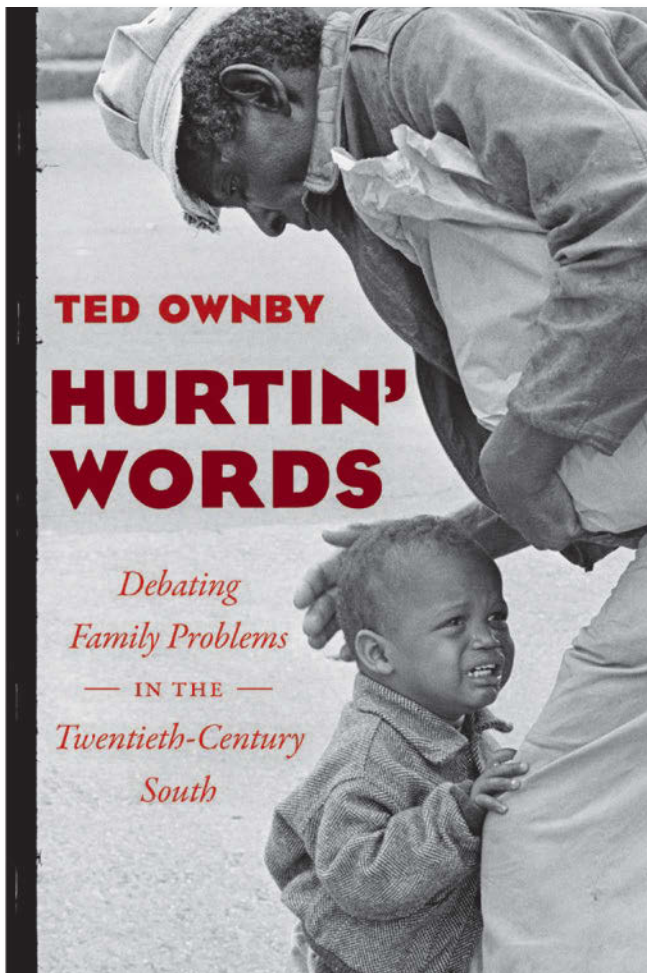
Press), Jessica Wilkerson, assistant professor of history and Southern Studies, examines the War on Poverty, which was launched in 1964 in Appalachia. Based on her dissertation, the study blends women's history and Appalachian history with labor, class, and activism. She visited archives around the region and conducted interviews with people who had been activists in the 1960s and 1970s.

"Ultimately, I was drawn to the stories of women in eastern Kentucky, where there's a long history of women's activism in the coalfields, from the 1920s to the present," she said. "The book starts with their experiences and then

follows them into other networks—regional and national—as they got involved in political and social movements."

There are no simple explanations for complex histories, and it was important for Wilkerson to contextualize the women's lives historically and to understand the movements in which they participated. Appalachian women acted as leaders and soldiers in a grassroots war on poverty—shaping and sustaining programs, engaging in ideological debates, offering fresh visions of democratic participation, and facing personal political struggles.

"In a broader sense, the big takeaway is that starting from the





perspective of women, especially poor and working-class women, allows us to see all sorts of things—federal policy, social movements, labor, the history of Appalachia—from a fresh and, I believe, necessary perspective,” she said.

The activists she writes about may have been overlooked, but their persistence brought them into unlikely coalitions with black women, disabled miners, and others to fight for causes that ranged from poor people’s rights to community health to unionization. “My point about caregiving is that women’s activism often reflected their predominant roles in society. Due to gender, policy, and social customs, women took on the burden of caring for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities,” Wilkerson said.

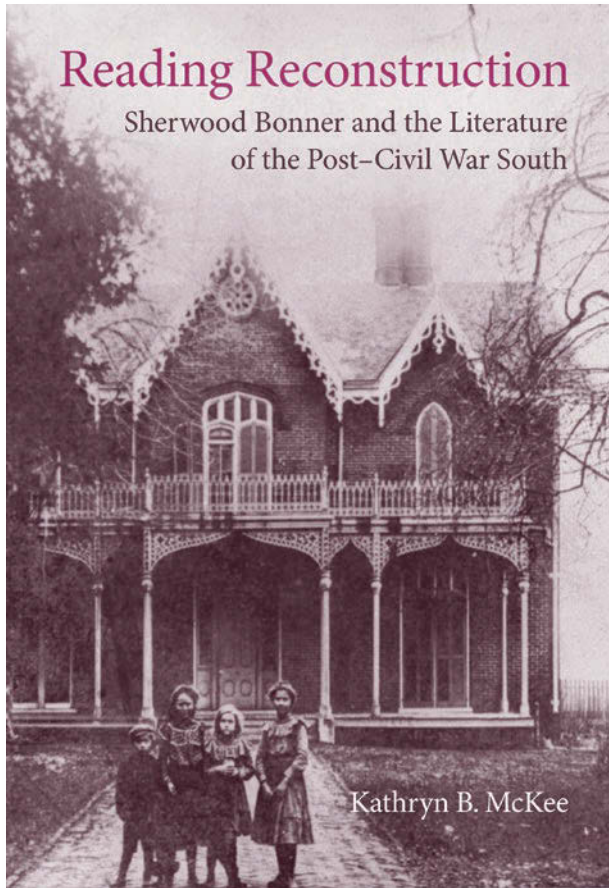
In *Reading Reconstruction* (LSU Press), Kathryn McKee looks further into the past to gain insight into Sherwood Bonner (1849–1883), a Mississippi native from Holly Springs who portrayed the discord and uneasiness of the Reconstruction era in her fiction and nonfiction.

McKee, McMullan Associate Professor of Southern Studies and associate professor of English, reassesses Bonner’s place in American literary history. McKee said she has always been haunted by Bonner’s life and choices, her blind spots, her shortcomings, as well as her successes. “She was a young woman who made controversial choices, even by today’s standards, but the most important thing about her was her drive to be a writer,” McKee said. “She knew she had to leave Mississippi in order to make writing the most important thing in her life. Today society still struggles with ambitious women, but she couldn’t live with herself without trying to be a writer.”

The book participates in a renewed attention to the period of

## Reading Reconstruction

Sherwood Bonner and the Literature of the Post-Civil War South



Kathryn B. McKee

Reconstruction in American literary history and an interest in recovery of nineteenth-century writers.

“We’ve moved beyond a celebratory existence to a stage of seeing knotty imperfection of their efforts,” McKee said.

The event at Square Books was especially important to McKee because it reflected the collaboration and collegiality of the Center, especially as Ownby and Wilkerson were all moving in the same phases to complete their work.

“It also reflected the values of this place—a common spirit that we all work to understand better the common subject that we share,” McKee said. “We all have the same sets of questions about the region, this place, identity, and power. It is rewarding to work at the Center because of a common pursuit of shared interests.”

Ted Ownby, Center director and William F. Winter Professor of History, hoped to call attention to the three interdisciplinary

scholarship texts all published on different university presses, as well as to the three colleagues who teach together.

“Having this event on the first day of classes was a way to bring people together and celebrate books, scholarship, and working together,” Ownby said. “Many people in their introductions say writing is solitary, but celebrating three books together suggests that finishing a book is not.”

In *Hurtin’ Words*, Ownby considers how a wide range of writers, thinkers, activists, and others defined family problems in the twentieth-century American South. The idea for the book, published by the University of North Carolina Press, originated when he wrote a paper about southern rock music and the men who thought it was impossible to stay in a lifetime relationship.

