This issue’s cover image—the first of 2021—is, appropriately enough, of the Mississippi River. Restless, murky, and somewhat foreboding, it might just as easily characterize 2020, a year winding to an unsteady conclusion as I write, leaving us drenched in uncertainty. The pandemic is ongoing; the summer’s demands for racial justice and reform are unresolved; the opening days of the new year rocked our democracy on its heels, as we moved in a single day from finally establishing the composition of the Senate to seeing that very chamber under assault. I am not the first person to borrow the title of Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1967 book, Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?, to describe the moment.

As my colleague Andrea Morales’s provocative Mississippi River photo suggests, we might turn to the rhythms of the natural world persisting around us. Following thoughtful and ongoing engagements with topics connected to “Movement and Migration” and the lives of LGBTQ southerners through the Invisible Histories project, we turn our collective attention in 2021 to the next Future of the South initiative: “Flood Gates.” Among a series of interrelated classes and interlocking programming, we will focus on “environments” broadly conceived, with a particular emphasis on climate change. Extreme weather, including record hurricane seasons, routine coastline destruction, and regular inland flooding, makes an image of moving water an apt introduction to our effort. Much is unresolved around the subject of climate change as well, but not engaging a topic of such significance threatens more dire consequences than confronting what science makes it difficult to deny. Water takes us also to questions linked to environmental racism and negotiations involving people, power, and access. Speakers featured in our SouthTalks series, at the Oxford Conference for the Book, and at Southern Foodways Alliance events will introduce pertinent topics enriching classroom study, culminating in a series of documentary projects unfolding over the next several years. Although still in its initial stages, the work we develop collectively under the “Flood Gates” heading will be a contribution to regional self-awareness and to the creation of knowledge that empowers southerners to envision and then bring to pass the world in which they want to live.

Climate change is not a challenge strictly in the South, but studying it here also helps to trace the complexities of work at a regional studies center like this one. The coin of the realm in Southern Studies was once exceptionalism, the idea that “the South” was unto itself an unparalleled world that mystified outsiders. In today’s Southern Studies, the opposite is true. As much as any other subject, declining environmental health insists on binding places together rather than holding them apart. If the pandemic has served no other good, it has, once again, reminded people around the globe of their interconnection. Of course places have local particularities—histories and climates and habits—but more powerful than particularity is the understanding of one place as equally important ways as it does those upstream.

Political mapping likewise reveals that treating the South as an isolated, impenetrable phenomenon offers an incomplete picture. Results from the 2020 presidential election, for example, disrupt the staid notion that “red states” and “the South” are synonymous, reinforcing a more complex, nuanced view, not just of the South but of the American electorate at large. Asked in a November 10 interview about the “New South,” a term with a complicated history, Georgia politician Stacey Abrams pivoted to what she prefers to call the “Now South.” When we solve challenges around education, health care, housing, and employment in the South, Abrams said, we solve them for the country. Malcolm X had something related but somewhat different in mind when, in 1964, he reminded audiences that the South was everywhere below the Canadian border. His intention was not to give the region a pass for its behavior on questions of racial equity, but rather to challenge the country to measure its guiding principles against a sustained history of black disfranchisement. In both formulations, the South isn’t an outlier to the nation. It is the nation, and in Abrams’s vision the South isn’t just America’s basement for storing what it otherwise doesn’t know what to do with, but the ground-level living room where it works out the most difficult problems it faces, including climate change. Taking the temperature in Mississippi, where everyone expects far more than the weather to be hot, does not yield only local information. In studying the South around us, we likewise study a country, a hemisphere, and a world we share.

Katie McKee
Issue 269 marks the end of our fiftieth-anniversary celebration of *Living Blues*. It has been quite a ride producing two of the largest, most complex issues in *LB*’s history during a global pandemic. I hope everyone can appreciate the hard work put in by dozens of our magazine’s writers, photographers, and staff.

I want to thank all of you who reached out with kind words about our Mississippi Delta Blues issue (*LB* #268). It was a monster to pull together, but in the end, I am very proud of the issue, which I hope shines a light on the never-ending fount of blues talent that comes from the Mississippi Delta.

Before I began to work on our fiftieth-anniversary celebration, I knew how I wanted to close out the year. (Little did I know what kind of year it would be!) I wanted to look forward to the future of the blues with a Next Generation issue. One of the things that gives me the most joy as the editor of *LB* is discovering young artists and helping spotlight them at an early stage of their career. I love being able to use the influence and exposure of *LB* to give young artists national and international attention. That has always been a core element of *LB* and was the reason we started the Breaking Out column.

Perhaps the most exciting thing about pulling this issue together was the fact that there are so many brilliant new players. Not since the 1990s have I seen such a wealth of young talent rising in the blues scene. (See Jim DeKoster’s “The Blues Will Never Die” for a list of fifty artists under the age of fifty.) Of the eleven musicians we cover, not one of them is over the age of forty, and the vast majority are in their twenties. This is exciting news for the future of the blues.

2020 was quite a year. It rocked all of us to our cores. And the blues world, of course, rocked, too. Nearly all blues festivals were canceled, artists couldn’t play club dates, labels are still struggling to release records with no tour support, and sadly, blues artists have died of Covid-19. We lost one of our last direct links to the prewar blues era when Rev. John Wilkins, son of Memphis bluesman Robert Wilkins, died from complications of the virus. Wilkins was a gem of a man and had been battling the illness for several months. It looked like he had turned the corner and was going to be okay, but then he had a rapid decline and passed away on October 6, just four days shy of his seventy-seventh birthday.

We also lost Sterling Magee, a.k.a. Satan, on September 6 to Covid-19. Bluesman Dave Riley was also stricken with Covid-19 and spent two weeks on a ventilator, only to discover when he regained consciousness that he had suffered a stroke while in his induced coma.

As blues artists have always done, they’re raising their voices to speak to the many challenges we continue to face. The first songs about the pandemic popped up a couple of months ago, along with a number of scathing songs addressing the recent presidential election, as well as a recent selection of very powerful recordings addressing the George Floyd murder and the Black Lives Matter movement. At its core, the blues has always been protest music. And 2020 certainly provided us with a rich source of material.

Brett J. Bonner
SouthTalks is a series of events (including lectures, performances, film screenings, and panel discussions) that explores the interdisciplinary nature of Southern Studies. This series is free and open to the public, and typically takes place in the Tupelo Room of Barnard Observatory unless otherwise noted. However, as a result of the current health crisis, all events will be virtual, free, and accessible on the Center’s YouTube channel after each live event. Visit the Center’s website for up-to-date information about all Center events. Registration will be required for all events in order to receive the webinar link.

**FEBRUARY 10**

**Wednesday, noon**

“Southern Journey: The Migrations of the American South, 1790–2020”

Edward L. Ayers

In his talk “Southern Journey,” Edward L. Ayers narrates the evolution of southern history from the founding of the nation to the present day by focusing on the settling, unsettling, and resettling of the South. Using migration as the dominant theme of southern history and including Indigenous, white, Black, and immigrant people in the story, Ayers cuts across the usual geographic, thematic, and chronological boundaries that subdivide southern history.

Ayers explains the major contours and events of the southern past from a fresh perspective, weaving geography with history in innovative ways. He uses unique color maps created with sophisticated tools to interpret massive data sets from a humanistic perspective, providing a view of movement within the South with a clarity, detail, and continuity we have not seen before. The South has never stood still; it is—and always has been—changing in deep, radical, sometimes contradictory ways, often in divergent directions. Ayers will be in conversation with Ted Ownby, professor of history and Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi.

Edward L. Ayers has been named National Professor of the Year, received the National Humanities Medal from President Obama at the White House, won the Bancroft, Beveridge, and Lincoln Prizes in American history, was a finalist for the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, served as president of the Organization of American Historians, and worked as the founding chair of the board of the American Civil War Museum. He is executive director of New American, dedicated to sharing innovative work in words, maps, audio, and video with broad audiences and the nation’s schools. He is Tucker-Boatwright Professor of the Humanities and president emeritus at the University of Mississippi.

**JANUARY 27**

**Wednesday, noon**

*Nonviolence before King*

Anthony Siracusa

In early 1960 Black students across the nation launched nonviolent direct-action campaigns in more than seventy cities across the nation, challenging Jim Crow segregation and violence. These students took courageous action knowing they would face arrest, expulsion, or even lose their lives. So why did they do it? Anthony Siracusa argues that the political philosophy of religious nonviolence was a key motivation for many. Siracusa excavates the history of this idea in his forthcoming book, *Nonviolence before King: The Politics of Being and the Black Freedom Struggle*, and explains how what he calls a “politics of being” came to occupy a central place in the Black freedom struggle.