“It’s about the problem of family life, the relationship between what people expect and hope for, and why does it matter what people think about you,” Ownby said. “Those southern rockers thought it was really important that no one understood them and felt it was important to address other peoples’ misunderstandings. Teaching and writing about Southern Studies means I find myself writing on a lot of topics, wondering what they had to do with each other, and several had to do with family life and family problems.”

The title comes from Tammy Wynette’s song “D-I-V-O-R-C-E,” which she said “spelled out the hurtin’ words” to spare her child the pain of family breakup. “Authors never know what readers will like or dislike, but what I hope is that people are intrigued by these definitions of family life. Instead of just thinking about specific issues, they are thinking about family ideals and problems,” Ownby said.

Rebecca Lauck Cleary

# Family Life in the Twentieth-Century South

## *A Conversation with Ted Ownby*

**By Jennifer Gunter**

Ted Ownby is the newly named William Winter Professor of History and Southern Studies and director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture. His new book, *Hurtin' Words: Debating Family Problems in the Twentieth-Century South*, pushes into the realm of intellectual history, debating and analyzing ideas and thought patterns regarding concepts of southern families in the twentieth century. He is particularly interested in how various communities contemplate and argue about what kinds of families have—or are—problems. After seeing him give a talk on this work at Duke University, I spoke with him about his newest publication.

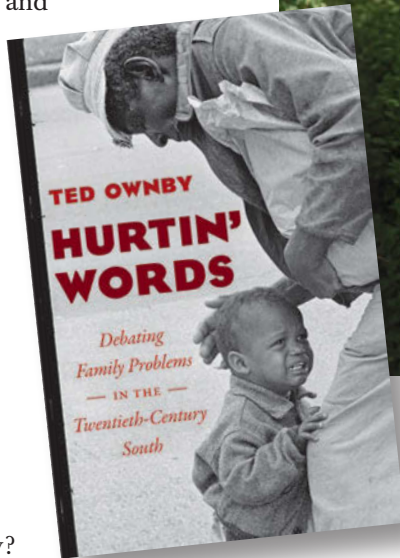
**Jennifer Gunter:** Can you walk me through how you realized that this was a cohesive work and not just a set of different articles?

**Ted Ownby:** As part of my job in history and Southern Studies, I found that I was writing a lot of essays that had something to do with family life in the twentieth-century South. I didn't set out to weave those into an argument, but I came to realize that these essays made most sense when I connected them to the other essays, that is, when I understood them in conversation.

**JG:** This is new ground for you, in some ways. How did it feel to be delving into the late twentieth century?

**TO:** Exciting, until it got too close to the present. That's the quick answer. The first of the sections that I wrote was on southern rock music of the 1970s, which was the favorite music of a number of people I went to high school with. So, I felt like I was trying to understand the cultural life of the South during my teen years. And then that brought up the fact that I needed to also understand things going on at the same time. That was an appealing challenge: to put southern rock music and the rise of the religious right and some other things that I hadn't

Ted Ownby



thought about into a kind of conversation. Partly it was exciting to be writing history that occurred in one's own lifetime, because you remember things. And, you remember the excitement, and why it mattered. Partly

it's exciting to be recognizing that things that I have studied, like Habitat for Humanity, for example, or Alex Haley's *Roots*, were going on simultaneously. The frightening thing is, getting up close to the present is it's really hard to know which things are really important, and which things just stand out either in my own life or in my imagination.

**JG:** I want to talk to you about the influence of music on this work. You use words from Tammy Wynette's song as your title, and you talk a lot about the outlaws of southern



rock in one of your chapters. Can you tell me a little bit about how your understanding of music influences this greater work?

**TO:** I wrote a number of things about music that I left out of the final product. They didn't strike me as very convincing or original. What I tried to particularly do was to think about forms of music whose themes seemed to overlap very clearly with issues of family policy and in that way the "hurtin' words" just stood out. As a two-word phrase, what that song accomplished at its heart is awfully close to what the southern legislatures in the 1970s did with divorce reform when they said they wanted a form of divorce in which people would not have to spell out their worst moments. So, in that case, I wasn't really trying to understand country music; I was just thinking about how that kind of cultural expression overlaps with government policy. In the same way, my only significant argument about southern rock music is that the most important thing the musicians had to say was that they could not be part of a conventionally defined family with a lifetime commitment. They couldn't. They said, "It's not possible, don't ask me. Don't expect me to." Part of why that was so interesting to me in this book is that it was one perspective on the broader question of, "What does family life look like after the decline of agricultural families and after the rise of divorce reform?"

**JG:** Can you talk some about the writing process? Can you explain about your thoughts on the writing process, particularly for this book?

**TO:** This book shows, if it's good, the possibilities of writing as a journey or an exploration, or a trip where you don't know exactly where you're going. I didn't begin with a plan to write about the history of discourse about family problems. It started with the pretty vague idea that I was writing about family life, and I thought I was writing to show the varieties of southern family life. As I did research and thought about it in response to contemporary events and presented it at conferences, it started to make more sense as a project about the idea of family problems. That's a fairly specific scholarly niche. The subject of the idea of family problems is certainly not a fun topic. But, it was an exciting challenge to try to write the history of so many topics and perspectives and to see how they were connected.

**JG:** At some point, did the connectivity start showing itself? I really like when I'm doing research and I just start seeing connections.

**TO:** The clearest example of exploring until something seemed interesting and then organizing my research in

response to that was the section on the 1960s. I knew that with this topic I would need to confront the Moynihan report from 1965—the report that said there was a crisis in African American family life. In confronting that, some interesting things happened. One was that I found an enormous amount of writing and thinking and talking about the concepts of brotherhood and sisterhood. And there were other people who talked about the need for authority and parental power and keeping away from families in trouble. Supporters of the civil rights movement and most specifically supporters of school desegregation talked about brotherhood and sisterhood as love and respect and interconnectedness and hope for a better future. And their opponents talked about the rights of parents or the power of parents to supersede lofty idealism, what they called brotherhoodism. And, especially, the opponents talked about how they did not want their white children sitting in school next to African American children who, they said, came from failed families. All these definitions of families all became part of a way to think about the civil rights era.

**JG:** There's also warring definitions or uses of morality. Both sides were using Christianity to their own ends.

**TO:** Yes, the massive resistance side saw the situation as family versus no family. People on the integrationist, brotherhood and sisterhood side held up this great hope that people would recognize their interconnectedness, their shared humanity. And by the late 1960s, there was a growing number of African Americans who grew frustrated with the concept of brotherhood on the terms of white people, and far more frustrated with always being portrayed as people with crisis-ridden families.

**JG:** What is the most important thing about this book?

**TO:** I'll let readers decide that, is the true answer, but I'll try. First, I hope it builds on an old, maybe conventional idea about southern cultural life that says that family is important. You can't disagree with that. But, find another place in the world where it's not. I hope I'm contributing to that pretty basic idea by talking about family problems in particular, and how different people argued about family problems. So part of the goal is to explore that question—who got to define what constituted family problems and what did they say about it? Second, as we said before, I hope some of the discussions about family life in the civil rights movement will strike readers as interesting. And third, I kind of like how the book ends in the 1970s and the 1980s, pointing toward the present, where there are a lot of people in ongoing conversations about the shapes of families, the definitions of families, and the permanence or impermanence of families.

# Caregivers of a Region

## *A Conversation with Jessica Wilkerson*

By Frankie Barrett

*To Live Here, You Have to Fight: How Women Led Appalachian Movements for Social Justice* tells the story of activism in Appalachia during the 1960s and '70s. Using the lives and perspectives of white, working-class women activists in eastern Kentucky as her guide, Jessica Wilkerson explores these activists' visions for the future of Appalachia and details the strides they made towards this better future.