A historian of modern America and a civic engagement professional in higher education, Anthony Siracusa works at the intersection of the community and the academy. He has written extensively about nonviolence and the Black freedom movement, and his first book, *Nonviolence before King: The Politics of Being and the Black Freedom Struggle*, will be released by UNC Press in June 2021. He teaches a variety of courses on African American history, religion, and politics in addition to community-based learning courses. He also develops and administers projects and programs in partnership with communities beyond the campus to enhance student learning and strengthen community impacts. Siracusa is a native of Memphis, Tennessee, and lives in Oxford, Mississippi.
Richmond, as well as a former dean of arts and sciences at the University of Virginia. Ted Ownby is William F. Winter Professor of History and Southern Studies, coeditor of *The Mississippi Encyclopedia*, and author of *Hurtin’ Words: Debating Family Problems in the Twentieth-Century South* and other works.

**FEBRUARY 11**

**Thursday, 3:00 p.m.**

“Protests in Pro Football, 1965–2020”

**Chuck Ross**

Chuck Ross’s “Protests in Pro Football, 1965–2020” examines both the events leading up to the 1965 American Football League All-Star game protest and the events that led to Colin Kaepernick’s 2016 NFL protest. Ross will also discuss the legacy of Kaepernick’s actions in the wake of the death of George Floyd and the different responses by professional sports leagues and teams in America.

Chuck Ross is a native of Columbus, Ohio, and currently is professor of history and African American studies at the University of Mississippi. He holds a BA in history from Stillman College. He has an MA in Black studies, an MA in history, and a PhD in history, each from The Ohio State University. He is the author of,* Mavericks, Money, and Men: The AFL, Black Players, and the Evolution of Modern Football*, which was published by Temple University Press in 2016, and *Outside the Lines: African Americans and the Integration of the National Football League*, which was released by New York University Press in 1999. His teaching interests include twentieth-century US history, African American history, and sports history. He has appeared on ESPN’s *Outside the Lines* and on ESPN Radio.

**FEBRUARY 17**

**Wednesday, noon**

*Masked Man, Black: Pandemic and Protest Poems*

**Frank X Walker**

Frank X Walker will read from and discuss his latest collection of poems, *Masked Man, Black: Pandemic and Protest Poems*. The poems document in real time the myriad of challenges presented by the multiple pandemics of Covid-19 and racial injustice. They also offer edifying pockets of solace as the poet shares his family’s survival tips, strategies, and discoveries in the midst of so much loss, while properly laying blame at the feet of the administration that unnecessarily politicized, misled, and further complicated this country’s response to the virus. University of Mississippi associate professor of English and African American studies Derrick Harriell will facilitate the Q&A portion of this event.

Frank X Walker is the first African American writer to be named Kentucky Poet Laureate. He has published eleven collections of poetry, including *Masked Man, Black: Pandemic and Protest Poems* and *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers*, which was awarded the 2014 NAACP Image Award for Poetry and the Black Caucus American Library Association Honor Award for Poetry. Voted one of the most creative professors in the South, Walker coined the term “Affrilachia” and cofounded the Affrilachian Poets. He is the founding editor of *pluck! The Journal of Affrilachian Arts and Culture* and serves as professor of English and African American and Africana studies at the University of Kentucky in Lexington.

Derrick Harriell is the Otillie Schillig Associate Professor of English and African American Studies at the University of Mississippi. His poem collections are *Cotton* (2010), *Ropes* (2013, winner of the 2014 Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters award in poetry), and *Striper in Wonderland* (2017). His poems, stories, and essays have been published widely.

Co-sponsored by the University of Mississippi’s MFA English Program.

**FEBRUARY 24**

**Wednesday, noon**

“The Emmett Till Generation: Youth Activism, Radical Protest, and Social Change in Jim Crow Mississippi”

**Daphne Chamberlain**

Daphne Chamberlain’s talk highlights the role of children as leaders and participants in the Mississippi civil rights movement between 1946 and 1965. This presentation also offers a new perspective on the origins of the civil rights struggle and gives credence to how instrumental
young people were to engaging in radical protest and grassroots activism in Mississippi.

Chamberlain completed her undergraduate studies at Tougaloo College in 2001 and received her MA and PhD in history from the University of Mississippi. Before returning to Tougaloo as a faculty member, Chamberlain was the founding director of the COFO Civil Rights Education Center at Jackson State University. In 2013 Chamberlain returned to Tougaloo College, where she is an associate professor of history and the associate provost and vice president for academic affairs.

Co-sponsored by the Mississippi Humanities Council.

MARCH 3
Wednesday, noon
White Kids: Growing Up with Privilege in a Racially Divided America
Margaret Hagerman

American children are living in a world of ongoing public debates about race, daily displays of racial violence, and for some, an increased awareness of inequality. Based on two years of ethnographic research with affluent white kids and their families, Margaret A. Hagerman’s talk examines how white kids learn about race, racism, inequality, and privilege in the contexts of their everyday lives. This talk explores how white racial socialization is a process that stretches beyond white parents’ explicit conversations with their white children and includes not only the choices parents make about neighborhoods, schools, peer groups, extracurricular activities, and media, but also the choices made by the kids themselves.

Margaret A. Hagerman is an associate professor of sociology at Mississippi State University and is a faculty affiliate in the African American studies and gender studies programs there. She is the author of *White Kids: Growing Up with Privilege in a Racially Divided America* (2019), and she is a nationally recognized expert on white racial socialization. Her research can be found in publications such as the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, and *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, among others. She has visited a number of schools and communities across the country to share her work with parents, teachers, neighborhood associations, school administrators, and young people.

Co-sponsored by the Mississippi Humanities Council.

MARCH 17
Wednesday at noon
“Indigenous Cultures and Histories of the Southeast”
Dwanna L. McKay

The Original Peoples of the Southeast differed culturally, politically, and linguistically from other tribes across North America. The Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee, and Seminole Nations were forcibly removed from their traditional homelands and relocated to Oklahoma. In her talk, Dwanna L. McKay examines some of the unique cultural practices and diverse histories of Indigenous Nations originally of the southeastern woodlands from precontact to current day.

Dwanna L. McKay is a citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and an assistant professor in the race, ethnicity, and migration studies program at Colorado College. McKay holds a PhD in sociology, a graduate certificate in Indigenous studies, an MS in sociology, an MBA in management science, and a BA in political science. Raised culturally within the boundaries of her tribal nation in Oklahoma, McKay centers her teaching, research, service, and activism on an overall commitment to social justice. Her research focuses on social inequality and Indigenous identity, and has been published in numerous scholarly journals, including *Sociological Compass*, *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, *American Indian Quarterly*, American Indian Culture and Research Journal, and the *European Sociological Review*. She has also authored multiple book chapters, poems, essays, and opinion editorials. McKay currently serves on the national advisory committee for the Native American Student Advocacy Institute and previously held an appointment as Secretary of Education for the Muscogee (Creek) Nation.

MARCH 24
Wednesday, noon
Arts in Barnard Lecture
“Traditional Crafts of Coastal Louisiana”
Maida Owens and Janie Luster

In the talk “Traditional Crafts of Coastal Louisiana,” Louisiana state folklorist Maida Owens talks about the crafts made by the many traditional cultures found on Louisiana’s Gulf Coast. Some are made from native plants, such as the Spanish moss crafts, decoy carving, and boatbuilding, while others,
such as embroidery and cloth dolls, are crafted from traditional textiles. All of these cultures are endangered as a result of increasing population movements due to land loss. Houma Indian Janie Luster will talk about her family traditions of using garfish scales and palmetto basketry. She studied museum artifacts to revive the half-hitch weave.

Maida Owens has been with the Louisiana Division of the Arts since 1986 and manages the state’s folklife program, where she has worked with hundreds of traditional artists and their communities and curates the program’s Folklife in Louisiana website. The program’s current project is the Bayou Culture Collaborative, which helps to sustain the cultures of coastal Louisiana.

Janie Luster is a master palmetto basket weaver and cultural preservationist of the United Houma Nation. Hailing from the community of Bayou DuLarge in Terrebone Parish, Luster comes from a long line of traditional healers and is a tribal advocate.

This talk is co-sponsored by the Arch Dalrymple III Department of History and the Native American and Indigenous Studies working group.

**APRIL 14**
**Wednesday, noon**
**“Still Worth Fighting For”**
**Joshua Myers**

Black students have struggled to reimagine the university. That struggle is one still worth fighting for. In the 1980s, when the rightward momentum shook the world to its core, Black student movements offered an alternative vision. Joshua M. Myers’s presentation looks to Howard students during that era as a model for what we still might do with the university.

Myers’s book, *We Are Worth Fighting For*, is the first history of the 1989 Howard University protest. The three-day occupation of the university’s administration building was a continuation of the student movements of the sixties and a unique challenge to the politics of the eighties. Upset at the university’s appointment of the Republican strategist Lee Atwater to the Board of Trustees, students forced the issue by shutting down the operations of the university. The protest, inspired in part by the emergence of “conscious” hip-hop, helped to build support for the idea of student governance and drew upon a resurgent Black Nationalist ethos.

At the center of this story is a student organization known as Black Nia F.O.R.C.E. (Freedom Organization for Racial and Cultural Enlightenment). Cofounded by Ras Baraka, the group was at the forefront of organizing the student mobilization at Howard during the spring of 1989 and thereafter. *We Are Worth Fighting For* explores how Black student activists—young men and women—helped shape and resist the rightward shift and neoliberal foundations of American politics. This history adds to the literature on Black campus activism, Black Power studies, and the emerging histories of African American life in the 1980s.