In recent years, pundits and journalists have frequently cast Appalachia in the role of national microcosm. Following in the footsteps of industrial corporations who have long exploited the region for its natural resources and labor, these writers seek to mine the region for universally applicable truths. Drawing heavily on nostalgic images and selective regional history, these popular accounts simplify the geographically expansive and demographically diverse region to craft a linear narrative. The resulting stories point to simple explanations and the promise of simple solutions. However, historical context and analysis are largely absent from these popular narratives.

In *To Live Here, You Have to Fight*, Appalachia appears not as a microcosm, but as one link in the broader chain of radical activism that occurred over the course of the late twentieth century. Wilkerson does not shy away from complexity but explores the multiple factors and national, regional, and local contexts that affected Appalachian communities in the 1960s and '70s. Her narrative, enriched by archival research and oral history interviews, invites readers to experience this historical moment from the perspective of



the activists on the ground. Readers observe the opportunities that Great Society legislation facilitated, how regional and national political tensions played out locally, and the collective memory of prior Appalachian working-class movements and how it informed activism.

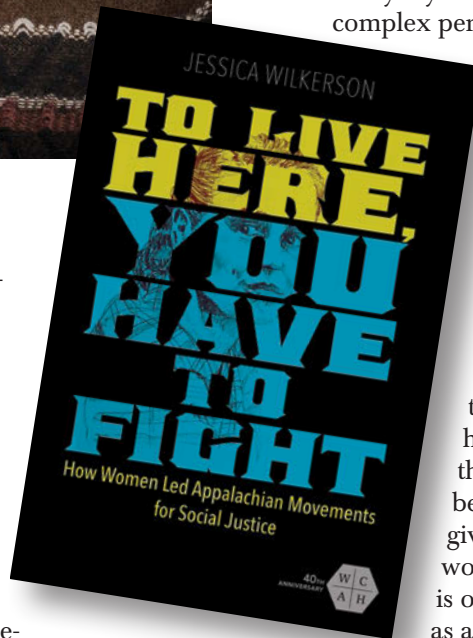
The book also gives voice to the activists themselves. The women's words and lived experiences are woven throughout the text. Their stories are enthralling and emotionally resonant; their creativity and persistence are striking. These women's lives have a powerful emotional impact—not because they possess superhuman abilities—but because they are so very human.

There's Bessie Smith Gayheart who, when attempts to seek legal recourse to address illegal strip-mining near her home failed, organized a protest to stop three coal trucks in their path. There's Eula Hall who fought for free and reduced lunch to address child hunger and established a community health clinic to combat the lack of services in rural areas. Each of these women, and the many other activists whose stories are a part of this history, responds to obstacles and opportunities of everyday life. Each navigates complex personal relationships and community networks.

Each seeks to help family, friends, and neighbors—in particular, the most vulnerable—to survive.

A central thread throughout this historical text is the interaction between caregiving and activist work. Caregiving is often thought of as an apolitical act. However, lessons

learned from taking care of sick family members and neighbors inform the activism of the women in this book. Drawing connections between sick and dying community members and harmful working conditions, environmental injustices, corporate greed, or inadequate medical care, these women pinpoint and confront sources of local suffering. Challenging the





status quo with knowledge gained through care work, these women demonstrate both the political nature of caregiving labor as well as how to provide care through political action.

*To Live Here, You Have to Fight* presents late twentieth-century US history from a largely untold standpoint, documenting how Appalachian activists drew upon local and national resources to fight for the wellbeing of their communities. Wilkerson invites readers to interrogate why things are the way they are in Appalachia and to consider how regional history explains the persistence of poverty in Appalachia in ways that more-simplistic narratives cannot. For readers who are newly curious about Appalachia or intimately familiar with the region, this book is an important read, providing an in-depth examination of the region's activist history and the trails Appalachian women blazed towards a more equitable future during the 1960s and '70s.

Below is a portion of a conversation I had with Dr. Wilkerson about her research, the writing process, and Appalachian studies today.

**Frankie Barrett:** For starters, what inspired the title of *To Live Here, You Have to Fight*?

**Jessica Wilkerson:** The title references a quote by the famous union organizer Mother Jones: "Pray for the dead and fight like hell for the living." There is a collective history around the labor movement in Appalachia and around Mother Jones in particular. She is iconic to these women, appearing in their stories and in their scrapbooks. Several women referenced or reinterpreted this particular quote. For example, Bessie Smith Gayheart, one of the activists featured in the book, once said, "To stay here you're going to have to fight like hell." With the book title, I'm echoing these phrases. The

statement feels as relevant to today as it is to the past.

**FB:** What was one challenge you faced during the writing process?

**JW:** I write about white working-class Appalachian women, focusing on antipoverty organizations. The last thing that I want is for people to assume that white working-class women stand in for all women in the region. This is one story among many more that is being told or needs to be told. Appalachia is a massive region with diverse peoples and cannot be represented by one group. However, I hope that—by showing these women's lives with complexity and by illustrating their interactions with diverse peoples across place, as well as thinking through gendered narratives of whiteness in the region—I can push against simplistic assumptions about Appalachia.

**FB:** How does the book engage with regional stereotypes?

**JW:** We tend to think of negative stereotypes of Appalachia, but there are also positive stereotypes that can be equally damaging. The same is true in Southern Studies. Stereotypes—negative or positive—do harm and prevent true understanding of a place or a people. One positive Appalachian stereotype is that of the "strong mountain woman." Part of this stereotype is the idea that mountain women work singlehandedly to accomplish heroic feats without resources or support. When I traced Appalachian women's lives over time, I saw that they were not working individually, but participating in networks, which were local, but expanded across region and nation. While Appalachian women have been portrayed as highly independent and outside of US history, my job as a historian is to say that they actually are very much a part of US history. In this book, I contextualize Appalachian women's activism

within broader networks, placing them within US history of the 1960s and '70s.

**FB:** How does your book fit within contemporary discourse about Appalachia?

**JW:** As a historian, I never set out to respond to narratives in the present. I will say that popular myths about Appalachia today ignore almost all of twentieth-century history. Appalachia is frequently portrayed as a dependent region of lazy, hopeless, opioid addicts; in tragic contrast to their hearty, hardworking Anglo-Saxon ancestors. These simple, and somewhat romantic, portraits of Appalachia ignore almost everything that occurred over the last century: the development of the coal industry, the impact of strip mining and mountain-top removal, the legacy of antidemocratic coal towns and coal bosses, and the backlash to the War on Poverty and welfare. The narrative we get today blames poor Appalachians for their own poverty without confronting the region's history. I hope this history makes a stereotypical, simple narrative about Appalachia harder to consume.

**FB:** What other scholarship on Appalachia should readers look out for?

**JW:** It's an exciting moment in Appalachian studies. There are new works coming out that show the range of experiences and diversity within the region. One example is Karida L. Brown's *Gone Home: Race and Roots through Appalachia*, a book about the black Appalachian diaspora. Another is Meredith McCarroll's *UnWhite: Appalachia, Race, and Film*, which explores images of the region. I am delighted that my book is part of a new, exciting wave of scholarship in Appalachian studies.