Joshua M. Myers is an associate professor of Africana studies in the Department of Afro-American Studies at Howard University. He is the author of *We Are Worth Fighting For: A History of the Howard University Student Protest of 1989* (2019) and the editor of *A Gathering Together: Literary Journal*.

**MARCH 31, 2021**
**Wednesday at noon**
**I Don’t Like the Blues: Race, Place, and the Backbeat of Black Life**
**B. Brian Foster**

In the last six years, B. Brian Foster has talked with hundreds of Black Mississippians about race, the blues, politics, memory, community, and more. In this talk, he shares with us some of what they’ve shared with him, and he considers what it all might mean both now and for the future. Some of that work is included in his new book, *I Don’t Like the Blues: Race, Place, and the Backbeat of Black Life*, in which he considers the value of non-affirming sensibilities like pessimism, frustration, and exhaustion for how we think about Black identity and lived experience.

B. Brian Foster is a writer and storyteller from Mississippi. He earned his PhD in sociology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and currently works as assistant professor of sociology and Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi. Foster also serves as coeditor of the journal *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* and is director of the Mississippi Hill Country Oral History Collective.
Filmmaker Jon-Sesrie Goff to Curate SFA Virtual Spring Symposium

The Southern Foodways Alliance is delighted to announce Jon-Sesrie Goff as the guest curator of the 2021 Spring Symposium. Goff is the 2016 recipient of the SFA’s John Egerton Prize for a body of work that addresses the theme of social and environmental justice through the prism of food. He was awarded the prestigious Princess Grace award in film in 2015. In addition to his filmmaking and interdisciplinary art practice, Jon-Sesrie Goff is the museum specialist for film at the Smithsonian Museum of African American Art and Culture in Washington, DC.

As a multidisciplinary artist whose work crosses different mediums and platforms, Goff is renowned for his penchant to seamlessly integrate social engagement, film, moving image, performance, photography, and installation. His practice explores the intersection of race, power, identity, gender, and the environment by unearthing the visceral representational value and authenticity behind images propelled across varying diasporas.

Goff has traveled extensively and offered his lens to award-winning documentaries, including Out in the Night (2015), Evolution of a Criminal (2015), and The New Black (2014). He is currently in the final stages of production for his first feature-length documentary, After Sherman.

In 2021 SFA will focus on environments. Exploring natural and built and imagined environments, we’ll ask questions that connect climate change and deer hunting to lunch counter design and literary landscapes. Those questions begin in the South and stretch across the world.

The SFA Spring Symposium will be coming to a computer screen near you on Saturday, March 13, and Sunday, March 14, 2021, via the Eventive platform. Look for information about ticket sales beginning January 2021 on SFA social media.

SFA Honors Ashtin Berry with 2020 John Egerton Prize

Drawing on a two-decade track record in the hospitality business, a sociology degree from the University of Chicago, and a drive to make equity-fueled progress, Ashtin Berry of New Orleans, Louisiana, changes the way people think about hospitality.

A sommelier, bartender, educator, and activist, Berry founded RadicalxChange, a content agency that places marginalized people at the center of hospitality work. She also conceived and now stages Resistance Served, an annual food, beverage, and hospitality symposium that celebrates and contextualizes contributions of the African diaspora through seminars, discussions, and experiences that inspire community and encourage nuanced conversations.

The John Egerton Prize, endowed by SFA member contributions, awards $5,000 each year. John Egerton Prize winners live or work in the American South, exhibit exceptional creativity, apply the rubric of food and drink to their work, and show the potential to make a genuine difference in one or more fields. To share the story of the Egerton Prize winner, SFA also produces a film. The 2020 film, Radical Vision, directed by UM Southern Studies alumna Zaire Love, premiered digitally on October 11 via a partnership with the Southern Festival of Books in Nashville, Tennessee. (In addition to being one of the founders of the SFA, John Egerton was one of the founders of the Southern Festival of Books.) Visit southernfoodways.org to watch Radical Vision.
SFA Honors Hanan Shabazz of Asheville, North Carolina, with Ruth Fertel Keeper of the Flame Award

An Asheville, North Carolina, native, Hanan Shabazz has long fostered local food movements and nurtured the political, social, and cultural power of Black foodways. In the 1970s, she owned and ran Hanan Shabazz Restaurant on Eagle Street in Asheville.

Shabazz now works with a new generation of Asheville cooks at Southside Kitchen, a project of the not-for-profit Green Opportunities, which trains, supports, and connects marginalized communities to sustainable employment pathways.

She also works to showcase the stories of Black Asheville for contemporary audiences. Among the beneficiaries of her work are her seven grandsons—all of whom she taught to cook, and all of whom now work in commercial kitchens—and Ashleigh Shanti, the former chef at Benne on Eagle in Asheville, who focuses on the foodways of Black Appalachia.

Each fall since 2000, the SFA, with support from the Fertel Foundation, has honored a relatively unsung hero or heroine, a foodways tradition bearer of note, with the Ruth Fertel Keeper of the Flame Award. We pay homage to their life and work through a documentary film, directed by UM Southern Studies alum and longtime collaborator Joe York. That film, Hanan, is available at southernfoodways.org. Celebrating these Keepers of the Flame, we also pay homage to the late Ruth Fertel, the beloved and respected New Orleans restaurateur and entrepreneur.
Rowan Oak—–the internationally recognized home of Nobel Prize-winning author William Faulkner—–has quietly moved to a far more popular and easily accessible piece of digital real estate with a new address: rowanoak.com. The relocation of this celebrated University of Mississippi-owned property in Oxford, Mississippi, to a more visible corner of cyberspace occurred thanks to a gift of the rowanoak.com domain name by Peter Askew of Atlanta, Georgia, a Southern Studies alumnus and Faulkner fan.

While the 176-year-old Greek Revival house has had a presence on the internet for many years, information about Rowan Oak was difficult to find because of the many pages on the UM Museum and Historic Houses website. Making web searches for information even more difficult was the fact that the iconic home had a “dot-edu” web address instead of a “dot-com” address.

“It’s difficult to over emphasize how important Peter’s gift of the rowanoak.com domain name is to the university and those who admire the life and work of William Faulkner,” said William “Bill” Griffith, curator of Rowan Oak. “This new domain name puts us right at the very top of every internet search for information about Rowan Oak and enables us to greatly enhance and expand our website.”

In October 2020, UM unveiled a vibrant rowanoak.com site containing much more information and features. “This investment in an improved Rowan Oak website would not be possible without having the dot-com domain name,” Griffith said. “We’re off to a great start and will make Peter proud to have given this domain to us.”

The gift reflects two of Askew’s primary passions: being a professional builder of dot-com businesses and a 1995 graduate of the university’s Southern Studies program. After completing his degree, Askew eventually settled in his hometown of Atlanta. In the late 1990s, he became interested in the role an attractive domain name played in the success of startup web enterprises. “The industry fascinated me, and I started paying attention to the expiring domain names market,” Askew said. “Every day, anywhere between 50,000 and 100,000 names expire, and while 99.9 percent of them are junk, sometimes you find one that is a diamond in the rough. And when I identify one of those, I build a boutique business around it.”

Askew created one of his first successful domain name-based businesses around vidaliaonions.com, which is a seasonal farm-to-door company shipping sweet Vidalia onions grown in Vidalia, Georgia, to customers nationwide. This year he and his farmer partner shipped thirty-two tons of Vidalia onions to customers. Now, Askew is launching a new business centered on another recently acquired domain name, birthdayparties.com. “My wife, Sara, and I have a nine-year-old daughter, Sloane, so we’ve been reintroduced to the whole birthday party experience,” he said. “I found there wasn’t a place online where I could find out what amenities the more than one hundred birthday-party event venues in Atlanta offer.”

During searches of domain names, Askew also kept an eye out for sites associated with his alma mater. While the rowanoak.com domain was owned by someone, it was not active. He negotiated to acquire the name and has since devoted some of his free time for more than a decade to creating the site. “I tried to make it a good resource for visitors and those interested in Rowan Oak and then it started taking on a life of its own,” he said. “Anytime a national magazine or media outlet, such as Southern Living or the New York Times, published an article on Rowan Oak, Faulkner or literary tours of the South, they would link to my website and the site would be hit with an enormous amount of traffic. “It was fun, and I just held onto it until it ended up in the right hands. When university representatives asked whether we could work together, I said, ‘I would love to work with you to get
this domain back underneath the oversite of the university.’ So now, the university is putting in a lot of time and resources into rebuilding the site into something I could never have built. The site looks beautiful and truly represents this unique property.”

The Friends of the Museum funded the design and launch of Rowan Oak’s new website, which provides information about Faulkner, the house and grounds, and the Bailey Woods area surrounding Rowan Oak. While the new site is already “live,” new features will gradually be added.

In the near future, rowanoak.com will feature a “store” where visitors and Faulkner enthusiasts will be able to purchase merchandise and tickets to tour the house, Griffith said. “This new site allows us to add a lot more details that we haven’t had online,” Griffith said. “It brings us into a modern age so individuals will be able to purchase tickets, buy unique items, and obtain directions, while also helping our visitors and Faulkner fans to be better informed and perhaps even more eager to come by Rowan Oak and interact with us.”

Considering that Rowan Oak annually attracts tens of thousands of visitors from around the world, the site is expected to help a variety of online viewers, said Rob Jolly, managing associate director of development for the University Museum and Historic Houses. “Faulkner fans live across America and all over the globe,” Jolly said. “This site provides a platform for us to connect with a diverse group of individuals who share a love and affinity for Faulkner’s literature.

“Faulkner fans live across America and all over the globe,” Jolly said. “This site provides a platform for us to connect with a diverse group of individuals who share a love and affinity for Faulkner’s literature.

“It also gives Faulkner fans the opportunity to provide financial support to preserve the treasure that is Rowan Oak. We are excited about the possibilities and look forward to engaging with generous donors worldwide.”

Jonathan Scott

Brittany Brown

Covering the South

Brittany Brown Receives Inaugural Emerging Reporter Fellowship

Most graduate students are busy people, but Brittany Brown may be busier than most. As a second-year Southern Studies master’s student, Brown has her schoolwork and a graduate assistantship with the University of Mississippi Division of Diversity and Community Engagement. Most recently, she has been awarded a brand-new fellowship with a nonprofit news and media company.

Brown is the first recipient of Mississippi Today’s Emerging Reporter Fellowship, which aims to promote diversity in journalism by helping to create a pipeline of young investigative reporters of color who want to remain and work in Mississippi. During her eight-month fellowship, she will be reporting on criminal justice issues.

Brown reached out to Mississippi Today’s editor-in-chief Adam Ganucheau to see if he had any freelance work, and soon after he contacted her about this opportunity. “I was in tears of joy,” said Brown, a Chicago-born, Mississippi-raised journalist who graduated from the University of Mississippi with a BA in journalism. “My reporting focus is the criminal justice system with an eye for racial justice and equity. That means reporting on police, prisons, the overall criminal-legal system in the state of Mississippi, and interrogating how we arrived at our current conditions. From looking at the impact of Covid-19 on incarcerated Mississippians to covering general and breaking news, my reporting varies but always centers on the justice system in Mississippi.”

As a student in Patrick Alexander’s mass incarceration literature class, she has added extra framework to her reporting abilities. “The justice system remains one of the most important but chronically understudied issues in the state,” said Ganucheau, when announcing the fellowship. “Brittany’s interests and academic expertise align perfectly with our mission of holding leaders accountable—and no leaders need accountability more than the ones who oversee our justice system, which has often and needlessly harmed too many Mississippians.”

Rebecca Lauck Cleary
Southern Environmentalism
A Southern Studies Reading List

This fall, Center programs focused on the themes of “Movement and Migration,” as a way of thinking about urgent issues connected to borders and belonging, and “Voting Rights and Community Activism,” which spoke directly to the flashpoints of 2020 and some central questions around the responsibilities of citizens.

This spring, the focus turns to “Southern Environments,” which is part of the Future of the South Initiative. Below is a list of reading materials to help everyone get a head start on the topic.

Kate Orff and Richard Misrach, *Petrochemical America*

*K Petrochemical America* features Richard Misrach’s haunting photographic record of Louisiana’s Chemical Corridor, accompanied by landscape architect Kate Orff’s Ecological Atlas—a series of “speculative drawings” developed through research and mapping of data from the region.


Some of the most cherished sustainable farming practices have roots in African wisdom. Yet, discrimination and violence against African American farmers has led to their decline from 14 percent of all growers in 1920 to less than 2 percent today, with a corresponding loss of more than fourteen million acres of land. In *Farming While Black*, Penniman offers the first comprehensive manual for African-heritage people to reclaim their rightful place of dignified agency in the food system.

Gilbert M. Gaul, *The Geography of Risk: Epic Storms, Rising Seas, and the Cost of America’s Coast*

In his book *The Geography of Risk*, Gilbert M. Gaul argues that federal incentives have resulted in one of the worst planning failures in American history, and the costs to taxpayers are reaching unsustainable levels. We have become responsible for a shocking array of coastal amenities: new roads, bridges, buildings, streetlights, tennis courts, marinas, gazebos, and even spoiled food after hurricanes. *The Geography of Risk* will forever change the way you think about the coasts, from the clash between economic interests and nature to the heated politics of regulators and developers.

Catherine Coleman Flowers, *Waste: One Woman’s Fight against America’s Dirty Secret*

In this powerful book Flowers tells the story of systemic class, racial, and geographic prejudice that foster Third World conditions, not just in Alabama but across America, in Appalachia, Central California, coastal Florida, Alaska, the urban Midwest, and on Native American reservations in the West. *Waste* is the inspiring story of the evolution of an activist, from country girl to student civil rights organizer to environmental justice champion at Bryan Stevenson’s Equal Justice Initiative. Her book shows how sanitation is becoming too big a problem to ignore as climate change brings sewage to more backyards, and not only those of poor minorities.

Janisse Ray, *Drifting into Darien: A Personal and Natural History of the Altamaha River*

*Drifting into Darien* begins with an account of Ray finally pursuing her childhood dream of making a journey down the Altamaha River: paddling its entire length to where it empties into the sea, turning to meditations on the many ways we accept a world that contains both good and evil. With praise, biting satire, and hope, Ray contemplates transformation and attempts with every page to settle peacefully into the now.

Rick Van Noy, *Sudden Spring: Stories of Adaptation in a Climate-Changed South*

Like Rachel Carson’s groundbreaking work *Silent Spring*, Rick Van Noy’s *Sudden Spring* is a call to action to mitigate the current trends in our environmental degradation. By highlighting stories of people and places adapting to the impacts of a warmer climate, Van Noy shows us what communities in the South are doing to become more climate resilient and to survive a slow deluge of environmental challenges.

Silas House, *Something’s Rising: Appalachians Fighting Mountaintop Removal*

*Something’s Rising* gives a stirring voice to the lives, culture, and determination of the people fighting the destructive practice of mountaintop removal in the coalfields of central Appalachia.
The Twenty-Seventh
Oxford Conference for the Book
March 8–12, 2021

Let’s face it, for innumerable reasons, 2020 was a bad year. And like everyone, we were disappointed to not have been able to host the Twenty-Seventh Oxford Conference for the Book in town or on campus. We had a great lineup ready to go—only to have to cancel just two weeks before the event.

Of course, 2021 won’t be “business as usual” either, and for the health and safety of all involved, we’ve made the decision to host the Twenty-Seventh Oxford Conference for the Book online. Even in March large in-person gatherings will still be impossible, so we are recording panels and conversations with speakers and sharing them online via the conference’s website. Sessions will go “live” on the website beginning on Monday, March 8, and we will highlight events throughout the week.

Sessions this year include awards ceremonies for both Willie Morris Awards for Southern Writing, which came to the University of Mississippi in 2020 to be administered by the Department of Writing and Rhetoric, and awards are given in both fiction and poetry.

The conference will carry over a number of sessions previously scheduled for 2020, but some with modifications. Instead of “University Press of Mississippi: Fifty Years of Academic Publishing,” we will host “University Press of Mississippi: The Next Fifty Years.” As a memorial tribute to longtime book conference participant and John and Renée Grisham Writer in Residence in 1997–98, we will record a collective reading of Randall Kenan’s “The Eternal Glory That Is Ham Hocks” from his latest story collection, If I Had Two Wings, published only days before his passing in August 2020. Past and present Grisham writers in residence will read the story.

Poet and UM associate professor of English, Beth Ann Fennelly, will host the always highly anticipated poetry session, and Southern Foodways Alliance Associate Professor of Southern Studies and associate professor of anthropology, Catarina Passidomo, will be in conversation with Catherine Coleman Flowers about her book Waste: One Woman’s Fight against America’s Dirty Secret. Flowers is founding director of the Center for Rural Enterprise and Environmental Justice and the rural development manager for the Equal Justice Initiative. Her session is part of the Center’s spring Future of the South initiative, which focuses on the theme “Southern Environments.”

The conference will also host virtual awards ceremonies for the Willie Morris Awards for Southern Writing in both fiction and poetry. The Willie Morris Awards are administered by the Department of Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Mississippi. The panel of judges looks for works that enact, in the words of the late author, “hope for belonging, for a belief in people’s better nature, for steadfastness against all that is hollow or crass or rootless or destructive.”

In addition to the prerecorded sessions, Square Books will host live readings in the evenings, Thacker Mountain Radio will air a special Oxford Conference for the Book episode that Thursday night, and the conference will cosponsor a keynote lecture by Dorothy Allison on April 16 during the Glitterary Festival.