# READING THE SOUTH

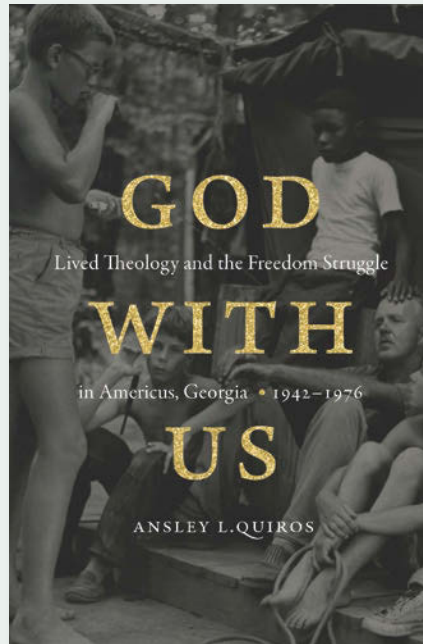
Book Reviews and Notes by Faculty, Staff, Students, and Friends of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture

## *God with Us: Lived Theology and the Freedom Struggle in Americus, Georgia, 1941–1976*

By Ansley L. Quiros. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. 292 pages. \$90.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper, \$22.99 ebook.

In *God with Us*, historian Ansley L. Quiros combines two important scholarly approaches—a community study of the civil rights movement and an analysis of how people understood and lived their theologies—into an original work on Americus and Sumter County, Georgia. The stories from southwestern Georgia are fascinating, but what makes this book so unique is the author’s approach. Working from the ideas of religious studies scholar Charles Marsh and others, Quiros details what she means by lived theology and how it differs from the related scholarly movement of lived religion. “Simply put, lived religion examines action to understand belief while lived theology examines belief to understand action.” Taking a broad approach to the topic, she argues that “to study lived theology in the civil rights struggle, then, is to examine marching and singing, shouting, and shooting, voting and vitriol on the one hand, and the more hidden beliefs that animated those actions on the other.”

Quiros organizes the book into two parts, the first dealing primarily with institutions and theological principles and the second exploring how people in Americus lived their theologies in specific stories of the civil rights



movement. The lived theology approach works well throughout the volume as ways both to say new things about stories that may be somewhat well known and to study experiences new to scholarship. For example, Koinonia Farm, organized by Clarence and Florence Jordan and their colleagues in Sumter County as an experiment in 1942, had three theological principles: redemptive agriculture, Christian community, and racial reconciliation. The discussion of white evangelical churches in downtown Americus addresses the range of conservative theological principles—the emphasis on conversion and Biblical literalism, issues of race and hierarchy, and also questions of the autonomy of churches whose members often rejected the authority of national organizations. The chapter on African American religious life roots broad ideas about the goodness of God, the connectedness of all people, the evil of racism and the goal of deliverance in the lives of ministers J. R. Campbell and R. L. Freeman.

The second half of the book embodies the uniqueness of the lived theology approach because it weaves theological issues through stories of individual people and specific moments. The significance of points that might seem a bit vague or unremarkable become clear when Quiros shows how theology was part of how people talked, sang, prayed, worried, and argued, whatever role they had in Sumter County’s civil rights movement or opposition to it. Concepts like redemptive suffering or persistence in the face of obstacles take on specific meanings as people described them when facing jail, violence, or condemnation. A group of young women imprisoned for protest called on strength through prayer. SNCC protestors connected to visions of interracial community life at Koinonia Farm, in part by using the farm as a kind of retreat. Activists in the kneel-in campaign at Americus churches drew on theologies of brotherhood and other shared religious experiences, and their opponents said protest was not what they considered real religion. Opponents of the civil rights movement drew on ideas of congregational control, and they increasingly called for schools that would allow and encourage prayer as part of the curriculum. The book concludes with more voices, including Charles and Shirley Sherrod and the Southwest Georgia Project, the political campaigns of southwest Georgia Baptist Jimmy Carter, a new kneel-in from Clennon King, and the start of Habitat for Humanity.

As this volume demonstrates, the lived theology approach encourages a kind of multivocal approach to history. By listening to so many people with so many religious languages, the book gets away from some of the either/or arguments that



can plague full historical understanding, whether those are arguments concern winners vs. losers or SNCC vs. NAACP or even ideas vs. action. Instead, by studying religious language wherever it appears, *God with Us* is best at telling a full, complicated, and often exciting story, with lots of people, lots of issues, and lots of religious ideas.

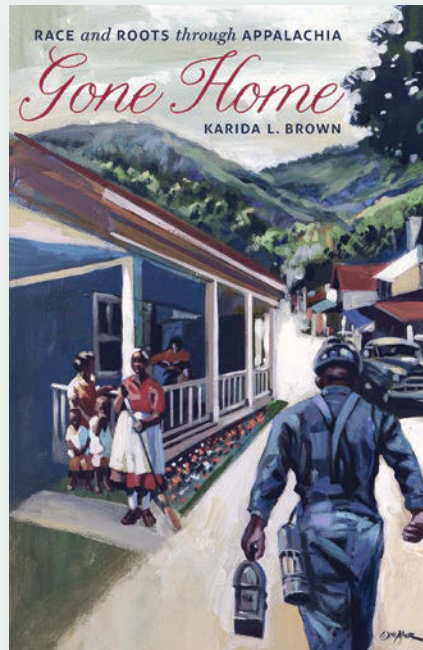
Ted Ownby

## *Gone Home: Race and Roots through Appalachia*

By Karida L. Brown. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. \$29.95 cloth.

In the American popular imagination, Appalachia is the home of mountaineers and hillbillies—all of them white folks. This stubborn myth erases the histories of indigenous people, settler colonialism, immigration, and black life and experience. The latter is the topic of UCLA sociologist Karida L. Brown's refreshing and beautifully rendered new book, *Gone Home*.

Based on an astonishing 150 interviews conducted by Brown, *Gone Home* charts the migration of black men and women from the Deep South to three towns in a seven-mile stretch of Harlan County, Kentucky, in the early twentieth century. There men were recruited to work in the burgeoning coal industry, and black families developed strong communities and educated their children for a life beyond the hills. Brown maps black family and community life that solidified between 1930 and 1950. She then shows through devastating oral history interviews how the black Appalachian communities of Harlan County began to fracture and dissipate as mechanization of the mines altered the labor economy and companies laid off workers en masse.



Harlan County became one step in a longer mass migration, as black families moved from Kentucky to cities in the Northeast, Midwest, and West in the second wave of the Great Migration. “Appalachia was both home and a launching pad,” writes Brown. And the generation of black youth that called Harlan County home would remember those years with nostalgia and pride, returning annually for reunions organized by the Eastern Kentucky Social Club.

Histories of black Appalachia have been told in fits and starts, with an important initial wave of scholarship beginning in the mid-1980s, focusing largely on the history of black coalminers. Brown builds on and extends this rich scholarship. She also shifts the focus, from the history of coalmining to the generation of children who grew up in the coalfields before becoming part of the black Appalachian diaspora. Notably, she places this story within the broad histories of Jim Crow, the Great Migration, and desegregation. Brown's Appalachia is a place in flux, a place that is home but is also ephemeral, a place that people pass through and carry with them.

Brown knits together oral history excerpts to show that life for black Appalachians was defined as much by a sense of community, family,

and education—the world above ground—as it was by coalmining and labor. Moreover, young, black Appalachians in the 1940s and 1950s had to learn to navigate two structures: “the patriarchal structure of the company-owned town and their blackness.” They did so within close-knit communities of black parents, teachers, and neighbors who sought to protect them from Jim Crow, which may have appeared less cruel in Kentucky than in Alabama, but was no less harmful.