As always, the conference is free and accessible to the public. Keep an eye on the conference website, www.oxfordconferenceforthebook.com, for the latest information.
Virtual Documentary Showcase Celebrates Student Work

The fall Documentary Showcase is an annual exhibition by Southern Studies students producing documentary work in a range of MFA and MA classes. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, documentarians came together in a virtual gathering on November 13 to discuss their recent projects.

Each artist presented their work, and a Q&A session followed their presentations. A recording of the event is available on the Center’s YouTube channel.

“This year marks our fourth Documentary Showcase, and even though the format was different this year, we were just as excited to share what our MA documentary track and MFA in Documentary Expression students had been doing,” said Andy Harper, director of the Southern Documentary Project. “In addition to the live online showcase, we featured the student work on our Center Documentary Studies webpage so everyone could see the works in their entirety before and after the showcase. There was a great mix of photography, audio stories, and documentary films by eleven students.”

Annemarie Anderson is the Southern Foodways Alliance oral historian, and she is pursuing her MFA in Documentary Expression. Her audio documentary Making Sorghum weaves the voices of sweet sorghum syrup makers from the Southern Sugars project.

Second-year student Brittany Brown’s short film We Go to Church on Sunday explores the historical and contemporary significance of Black church music and how people are keeping music, worship, and praise alive in the time of a global pandemic.

Christina Huff, also a second-year student, used her short film Surviving and Thriving: Covid-19 in the Mississippi Delta to show how the communities in the Mississippi Delta are handling the pandemic. In this
piece, Sumner, Mississippi, resident Willie Williams discusses community response and how accessibility to information in rural Mississippi has been difficult because of wi-fi and broadband issues.

Janeth Jackson, a first-year student, produced *A Worshipper’s Heart*, a film of the duo singing group A and A Double Portion, giving a closer look at what is entailed in worshipping, revealing the lifestyle and energy that goes into ushering people into the presence of God.

Finding Rhythm without the Reunion, first-year student Catherine Jessee’s short audio documentary, explores the year-round influence of a growing festival on the local community, as well as the impact of Covid-19 on making music in Bristol, Tennessee.

Raegan Kelly Johnson is a second-year history master’s student whose project *Black in the Pandemic: A Personal Reflection of Covid-19* utilizes audio, recordings, photographs, and interviews to highlight the various ways in which the virus has impacted the mental health of different members of the Black community. The multigenerational subjects document the complex effects of Covid-19. The underlying theme of “connectivity” is critical to the execution of the project and reveals a shared plight among the group interviewed.

Christian Leus, a second-year Southern Studies master’s student, produced an audio podcast of *What Remains*, which contextualizes a true crime story within questions of family, memory, and landscape in Altheimer, a small town in the Arkansas Delta.

Andrea Morales is a documentary photographer and journalist who is working on her MFA in documentary expression. Her photographs in the series *Velvet Ditch Goddam* are a retelling of what the summer of 2020 looked and felt like in Oxford while organizing in a place where moderate attitudes have prevailed and the path for radical change is narrow.

Kelly Spivey earned her MA in Southern Studies in May and immediately began the MFA in Documentary Expression program. Her audio documentary, *Bake Sales: Social Justice Works in the South*, explores southern bake sales through the experiences of bakers, restaurant owners, employees, and customers as they navigate a global pandemic that threatens their livelihood.

Originally from Louisville, Kentucky, Lilly Slaughter is pursuing an MA in Southern Studies with a focus on food systems. In her documentary film, *A Day with Sam*, she shares a story of gender identity and queerness.

Braxton Thomas, a first-year MA student from Tupelo, produced *Georgia’s Way*, a short film that focuses on her grandmother Georgia R. Wheeler. Through this work, she amplifies the voice of a Black woman who spent her life in the South navigating Jim Crow.

Rebecca Lauck Cleary
Film has become a nearly essential part of pandemic life. Journalism in the news, activism in documentaries, online streaming, and even the Center’s SouthTalks have included many films and documentaries.

Southern Studies alumni Jonathan Smith, Mary Blessey, Zaire Love, and Jamison Hollister have each created, completed, or exhibited original film and soundtrack works in 2020 that have reached new heights and won awards left and right.

**Jonathan Smith** earned his MFA in Documentary Expression in 2018. Since then, his short film *Remembering Elwood Higginbottom*, which was created as part of his thesis, has been shown to community groups and city governments in support of lynching memorialization, and has shown at several regional film festivals. This past September, *Remembering Elwood Higginbottom* won the PBS WNET Reel 13 Online Short Film Competition, which is a weekly competition that gives viewers the opportunity to vote online for which short they would like to air alongside the station’s featured films during the Reel 13 Saturday-night cinema block. Smith received an award of $250 for his winning film.

*Remembering Elwood Higginbottom* is based on the lynching of Elwood Higginbottom (also spelled Higginbotham) in Oxford, Mississippi, in 1935. After the lynching, Higginbottom’s wife and children fled the area, and the memory of his murder faded within the local community. A sequence of events, beginning with the publication of the Equal Justice Initiative’s *Lynching in America* report, brought his and many other lynchings back into public view. The Oxford-Lafayette County community, along with Higginbottom’s descendants, placed a memorial to him in Oxford, and Smith’s film details some of the impacts on the family.

“I was thrilled to see my short had been selected for the WNET Reel 13 showcase,” Smith said, “and I was excited that the story would be aired outside the local region. I really wanted to get this story of Higginbottom’s memorial out there. It shows a different side of the memorial process that I think people just aren’t familiar with. The process can impact the entire family network, often for the better. Valerie Reaves notes in the film that they have connected with hundreds of relatives through the memorial’s publicity, and it has brought some scattered branches of the family back in contact. Done properly, with community involvement and following the guidance set out by institutions such as the Equal Justice Initiative, the memorial can be a first step in healing community bonds.”

**Zaire Love** is a freelance filmmaker, music maker, and documentary photographer from Memphis, Tennessee. She earned her MFA in Documentary Expression in 2020 and says her ongoing work is “an ode to being Black and southern in America, because the Black South has always had meaningful ‘cornbread’ to share,” a reference to her recently founded the ideation and film agency, Creative Cornbread. Her mission is to honor and amplify the stories and voices of the Black South. She is a graduate of Spelman College, Houston Baptist University, and the University of Mississippi.

Love was recently awarded a $5,000 unrestricted nonfiction filmmaking grant to produce her short film, *Slice*. “Summer for Black boys and men in Memphis has proven to
be a season of danger and death,” said Love about the film, “but these Black men refuse to drown in a pool of low life expectancy. Slice explores how Rico Golden and his homeboys from Memphis dealt with the pain of summers by submerging themselves in a swimming art form of athleticism, creativity, and joy called slicing.”

The newly created grant is awarded by the Memphis arts organization The CLTV (Collective). “We felt like it’s a fresh idea and represented the spirit of Memphis,” says The CLTV. “Black communities have a fraught relationship to swimming, and this short documentary is a great way to shed light on that in a way that sparks joy and spotlights the innovation of Black youth.”

“I want to tell Black southern stories minus the gentrification and exploitation of our native tongue, mannerisms, and experiences,” Love said. “This is my inspiration. It is to listen, capture, imagine, and manifest Black southern life and for those same Black folks to look at themselves and see something that makes them proud.”

**Mary Blessey** earned her MFA in Documentary Expression in 2019 and is currently an independent documentary filmmaker based in her hometown of Biloxi, Mississippi. Her thesis film, *You Asked for the Facts: Bobby Kennedy at the University of Mississippi*, premiered at the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum in December 2019. *You Asked for the Facts* explores how, four years after the historic enrollment of James Meredith at the University of Mississippi, students there devised a plan to get around Mississippi’s speaker ban and bring Robert F. Kennedy to the university to reveal the truth about phone calls with former governor Ross Barnett.

“Progress requires a real reckoning with real history,” Blessey said. “We need to confront the history of people like Ross Barnett, for example—the huge damage caused by allowing people like that to be leaders. We need to understand the ways in which those same ideologies manifest today and continue to cause harm. The state of Mississippi, and the entire nation, still has a very, very long way to go.”

Blessey’s film has won a number of awards, including the San Diego International Film Festival’s Artistic Director’s Award. The film has been an official selection at the March on Washington Film Festival, the Oxford Film Festival, the Kansas City FilmFest International, the Los Angeles Indie Film Festival, and, most recently, the Montclair Film Festival in Montclair, New Jersey.

**Jamison Hollister** earned his Southern Studies MA in 2012. An accomplished musician before arriving at the Center, Hollister wrote his master’s thesis on “Mississippi Breakdown: A New Look at Mississippi Old Time Fiddle Music.” Since graduating, he has played pedal steel, fiddle, mandolin, dobro, and guitar on the hit television shows *American Idol*, *The Voice*, the Grammys, *Later . . . with Jools Holland*, and *Glee*, and he has performed, recorded, and toured with artists such as Dwight Yoakam, Dolly Parton, John Fogerty, Blake Shelton, Lisa Marie Presley, Brandy Clark, Utkarsh Ambudkar, Jimbo Mathus, and others.

In 2020 Hollister began work scoring Showtime’s upcoming limited series *The Good Lord Bird*, starring Ethan Hawke. He had previously written the original score for the ABC’s show *American Koko*, produced by Oscar Winner Viola Davis, and the award-winning film *He Could’ve Gone Pro*. He has also contributed music to the Del Shores film *A Very Sordid Wedding*, as well as the score for the upcoming film *Jesus and Jimmy Ray*.

*The Good Lord Bird*, a seven-part drama, is told from the point of view of a fictional enslaved boy who becomes a member of abolitionist John Brown’s motley family of soldiers during Bleeding Kansas and eventually finds himself participating in the famous 1859 raid on the US Armory at Harpers Ferry. Hollister said his time in the Southern Studies program was influential on his work on the score: “Whether taking a class or researching my thesis, I unearthed all sorts of music that has opened up my worldview as a composer. My time at the Center helped with *The Good Lord Bird* specifically, as both the historical and musical components were integral to my whole approach for the score.”

Martha Grace Mize
A State of Change

Katie Blount Reflects on the Process of Changing Mississippi’s State Flag

In November’s election, the ballot in Mississippi included the state flag referendum Mississippi Ballot Measure 3 and a full-color image of a possible new flag, known as the “In God We Trust Flag.” The previous state flag prominently featured the Confederate battle flag and was the first (adopted in 1894) and the last to include explicit Confederate iconography. The adoption of the new design passed on November 3 with 71 percent of the vote and surprisingly little controversy.

The new flag design is the culmination of many years of Mississippians advocating for a state symbol not rooted in the Lost Cause narrative. The recent legislative process to do so was finalized on June 30, 2020, when Gov. Tate Reeves signed House Bill 1796, which removed the official status of the previous 1894 state flag and led to the establishment of the Commission to Redesign the Mississippi State Flag. On June 27, 2020, the Mississippi House and Senate had approved the bill, which stipulated that “the new design for the Mississippi state flag . . . shall not include the design of the Confederate battle flag, but shall include the words ‘In God We

House Speaker Philip Gunn, left, Executive Director of Mississippi Department of Archives and History Katie Blount, and Lt. Gov. Delbert Hosemann prepare to deliver the state flag to the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum on July 1, 2020.
Trust,” thus the name of the new state flag. The redesign commission consisted of nine members, including a representative from the Board of Trustees of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), Katie Blount. A Southern Studies MA graduate (1990), Blount serves as the current director of MDAH, and she has thought deeply about this moment in Mississippi history.

“I think it has been building up over time,” Blount said. “The flag had already come down on a lot of campuses, and a lot of private businesses had taken it down. People increasingly saw it as a problem. I think a turning point was the shooting in Charleston and the courage of House Speaker Philip Gunn to advocate for changing the flag. The killing of George Floyd, I think, was another one. The strong national reaction to that murder galvanized the people who wanted to make a change, and in the end it came down to legislators coming to see this as a moral issue.”

The first role MDAH had in the flag process was the removal of the 1894 flag. “The flags were taken down and presented to the lieutenant governor, the speaker, and me,” Blount said, “and we carried them down the steps and brought them to the Two Mississippi Museums. The speaker and lieutenant governor presented them to Reuben Anderson, who is the chair of our board of trustees. It was a tremendous honor to participate in that.” Blount said the decisions of June 28, 2020, were not meant to erase history, but to ensure that the importance of the past not be used to the determent of the future. “The Two Mississippi Museums created an exhibit telling the story of the 1894 flag so that people could come and see it.”

In addition to the respectful retirement of the 1894 flag into the Two Mississippi Museums collections, MDAH played an integral role in the commission’s work to put forth a new flag. “I think the fact that the leadership turned to us to contribute to the process of choosing a new flag, really highlights the message that this department is about the future as well as the past,” Blount said. The central role MDAH played in helping to facilitate the flag change concluded on September 2, 2020, after a long public process. An open call was put forth to design a new flag according to the legislative stipulations. “Ultimately,” Blount said, “we had more than three thousand submissions, and we thought we’d just have the staff go through all of those and present a set of finalists to the commission. But the commissioners weren’t interested in that. They wanted to see every flag. And if you watched any of the commission meetings, they were fully engaged. They asked us to arrange for a flag specialist, a vexillologist, to come and speak with them, which we did. And he, Clay Moss, was instrumental. He came and talked to them about flag design, and they really listened and took that to heart. Then the deadline came, and we developed a process where they could gradually, over a period of weeks, narrow those choices down. Initially, they did it by each of them ranking their top twenty-five, and then those went into the second round, and eventually, those choices were happening at the meetings because it was a public process, public meetings. So people got to watch everything on Facebook Live.”

The flag is only one of many things in Mississippi that have changed. As the state of Mississippi has changed tremendously, so has the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. “We were established in 1902 really as an outgrowth of the Lost Cause movement to promote the glories of the Confederacy,” Blount said, “and that was the purpose toward which our initial collections were built. Changing from that agency to the agency that opened the Two Mississippi Museums, which take a very candid look at every aspect of our state’s history—from Indian removal to lynchings to the atrocities of the civil rights era and the heroism of that era—took years. That flag, the 1894 flag, is not going to go away. It’s in our museums, and it’s part of our story. It’s a really, really important part of our story, and what we believe here at the Department of Archives and History—and what I think people across the nation and world are increasingly seeing—is that none of the stories from our history go away. When George Floyd was murdered, my thoughts turned, as lots of people’s did, to Emmett Till’s murder and the impact it had in galvanizing people who wanted change. We can’t understand the world around us today unless we understand our history. We can’t understand why the 1894 flag was so offensive and upsetting to many people unless we understand our history. We have to confront it, and we have to build a shared understanding of it. We have to, as much as we can, be working from the same understanding of what happened and why and how it affects us today. And that’s really our mission here at the Department of Archives and History.”

Martha Grace Mize
As so many citizens across the nation have looked around at their statues, buildings, and monuments, they have realized that those that honor the legacy of white supremacy needed to come down. Southern Studies alum Andrew Mullins didn’t settle for looking above ground for those commemorations of the Confederacy, though. He began researching how that city’s streets were named.

Mullins is the archivist-librarian at the City Archives and Special Collections at the New Orleans Public Library, which is the official repository for the municipal records of the City of New Orleans. He earned his bachelor’s degree in Southern Studies in 2009, winning the Coterie Award in Southern Studies for Best Undergraduate Research Paper that year. He went on to earn a master’s degree in American studies from the University of Massachusetts and a master of library and information sciences from LSU.

Staff members from the New Orleans city council reached out to the public library as they began to examine the history of the city’s urban geography after the nationwide protests. They sent a list of street names and asked for brief histories of each person, as well as city ordinances that dictated the original names of the streets.

Their office and ours incorrectly assumed local media outlets had accurately identified the people memorialized in the street names,” said Mullins, who previously was the library associate for Archives Processing and Digital Initiatives for the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library at Tulane University. “We found several discrepancies between popular assumptions and the actual street names, when we could find information at all. Brittany Silva, a colleague and partner on this project, and I met with council staff members and outlined each street: this one is obviously this person, this street could be this Confederate general or that Confederate general, those streets are under the jurisdiction of the US Army, and we have no record of any streets being officially named in city records.”

The Streets Renaming Commission formed and started meeting, and the city council’s office wanted a deeper dive into the history of two neighborhoods (Carrollton and Lakeview).

Mullins credits his Southern Studies degree as being directly helpful with this particular research project. “We cited The Southern Past, a book about the history of Lost Cause memorialization and urban development across the South that professor Nancy Bercaw assigned to my SST 401 class,” Mullins said. “It was definitely an interdisciplinary effort involving different types of ‘texts.’ To help make our point and provide better context, we expanded our research to include other types of resources, such as promotional pamphlets, folk histories, advertisements for lot sales, drainage documents, and speeches given to local Confederate history groups. We also used lists of problematic street names created by community groups, such as Take ’em Down NOLA, to supplement the list provided by the city council.”

In August, the report went to the Street Naming Commission, who had a similar reaction to the city council. “They sort of thought it would be relatively straightforward,” Mullins said. “The Confederate monuments all had very baroque ceremonies accompanying their unveiling: fiery speeches about dark days of Reconstruction and displays of schoolchildren making a ‘living’ Confederate battle flag. They thought the process would be similar: identify the street, then locate the ordinance, and it will tell you who the street is named after and when it was named after them.”

However, Mullins said that was the reality for maybe one street out of twenty. For example, Mullins said that the Lakeview neighborhood was planned as early as 1867, but wasn’t built until the 1920s. There wasn’t any city ordinance
specifying that streets in a subdivision needed to be approved by the city, so developers named them whatever they wanted. “I noticed a pattern that many of the streets were named after Louisiana Confederates and/or participants in the Battle of Mansfield, the only major Confederate victory in Louisiana,” Mullins said. “Brittanny then did a deep dive into the history of Lakeview’s development and discovered the main developer, Charles Loque, was a big member of local Lost Cause organizations. In another example, the city council swore that Leonidas was named after Leonidas Polk, the so-called Fighting Bishop. Several books published about the history of New Orleans street names backed up that assertion. But, we learned that street was probably laid out several years before Polk was appointed Bishop of the Southwest of Louisiana from looking at survey documents and maps of the Carrollton neighborhood.”