Schooling and education were vitally important to black communities in Harlan County. Brown explains that in Lynch and Benham—designated as company-owned towns—company owners built model towns with attractive schools in order to lure workers. As part of that process, they successfully recruited highly qualified black teachers from Kentucky cities to teach in the “colored schools.” These schools “institutionalized and reproduced racial ideologies,” in that they received less funding and fewer resources than white schools. At the same time, they became sites of “black cultural expression.” Brown shows how the schools operated as anchors in the community and buffers against the racist attitudes and institutions that existed just beyond black neighborhoods. Black teachers and principals were among the most revered community members, and they cared for and nurtured their students. When Harlan County schools desegregated in 1964—due to federal legislation but also the declining population—black students experienced a deep sense of loss. They had to move schools, even though their school was newer, and they lost their teachers and principals, the people who cared about their well-being.

The school closures were the first of several dramatic changes witnessed by this generation of black Appalachians. As the mines shut down, companies razed entire towns and families sent their children to faraway cities, one by one. While these were disposable places and people in the minds

of company executives, the black neighborhoods of Harlan County would remain home for hundreds of people who are part of the black Appalachian diaspora. As Brown explains, they are connected “by the collective feeling of loss, mourning, and homesickness that accompanies the experience of abrupt displacement and dispersion.”

Brown tells us in the appendix that she decided to begin this study while sitting on her grandparents’ porch one Memorial Day weekend. She had gone home to Harlan County with her parents for the annual reunion. Although I resist the notion that we must be from a place in order to understand it or tell the story of its people, I have no doubt that Brown’s ties to eastern Kentucky tuned her to hearing the stories and understanding their value. Her insightful study deserves wide readership.

Jessica Wilkerson

## *Heavy: An American Memoir*

By Kiese Laymon. New York: Scribner, 2018. 256 pages. \$26.00 cloth.

Kiese Laymon’s *Heavy: An American Memoir* is a revelation and a reckoning. Addressed to his mother, the book lays bare some twenty-five years of Laymon’s life as a black male from Mississippi.

From childhood, Laymon struggles with his weight, with the physical pain his mother inflicts on his black body, with the ways he sees other black bodies absorb violence and humiliation. In *Heavy*, he grapples with how America taught his parents and grandparents to withstand that violence.

Laymon holds the dogmas espoused by those he loves up to the light. His mother believes that “excellence, education, and

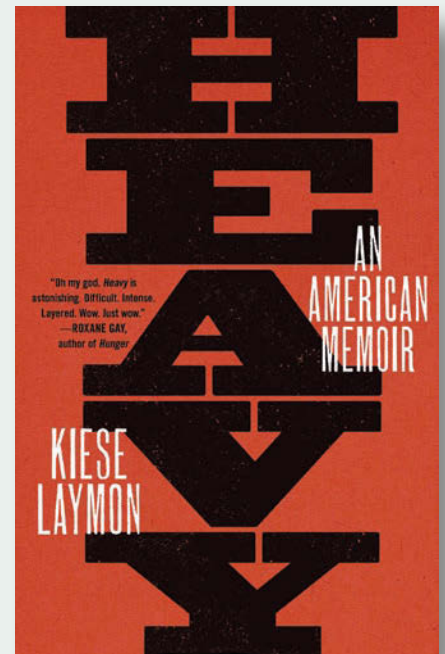
accountability were requirements for keeping the insides of black boys in Mississippi healthy and safe from white folk.” Grandmama “is too heavy to blow away or drown in tears made because somebody didn’t see [her] as somebody worth respecting.” She loves Jesus and prays through her pain. “Presentation matters,” his father preaches. “So do patience and discipline.” His mother’s boyfriend strives to carry himself “like he saw rich radical white men carry themselves in Mississippi.” Both Grandmama and Mama know that black people “didn’t even have to win for white folks to punish us. All we had to do was not lose the way they wanted us to.”

With *Heavy*, Laymon refuses to lose the way America wanted him to. By his estimation, each strategy, each method of survival modeled by his forebears, breeds dishonesty and deception. Those strategies also seem safe and enticing, until they’re not.

In his introduction, Laymon confesses, “I wanted to do that old black work of pandering and lying to folk who pay us to pander and lie to them every day.” He set out to publish a book about “how fundamental present black fathers, responsible black mothers, magical black grandmothers, and perfectly disciplined black children are to our liberation.” In short, Laymon intended to publish a memoir reinforcing the politics of respectability passed down to him, not only by white America, but also by his elders who navigated those fraught waters.

He wrote *Heavy* instead.

In his book *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (1992), theologian Walter Wink considers Jesus’s command in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” Wink postulates that, rather than shrinking in the face of abuse, Jesus advocates subverting power structures by exposing them for what they are.



To slap someone on the right cheek would be to backhand that person, to demean him or her, asserting power and dominance. To turn the left cheek challenges the oppressor to slap with an open hand, a gesture that, though violent, is reserved for equals. Wink writes, “Masters backhanded slaves; husbands, wives; parents, children; men, women; Romans, Jews. We have here a set of unequal relations, in each of which retaliation would invite retribution. . . . [To turn the other cheek] robs the oppressor of the power to humiliate. The person who turns the other cheek is saying, in effect, ‘Try again. Your first blow failed to achieve its intended effect. I deny you the power to humiliate me.’”

To turn the other cheek, in this sense, is to “not lose the way [the oppressor] wanted us to.”

In disclosing the raw details of his own trauma, Laymon demands his readers acknowledge the violence his generation has inherited from slavery, from Jim Crow, and from previous generations of African Americans who adopted a pathology of violence hoping to spare their children from the worst of white America’s blows. He probes wounds of vice and addiction, eating disorders, depression, misogyny, and poverty.



In the second chapter of *Heavy*, a young Kiese is witness to sexual violence at the house of a neighbor whose encyclopedias he is supposed to be using to write an essay. He offers no excuse when his mother asked why he didn't complete the assignment. "I didn't know how to tell you or anyone else the stories my body told me," he writes, "but, like you, I knew how to run, deflect, and duck."

He expects his mother to beat him, but instead she makes him promise to do better by the only means she trusts—reading and writing. Though *Heavy* is very likely not what his mother intended, with its publication Laymon makes good on that promise. "I am writing a different book to you," he explains, "because books, for better or for worse, are how we got here."

Jenna Mason

## Mississippi

By Ann Fisher-Wirth and Maude Schuyler Clay. San Antonio, Texas: WingsPress, 2018. 101 pages. \$34.95 cloth.

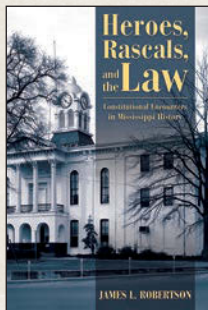
Poet and Army brat Ann Fisher-Wirth spent her childhood in Washington, DC, Germany, Pennsylvania, Japan, and California, but her new collaborative book with photographer Maude Schuyler Clay gives the appearance that she was born and raised in Mississippi. Each of the forty-seven poems—all of which explore connections between Mississippians, the environment, and home—appears on a spread with a color photo taken by Clay.

"If you're not from Mississippi, it's hard to claim the right to write about it," Ann Fisher-Wirth said. Although Fisher-Wirth has lived

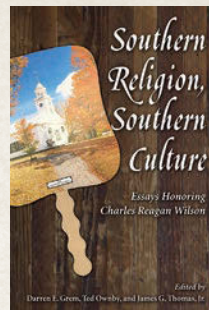
in the Magnolia State for the past thirty years, she says that Clay, who is a fifth-generation Mississippian, brought an authority to the collection that she could not. But anyone who reads *Mississippi* will find that Fisher-Wirth has a deep understanding of the complex lives of Mississippians. She slides into a variety of personas to bring Clay's photos to life in breathtaking ways: glass swans elicit senile dementia, shadows on a diamond-patterned rug evoke a romantic hotel getaway, and a reflective store-front window calls forth the struggles of a beauty queen. Inspired by Emily Dickinson, Fisher-Wirth omitted titles so that each poem would be identified by its first line, which also positions the photo as a visual title.

As Clay explored Mississippi with her camera over the past ten years or so, she sent Fisher-Wirth emails of random photos with simple captions such as "pink house." Fisher-Wirth then selected the images that spoke to

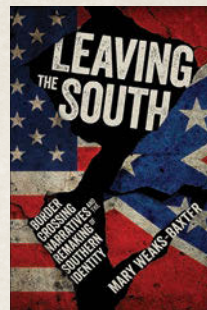
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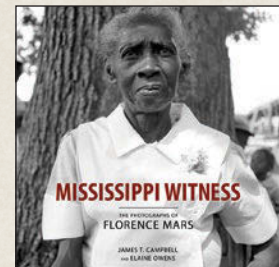
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her and “joggled bits” in her imagination. Clay said that she initially took the photographs with her own projects in mind and was delightfully surprised to discover how Fisher-Wirth found particular voices in the photos. Whether it be a story inspired by a person, a conversation she heard, or experience from her own life, Fisher-Wirth said she aimed to respect the voices she imagined in the photos.

Using free verse that feels like it is floating off the page, Fisher-Wirth explores the white space on a page just as a farmer cultivates land—she methodically plots words and pauses to reflect the story she’s telling. In the first photo of the collection, Clay captures a serene moment in which an abandoned canoe drifts on the surface of a moss-filled swamp. Shadows from a tree standing on a bluff in the center divide the sunny scene into two parts, which Fisher-Wirth represents by placing line breaks between visually descriptive language in order to convey memories of presence and absence:

Between two worlds  
the soul floats

nothing remains

but purple flowers smeared across  
the trees  
a silver boat tucked in against the  
bank  
the fecund pond  
like greenish velvet

Fisher-Wirth was inspired by Dutch and Flemish Renaissance painter Pieter Bruegel to take on the voice and perspective of a subject in the image, and in doing so, she utilizes vernacular that makes us feel like we are in conversation with the speaker of the poem. She shies away from formal literary language and embraces orality: a photo of an empty green space enclosed by brick walls sparked a memory in Fisher-Wirth’s mind about a female student she taught in Mississippi twenty-seven years ago. After learning the story of Antigone, the



## Mississippi

Poems: Ann Fisher-Wirth  
Photographs: Maude Schuyler Clay

school girl declares, “No way in hell I’d let them vulchers eat my brother / no ma’am I’d do just like Angon done / my daddy my brother my cousin all them . . . family the only thing that matters.” Fisher-Wirth said she wanted to honor the student’s “ferocity about family loyalty.”

Darker voices engulf us with a photo of the ruins that were once the Bryant Grocery Store in Money, Mississippi—where the Emmett Till murder began in August 1955. Trees and shadows loom around the

rubble, representing how although time passes, events as atrocious as the Till trial refuses to fade into oblivion. In the accompanying poem that begins, “He ain’t done right to whistle,” an old woman from Money—who said she “sure as hell don’t believe his uncle / / shoulda stood up and pointed out / Roy and J. W. in that courthouse”—laments of people coming to interview her “just because we / was alive then making out like this / / is a bad town y’all don’t know.” The very next photo





looks down the dusty back-entrance steps to the Tallahatchie County courthouse, where the trial of Till's murderers was held. Instead of trying to forget about the trial, as the speaker in the previous poem does, this speaker, who was a kid when the incident occurred, is haunted and ashamed of his folks who say: "get the sheets / go rough up some a them teach em / what's right."

Empathy is a storyteller's art, Fisher-Wirth writes in the foreword of *Mississippi*. Only if we listen and immerse ourselves in the world around us are we able to see and hopefully understand each other. Fisher-Wirth writes that she disagreed with a snarky comment on Facebook saying that expressions such as "might could" and "aks" are not English. "I honor the voices, no matter whose they are, both white and African American," Fisher-Wirth writes. The poems, however, do not explicitly point out the race of the speaker, because the point of Mississippi is not to pigeon-hole certain identities but rather to celebrate the rich orality of the state and promote equality. Instead of elevating educated voices above uneducated, *Mississippi* reminds us that we are all more alike than different—regardless of one's background, everyone experiences the human condition.

Jacqueline Knirnschild

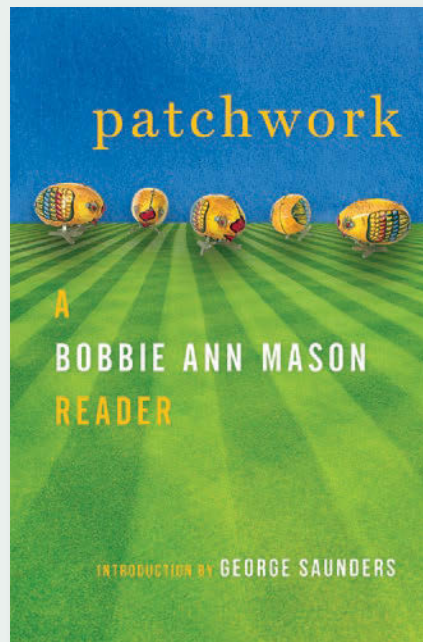
## *Patchwork: A Bobbie Ann Mason Reader*

By Bobbie Ann Mason.

Preface by Jonathan Allison.

Introduction by George Saunders. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018. 487 pages. \$35.00 cloth.

From the vivid front cover through a closing group of interviews, *Patchwork* offers new ways of looking at forty years of fiction and



nonfiction by the award-winning Kentucky author best known for *Shiloh and Other Stories* (1982) and *In Country* (1985). Stories and chapters from these early books are among the fifty-one selections in the Bobbie Ann Mason reader, but so are an excerpt from her *Girl Sleuth* (1975), an essay on "My Life as a Fifties Groupie," the unforgettable story "Quinceañera" from a 2013 *Good Housekeeping* issue, and a surprising sample of recent flash fictions.

In her "Note to the Reader about This Reader," Mason considers the collection "a patchwork autobiography of sorts. I see in it my lifelong tendency to look for patterns, and I see my rebellion against them too." University Press of Kentucky editor Jonathan Allison views the multi-genre gathering as a "patchwork" assemblage for its "variety and brilliance." The literal patchwork quilts in Mason's works have no obvious relationship to *Patchwork's* cover design of mechanical chicks on a plowed green field generated by computer. An eighty-three-year-old man in the story "Wish" recalls making love for the first time on a traditional quilt in a traditional field: "He could still feel the clean, soft, cool cotton of that quilt, the stubble poking through, and the patterns of the quilting pressing into his back."

On the other hand, in her *New Yorker* essay "Fallout," on the "morphing" of a Kentucky town "from the Atomic City to the Quilt City," Mason says Paducah's quilt museum is boldly "on the cutting edge. Its quilts are post-modern"—perhaps in the mode of the *Patchwork* dust jacket. In another *New Yorker* essay, Mason admires the "wonderful, complicated hills" of New Zealand, which "look as if someone had draped a crazy quilt over a pile of oranges and rocks"—another surreal image. Her grandmother taught the young Bobbie Ann how to stitch "scraps" into patchwork quilts; much later, Mason wrote a doctoral dissertation at the University of Connecticut on the "literary allusions, obscure words, and intricate patterns" in Vladimir Nabokov's *Ada*. Mason discovered a commonality between creating quilts and creating literature: "For me, stories are made out of tiny details stitched together," she told Candela Delgado Marin in a 2015 *Transatlantica* interview.