The Street Commission also put together a panel of experts to do this type of work, just as the City Council had. “We reached out to them early on to let them know what we were doing,” Mullins said. “They were very appreciative that we researched the history of the streets, neighborhoods, and people who planned them. Our report freed them up to focus on more detailed biographies of the people supposedly being memorialized, as well as to begin coming up with new names for streets.”

For Mullins, this project was somewhat of a departure from his day-to-day interactions with the public. “Public archivists, or those of us who work with government records, definitely support academic research, but the majority of our reference work engages with on-the-ground research rather than big scholarly questions,” he said. “We’re helping residents—most of whom have very few research skills—find property information to resolve a dispute, locate ordinances and city directories for legal research, gather naturalization documents to apply for dual citizenship, or figure out if their ancestor is buried under the Bonnet Carre spillway. Each day introduces a new type of research question that stretches our skills.”

“Having spent a while researching street name changes throughout New Orleans history, I can say that this process with the City Archives, the report, the Streets Commission, and panels of experts is far more transparent and open than any attempt to rename streets in the past,” Mullins said. “It’s fun to watch this report grow into a life of its own.”

Since the report is a public document, Mullins thinks it influenced the amount of research. “We often joked about leaving no stone unturned to find a silver bullet in a haystack,” Mullins said. “The city council stressed that they wanted as much clarity and proof as possible, so they could be prepared for town hall meetings with neighborhood residents. I think they received a lot of pushback from a vocal minority of citizens when they removed the Lost Cause monuments, and they wanted to be prepared for the same type of questions. We found a lot of evidence, but less proof. So, we had to look beyond the city records and research the history of certain neighborhoods and people, and it felt like a Southern Studies project.”

For a complicated research project such as this, they only had a month, which, of course, was not enough time. “So many people that are memorialized in street names had connections with the Confederacy, the Lost Cause, Jim Crow, or just white supremacy in general,” Mullins said. “We could still be identifying new streets for renaming or tracking down records. People in the community are doing just that.”

While researching the street names, Mullins also found he loved using the nineteenth-century survey records and plans. “They weren’t static records created for posterity or used for a single task,” he said. “A surveyor made the map in 1853, then another surveyor drew an update on it a few years later, and finally another city employee copied the plan into a city plan book a few years after that. That one survey is a dynamic record being used and updated and copied over a fifteen-year period while a neighborhood is being built, updated, and rebuilt. It certainly frustrated the quest for clear answers, but using those survey records and comparing them with not-very-honest maps of the city was a fun challenge.”

After discovering those records, Mullins used them to research Leonidas Street in Carrollton. He learned the street was surveyed prior to Leonidas Polk becoming the Bishop of the Southwest, but it could have been named within the fifteen-year-period in which Polk came to Louisiana, left the state, and died on the battlefield. So it might be named after him—or it might not. “Some
historians and members of the community seem to think that it is,” Mullins said. “Other sources said it was named after the Spartan general from the legend of Thermopylae. Even with all of the weird love the Confederacy had for Sparta, we thought that was a stretch and found no evidence. There wasn’t a whole lot of evidence to say somebody named Leonidas lived in that area. Still, I like that idea. It might not be true at all, but I like it. Some faceless dude named Leonidas could have a street named after him. The thought made me laugh.”

Rebecca Lauck Cleary

Me and Matt and Grits and Southern Studies

By Steve Cheseborough

I still have the sourdough starter I cultured about twenty years ago in Mississippi, but it had been hanging out in the back of my fridge most of the time until the Covid lockdown started in March. Like many other people, I got back into regular home baking, sourdough bread in particular, at that time.

I also started posting photos of my breads on Instagram and following other sourdough bakers—including Matt McMillen, who posts as @quartet1977. After admiring his gorgeous breads, I noticed that he lived in Portland, Oregon (as I do), and he gave away pizza dough on Sundays. I tried some of his dough and soon was buying hand-milled flour from him for my own creations. Matt is no ordinary home baker: he mills flour from locally grown grains, bakes in a special oven that recently replaced his regular stove, uses special pans and other gear—and comes out with beautiful loaves, some of which he sells, delivering them himself. The name of his home-based nano bakery is the Quartet Bread Company.

We became friends, or as close to it as can be during Covid. We had some conversations at his door while I was picking up flour, otherwise communicating via email, text, or Instagram. Nearly always, we talked about bread.

Then, after we had known each other more than six months, I bought some superb grits online—Jimmy Red, an heirloom variety from Marsh Hen Mill (formerly Geechie Boy) in South Carolina. Since Matt is a grain connoisseur, I told him about them. He asked if I would trade him a sample for some home-milled local corn, and I said sure. We talked about grits cooking methods. I asked if he had ever lived in the South. He said, “I spent a year and a half in Oxford, Mississippi, for grad school.”

Omigod. What were you studying? Omigod. Yup, we both were in the grad program in Southern Studies. Matt started in 1995 and left, without finishing the degree, just before I arrived in 1997. His main interest was African American gospel quartets; mine was 1920s and ’30s blues. So we had encountered some of the same local characters, including Clarksdale deejay Early Wright and several members of the musical Junior Kimbrough family of Holly Springs.

Someday after Covid is under control Matt and I will sit down to beer and homemade sourdough pizza and talk for hours about Southern Studies, Oxford, and music, as well as baking. But in the meantime it’s just astounding and cool that we established our Southern Studies connection in the most appropriate way—through grits.
Black Folks Be Livin’
A Front Porch Kickback with B. Brian Foster
Interview by Zaire Love

Brian Foster is a writer and sociologist who writes about Black folks livin’, talkin’, and makin’ in the South at the intersection of race and place. He is an assistant professor of sociology and Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi, coeditor of the journal Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, and the director of the Mississippi Hill Country Oral History Collective. In his first book, I Don’t Like the Blues: Race, Place, and the Backbeat of Black Life, he writes about his time with Black folks in Clarksdale, Mississippi, and artfully captures the stories they tell about the blues of life and blues music and how they really feel about it all.

This front porch kickback with Brian Foster is one that I’m excited to have because Brian and I always talk about how the mission of our work is similar and almost identical in that we want to honor and amplify Black voices of and in the South and make sure that they are on the record. So, y’all get to be a fly on the wall, reading the realest written conversation that y’all probably have read this entire year. If the spirit moves you, pass around the collection plate.

Zaire Love: Brian! Your first book is out in these streets. How does it feel?

Brian Foster: Z-love! The book is out out, and there are lots of feels. I’m grateful and excited and scared and and and. It starts with gratitude because it must. It always does. I don’t know that I always knew—or believed—this moment would come. And I mean that. When I first got to Clarksdale in 2014, I didn’t know what story I’d leave with. When I left at the end of 2015, I wasn’t sure how I’d fit the story into a dissertation. When I finished the dissertation in 2017, I knew it wasn’t the book. I got some stuff true, and some stuff wrong. Then I wrote the book, again and again, in 2018 and in 2019; there’s no doubt that I’ve cut more words from this manuscript than I’ve let stay in. And all of that revision is why I’m excited. I don’t care at all how well the book sells. I don’t care at all what it means for my professional aspirations. Don’t need a single award. And I mean that. I just care that the story I tell in the book is real and true—if flawed and still in process—and that it shows and tells of Black southern life in all its ordinary significance. And that’s what makes me scared. The story is now out in the world and, as a colleague said to me recently, folks will do with it what they will. Letting things go is scary.

ZL: I’m really proud of you. Not only for publishing a dope book but also for making it feel like Black folks because it’s about us and folks like us. Why was that a priority for you while writing this book?
especially nicknames. They tell stories
Names for Black folks are important,
the names of the people in the book.
book casually, and you talked about
rural Black South.
without making
it sound and feel like the rural Black South.
Ain’t no way to do that (right or well) without making

BF: Thank you for saying that. My metric for how satisfied I am with a thing that I’ve written is—and, I think will always be—what the folks I write about have to say about what I write. Not do they like it, but do they feel it rings true. Does it sound and feel like them. You the Black South, like Clarksdale. So, I appreciate that.

To answer your question a little bit, one of the most frustrating parts of graduate school for me was constantly being asked the paralyzing “So what?” question about my work. I’d say something like, “I want to do an ethnography in the rural Black South because it’s been a hundred years since we’ve had a good one,” and I’d hear something like, “So what?” I’d say, “We need it because the rural South is different from other places, and we need to document and chronicle those differences.” And, I’d hear, “So what?” It was never a bad faith question, I don’t think. It just didn’t fit. It didn’t fit with how I saw myself as a writer. And it damn sho’ ain’t fit with what I was hoping to do with what I wrote. I wanted to write about a people who have survived four hundred years of plunder. I wanted to say they are still here, surviving, with memories and feelings, with frustrations and fears, with with and laughter and anger, with all the things that make life.