Introducing *Patchwork*, the novelist George Saunders says it is a "short sell" to characterize Mason as a "dirty realist" or "Kmart realist" for her references to shopping malls, Cokes, and other ubiquitous features of contemporary life. Saunders notes that Mason's unpublished first novel was a "riff on Donald Barthelme's *Snow White*," and he believes her well-crafted stories "retain that essential postmodern energy," with "shapes" that are "new and odd and truthful. (Also ornery and funny.)" When she read from *Patchwork* at Oxford's Square Books this past fall, Mason appreciated Saunders's revisionary assessment. "I'm a little sensitive about being reduced to the terms of 'popular culture,' since it's often a pejorative term," she once explained to Jo Sapp and Evelyn Somers of the *Missouri Review*. "I don't think the culture of the people ought to be dismissed like that." In another interview, she told *BOMB Magazine's* Craig Gholson that her characters "are my people. I'm part

of them, and so I see myself implicated and reflected in their lives. So I can't become this Northern Literary person who looks back on them from some great distance and judges them." Stressing music's crucial place in her people's culture, Mason affirms: "For me, Elvis is personal—as a Southerner and something of a neighbor." She includes an excerpt from her biographical *Elvis Presley* (2003) with three other pieces in *Patchwork*'s fourth division, "Beginnings." In the headnote for this group, Mason confesses that "the radio, girl detective books, and Louisa May Alcott were my early escapes from the isolation of country life. I wanted to go to radioland."

Like her interviews, Mason's prefatory notes for all seventeen sections of *Patchwork* are a rich source of contexts and insights for fans and scholars. For example, she leads into part 2, "War," by commenting on her popular coming-of-age novel about a teenaged girl whose father died in Vietnam: "No personal loss or connection motivated the writing of *In Country*." In fact, Mason says she was "reluctant at first to write about war" but "soon realized that war wasn't only battle. It was also the shattering effects on the people at home." Mason's headnote for part 5, "Family History," prefaces her excerpt from the autobiographical *Clear Springs* (1999) by arguing that "a good memoir ought to have a larger story." Mason found hers in the history of British pioneers who migrated to Kentucky, and she realized that she herself was a pioneer: "My generation was the first since that perilous migration to embrace radical change." Her mother, however, is "the real center of this memoir."

The structure of the Bobbie Ann Mason reader is roughly chronological, from part 1, "First Stories" to part 16, "Flash Fiction," with the four interviews of part 17 serving as a sort of coda. The headnote to Mason's latest stories announces a "time shift" from works like the family memoir *Clear Springs* or the World War II settings of *The Girl in the Blue Beret*. "I wanted to settle down in

the twenty-first century." Techniques change, and Mason contrasts flash fiction's "new kind of immediacy" to the immediacy of the first-person point of view in her 1982 *Shiloh* stories. "I'm excited about things that are new and challenging, things that shatter the old ways," she told Craig Gholson, who notes Mason's laughter at this point in their conversation. From start to finish, however, *Patchwork* upholds the "aesthetic principles" that Mason cites in another interview: "From Nabokov I learned that the surfaces are not symbolic representations, but the thing itself, irreducible. . . . The work should shimmer"—like the neon green *Patchwork* design on her front cover.

Joan Wylie Hall

## *Women of the Storm: Civic Activism after Hurricane Katrina*

By Emmanuel David.  
Champaign: University of  
Illinois Press, 2018. 266  
pages. \$95.00 cloth, \$26.95  
paper, \$24.26 ebook.

On the lead single from her album 4, Beyoncé asks the question, "Who runs the world?" Her powerful response, is, "Girls!" In Emmanuel David's *Women of the Storm: Civic Activism after Hurricane Katrina*, David also demonstrates a message of female empowerment.

*Women of the Storm* draws on in-depth interviews, ethnographic observation, and archival research to tell an engrossing story about the collective action and personal transformation of the women who made it their mission to make sure Louisiana and the Gulf Coast were not forgotten in the wake of two powerful storms and subsequent levee breaks.

In 2005, when Hurricanes Katrina and Rita made landfall less than four weeks apart, the fate of Louisiana



seemed uncertain, as politicians and pundits wondered about the logic of saving a city built under sea level. As people waited for help from FEMA, for electricity to be restored, and for the waters to recede, a group of women lost patience with what was an increasingly inadequate governmental response.

Anne Milling, founder of Women of the Storm, organized the group to pressure Congress to support the rebuilding of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. The women were a cross-section of society, including Rebecca Currence, mother of Oxford chef John Currence; Olivia Manning, philanthropist and wife of footballers Archie Manning and mother of Eli and Peyton; future New Orleans mayor Latoya Cantrell; Lindy Boggs, politician and ambassador to the Vatican; and chef Leah Chase; just to name a few.

Milling led efforts that culminated in 130 Louisianans flying to Washington, DC, to lobby for more disaster aid. The group realized politicians needed to see the area for themselves in order to sympathize with the plight of the residents, and so they invited every member of Congress to come to New Orleans. Using her background in philanthropy, Milling's "long career taught her how to raise money, maneuver



through difficult political terrain, and make bold requests.” These were not just women who went out to lunch; they became political strategists.

When thinking about the disaster recovery aid needed for the state, most accounts of Katrina don’t recognize the importance of lobbying to explain the allocation of federal funds, and David seeks to make sure the Women of the Storm were not written out of history. When the bipartisan congressional visits took place at the 17th Street Canal levee breach in the Lakeview neighborhood in March of 2006, it was due to the efforts of this group.

Women of the Storm also recognized the importance of having both elite whites and African Americans involved, as the group had varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. One of David’s central findings was that women of color found their “participation to be meaningful and empowering.” Etiquette played a strong role as well, whether it was their handwritten thank-you notes to politicians after they visited the Capitol, or the graciousness that was part of their code of conduct. They also understood how to garner media attention, using umbrellas the same blue as the FEMA-issued tarps covering roofs when they arrived at Capital Hill for a press conference. Seemingly small details were of the utmost importance when they hand-delivered their heavy card-stock invitations to politicians for a ground and aerial tour of the devastated area and the wetlands.

The book is part history of the group and part sociological study, as David, who is assistant professor of women and gender studies at University of Colorado Boulder, graduated from Loyola University, and his scholarly interest in Katrina was shaped both by his past as a student in the city and his wanting to participate in its recovery. He primarily focuses on the first year of Women of the Storm from January to December of 2006 and then again during the BP oil spill in 2010. He points out that Women of the Storm is a “disaster-related emergent

group,” defined as private citizens coming together in pursuit of collective goals relevant to disasters. By focusing on the beginning of the organization, he is guided by sociologist Kathleen Blee, who notes in the introduction that “what happens later obscures what happened earlier.”

He writes: “I didn’t know it then, but this small group of women leaders would arguably become among the most powerful and influential in Louisiana’s history, contributing in countless ways to the rebirth of New Orleans after one of the greatest catastrophes of our time.”

He seamlessly integrates background about Women of the Storm—information gathered through oral histories, forty-one interviews, notes he took at their meetings, and being involved as a participant observer—with sociological perspectives on what the women were doing. He was with them on the plane to Washington, participated in their public demonstrations, and maintained an ongoing rapport with the women.

Though David points out that other social scientists have studied upper-class women’s cultures, his book investigates the formation of a women’s group also emerging from a crisis. As sociologist Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi also writes in the introduction, “People most frequently become conscious of their identities at moments of transition, which are often also moments of crisis,” and indeed Women of the Storm came about out of necessity.

David actually returned to the project ten years after starting it, realizing the passage of time enabled another vantage point of his interviewees of the initial formation of the group, an untold story of the catastrophe. His language is entirely readable, and he meticulously explains his methods, which would be useful for anyone interested in studying gender, groups, disasters, politics, or social movements.

David is also coeditor of *The Women of Katrina: How Gender, Race, and Class Matter in an American Disaster*.

Rebecca Lauck Cleary

## *Remembering Reconstruction: Struggles over the Meaning of America’s Most Turbulent Era*

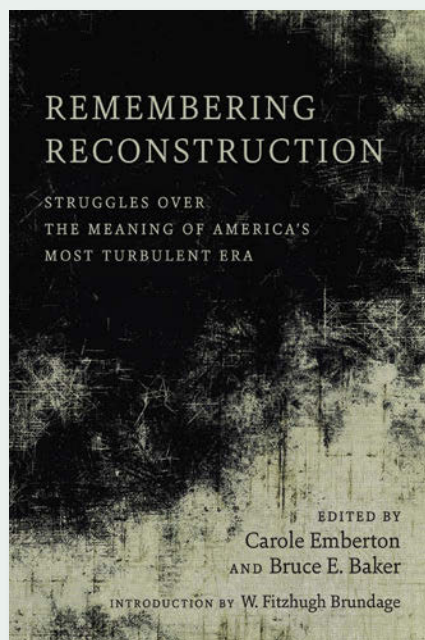
Eds. Carole Emberton and Bruce E. Baker. Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2018. 296 pp. \$45.00 cloth.

*Remembering Reconstruction*, edited by Carole Emberton and Bruce E. Baker, is more than another instance of what historian Fitzhugh Brundage describes in the book’s introduction as “our enduring preoccupation with making sense” of the period. In fact, in collectively refuting any monolithic accounting of “Reconstruction,” these essays render the era productively more complex rather than more coherent. As Brundage points out, unlike other epochs retroactively named by professionals, “Reconstruction” was a word people began using in the moment to describe the monumental process they were actively undertaking: the reassembly of a fractured nation. Above all, *Remembering Reconstruction* emphasizes the illusive power of memory to create a stable “truth” about that process, one that often far outweighs anything either participants or later interpreters might be tempted to set down as “fact.”

*Remembering Reconstruction* makes at least three significant interventions in how we understand the post-Civil War years. First, the collection intentionally dismantles a recurrent storyline that depends on African American passivity in the face of white supremacy. Shawn Leigh Alexander, for example, examines the power of the postwar black press, focusing in particular on the career of newspaper man T. Thomas Fortune, who in a series of prominent publications made the case for both the brutality of white-on-black

violence and the ongoing assertions of African Americans to their rights as citizens and as human beings. Justin Behrend reads black politician John R. Lynch's autobiographical *The Facts of Reconstruction* as particularly shaped by the time lapse between the events of Lynch's account and their publication in 1913; he posits the author's keen awareness of how his narrative would complicate well-entrenched origin stories of white power. In "The Freedwoman's Tale," Carole Emberton returns to the collection of ex-slave narratives gathered by the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) in the 1930s, what Emberton characterizes as "one of the richest yet most controversial archives in American history." Using the account of Hannah Irwin, Emberton explores the FWP narratives as an index of racial power dynamics freedpeople encountered well into the twentieth century, suggesting the Jim Crow context of Irwin's retelling as its most important frame.

Thus *Remembering Reconstruction* follows recent scholarly trends by extending "Reconstruction" and its influences past the period's formal end in 1877, powerfully arguing for its reach well into the twentieth century. For instance, in his essay K. Stephen Prince argues that "Jim Crow segregation, disfranchisement, and systemic violence were . . . the result of a planned and coordinated attack on African American civil and political rights" rooted in nineteenth-century practices and carried out in full view of an entire nation. Similarly Jason Morgan Ward, in "Causes Lost and Found: Remembering and Refighting Reconstruction in the Roosevelt Era," suggests "that the distance between post-Civil War racial struggles and the modern civil rights movement is shorter than many realize." He understands resistance among southern states to New Deal-era legislation as an extension of postbellum distrust for carpetbaggers and outsiders who fail to understand what white



southerners saw as the regionally specific dynamics of race and class. In an archivally based essay, Elaine Parsons reads a wide selection of history textbooks in order to trace a remarkable similarity in depictions of the Ku Klux Klan from the 1880s up to 2015. Despite a movement away from empathetic portrayals of the group toward overt condemnation of its motives, she notes consistent tendencies to figure the Klan as a mysterious force discontinuous with quotidian and systemic racism. The Klan thus problematically becomes the "stand-in" for all white-on-black aggression. Bruce Baker's closing essay, "Wade Hampton's Last Parade," functions as an afterword, examining Reconstruction's fitful role in South Carolina's tricentennial celebrations. Federally mandated school desegregation was kicking in at virtually the same time (1970), creating a paradoxical blend of racial integration and black erasure as schools originally named for African American community leaders were absorbed into a tide of white renaming that privileged one set of memories over others.

Finally, the collection's focus on "the creation of American Empire" extends this attention to collective memory-making by considering the role Reconstruction played in the

nation's evolving awareness of itself on the international stage. Mark Elliott's essay, for instance, focuses on two Lake Mohonk conferences in 1890 and 1891 devoted to the "Negro Question," held not coincidentally on the eve of the Spanish-American War and at the location where regular policy meetings about the "Indian Question" took place. In "A New Reconstruction for the South," Natalie Ring traces parallels between "civilizing" missions abroad and attitudes toward the South, likewise temporally out of step with the nation at large and in need of a "readjustment" that would concentrate less directly on political and civil rights and more on economic, educational, and cultural uplift for both blacks and poor whites—a benevolent civilizing mission that folded region back into a national narrative of white supremacy. A related sort of benevolence is at the root of Samuel L. Schaffer's argument that Woodrow Wilson, because of his exposure to the popular narratives of Reconstruction, resisted a too strenuous remaking of Europe in the wake of World War I and designed a League of Nations that fast-tracked some countries and remediated others along a sliding scale of "civilization."

*Remembering Reconstruction* consistently demonstrates, then, that who tells a story always matters. As Parsons observes, "Part of the work of any national history narrative is to make itself appear to have been inevitable." The work of Emberton and Baker's collection is to expose the nature of white supremacy as a carefully curated narrative that makes imbalances of power, even in 2019, seem somehow inevitable or unavoidable. These thoughtful analyses of Reconstruction—what Emberton and Baker term "America's Most Turbulent Era"—recover the potential for a nation differently configured, a nation still struggling to acknowledge who has told our national stories and why.

Kathryn B. McKee



*Gun* magazines; she is frequently published in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Condé Nast Traveler*, and she is the author of a double handful of best-selling books. Her latest is *South toward Home: Adventures and Misadventures in My Native Land*. Simon and Schuster calls Jessica Harris the “preeminent authority on the culinary culture of the African diaspora.” She has written a dozen books—almost all contain recipes, but they aren’t constrained by the cookbook genre. Harris’s most recent book is the memoir, *My Soul Looks Back*. She has also written countless essays, book and theater reviews, and features. She recently retired after almost five decades as a professor of English at Queens College/CUNY.

All events are open to the public without charge, but registration is required for the symposium. For details, visit [museum.olemiss.edu](http://museum.olemiss.edu) or call the University of Mississippi Museum and Historic Houses at 662-915-7073. The project is supported in part by funding from the Mississippi Arts Commission, through the Avery B. Dille Jr. Fund for Art Acquisition, in memory of Mr. Avery B. Dille Sr., Mrs. Katherine T. Dille, and Avery B. Dill Jr.

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## In Memoriam

Sarah Anderson “Tay” Gillespie  
May 18, 1924–December 16, 2018





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