To answer your question all the way: I wanted to tell a story about the rural Black South. Ain’t no way to do that (right or well) without making it sound and feel like the rural Black South.

ZL: Now, we’ve talked about the book casually, and you talked about the names of the people in the book. Names for Black folks are important, especially nicknames. They tell stories at hello. What story were you trying to tell in “re-naming” these people?

BF: First of all, “They tell stories at hello,” is poetry. And true. Second, to your question: it is a pretty common practice for ethnographers to use pseudonyms when writing about the people in their work. Some won’t even name the place(s) where the work is set. But because “place” is so central to the story of I Don’t Like the Blues, I knew I’d need to name Clarksdale. And because I knew I’d need to name Clarksdale, I thought it best to not name the people with whom I spoke (even though many of them told me that they’d be okay if I did), many of whom were openly critical of local elected officials, public stakeholders, and sometimes each other. So, as you note, I “re-named” everyone. I took that decision, and process, seriously. Because it is. A part of the case that the book makes is that Black southerners use language to “do” lots of things—to mark and constitute self identity, to define and reinforce notions like “community,” and, of course, to communicate. How we say and spell our names is a part of that. The rural Black South that I know is full of Mrs. Irene’s, and Mr. Jimmy’s, and Pooh Baby’s, and Mac’s, and Teryea’s, and Teryea’s. A book about the rural Black South had to, too.

ZL: You see how I came with the poetry. I feel you about the origins of naming. In the book, Kizzy says, “We got our own thing,” and Auntie said, “We just did our own stuff.” They’re both talking about this separation or distinction from whiteness. What’s the gem in what they’re saying?

BF: Imagine you had to make a life in a place that you didn’t know, around people who didn’t see you as people, while dodging things designed to make you dead. And imagine that every time you got something, folks took it and was mad that you got it in the first place. From slavery to Jim Crow to housing segregation and beyond, that’s a part of the story of Black life in America and of Black Americans in the South—not the whole story but part. What Kizzy and Auntie and the rest of them folks were showing and telling me—and what Black Americans have been showing and telling for a long time—is that they’ve taken the nothing that this nation wanted them to have and made something from it. A strange, regular, and beautiful something. They were telling me how much they “loooved” some parts of the something they’d built, and how they didn’t like what had happened to the something since they built it. Like Mrs. Irene says in the last line of the book, they were saying, why don’t y’all just let our something be ours.

ZL: Black ownership of Blackness and what it manifests is key. Now, Black musical invention and expression is used to bring millions to Clarksdale. But Black folks still got the blues?

BF: Yes, and verse. That’s one of the takeaways from Pooh Baby’s story in chapter 1. The tourists who flock to Clarksdale and the Delta each year come in and get their blues fix. They shop and sing and tip musicians like Pooh Baby well. Then, they leave. And Black folks, like Pooh Baby’s folks, are, again, left with the blues. It’s a haunting reality for real.

ZL: That’s real. Listen, I like Pastor Early in the book. He says,
Brian Foster’s year ended quite pleasantly. In quick succession, happy news popped into his inbox—first that he was selected as coeditor of the journal *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, and second, that he was the University of Mississippi Humanities Teacher of the Year. This is in addition to the publication of his new book *I Don’t Like the Blues: Race, Place, and the Backbeat of Black Life*.

The official journal of the American Sociological Association’s Section for Racial and Ethnic Minorities, the *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* publishes the highest quality, cutting-edge sociological research on race and ethnicity regardless of epistemological, methodological, or theoretical orientation. Foster, along with James M. “JT” Thomas, associate professor of sociology and anthropology, will help publish critical and engaged public sociological scholarship on race and ethnicity.

“The editorship wasn’t something that was on my radar initially,” said Foster, assistant professor of Southern Studies and sociology. “Once I learned a little more about it, though, I was instantly interested. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* has become the premier journal for scholars who do work on race and ethnicity. I see the editorship as an opportunity to immerse myself in the discipline and to help shape the discourse.”

Soon after Foster learned he had been selected for the coeditorship, he learned he was the Mississippi Humanities Teacher of the Year. The College of Liberal Arts and the Mississippi Humanities Council cosponsor the Humanities Teacher of the Year Award recognizing outstanding contributions of humanities faculty at the University of Mississippi with a free public lecture during National Arts and Humanities Month in October and at the Mississippi Humanities Council’s annual awards ceremony in the spring. All state universities and community colleges honor a faculty member.

“The College of Liberal Arts asks for nominations from department chairs who have humanities faculty, and then a committee of three former winners chooses the winner,” said Donald L. Dyer, associate dean for faculty and academic affairs and distinguished professor of modern languages. “Every year, working with the Mississippi Humanities Council, we are so happy to have the opportunity to pause and honor a member of our humanities faculty who is doing great work in the classroom.”

Foster said when he saw the email from Dyer, the honor surprised him, then immediately validated him. Foster also expressed appreciation for Center director, Katie McKee, and Jeff Jackson, chair and professor of sociology, who nominated him.

“I always appreciate the positive and excited feedback that I get from students about the classes that I teach,” Foster said, “and I’m grateful for the nice things that many of my colleagues have had to say about my work in the classroom.”

Rebecca Lauck Cleary

“[The blues say, ‘I’m going through.’ Gospel say, ‘I’m pressing on.’] What does pressing on look like for the blues and Black folks that don’t like the blues in Clarksdale?”

BF: I love Pastor Early, and I love how he talks about the relationship between blues and gospel—James Baldwin says that blues and gospel constitute the two poles of Black life. In a recent conversation, Pastor Early called them thunder and lightning, which I took to mean different manifestations of the same sensibility. A simple reading of the blues is, as an expression of pain and despair. A simple reading of gospel is, as a cry of hope and triumph. That is what pressing on looks like in Clarksdale: people having good days and bad days, making strides forward and sometimes tripping up along the way, again loving and not liking. It looks like people organizing, and voting, and tutoring folks after school, and looking to laugh on the weekends, and bringing food for the fellowship on Sunday. It looks like people speaking truth to power at town hall meetings, and sweet nothings to loved ones in the night, signing petitions, and hoopin’ at the park. All of that—the mundane, the quiet, the active, the intentional—is pressing on.

ZL: We could sit here and talk and talk all day, but I know we got things to do and the folks that’s reading this gotta get some stuff done, too. Could you give us a benediction about the book that’ll get us through until we meet again?

BF: Just, listen.
In addition to his role as professor of English and Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi, Adam Gussow is an accomplished blues harmonica player and educator, performing these days—once the pandemic lifts—with his new trio, Sir Rod and the Blues Doctors. His performing career with Sterling “Mister Satan” Magee is documented in the film Satan and Adam and in Gussow’s first book Mister Satan’s Apprentice: A Blues Memoir. Gussow is also the author of Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition, Journeyman’s Road: Modern Blues Lives from Faulkner’s Mississippi to Post-9/11 New York, Busker’s Holiday, and Beyond the Crossroads: The Devil and the Blues Tradition.


Greg Johnson: You tackle a lot in this one. You pretty cleverly organize it along the structure of a 12-bar blues, where each chapter becomes a bar in a 12-bar blues cycle. You use a number of lenses to examine blues through two ideologies that you call “black bluesism” and “blues universalism.” Tell us about these two positions.

Adam Gussow: I should start by saying that the original title I gave to the publisher was Blues Talk: Making Sense of the Music in a New Millennium. I was interested in the range of ways that people talk about the blues. And what occurred to me when I thought about those is that there were two primary ways that people ideologize the blues, meaning the way in which people do something other than just being purely scholarly about it, or discographical about it, or just listening to it with some whiskey in hand. When people want to cultivate an argument about it, they use what I call the lens of “Black bluesism” or “blues universalism.” I talk about a sort of competition between slogans.

The first is “blues is Black music.” On the face of it, as many people might say, well, of course it is. Blues is Black music in so many different ways, from its African sources, to the principle of call and response, to the Black vernacular that seems to be a part of it no matter where it travels around the world, so that everybody knows “Got My Mojo Working” and “Hoochie Coochie Man,” with their language of Black hoodoo/voodoo religion tracing
back to Africa. If one wants to be an empiricist, though, and think critically about the phrase “blues is Black music,” one might say, well, it certainly was Black music in some profound way between 1920, when Mamie Smith’s “Crazy Blues” came out, and maybe 1960, but between 1960 and 1970 (and B. B. King is a very good example for this) the blues audience was transformed in a radical way. The younger Black audience fell away and moved towards soul music, and King talks about this as a hurtful thing, the loss of that audience. Meanwhile, there’s a huge sort of swelling white audience for blues, and we begin to have white blues musicians to the point where the Black Arts Movement—people like Larry Neal, Stephen Henderson, Ron Welburn, and other Black Arts Movement intellectuals—said, “Whites are stealing the music, and the media’s going to crown the king and queen of the blues, and they’re going to be white people!” You know, Janis Joplin and Tom Jones and Paul Butterfield at Madison Square Garden. And so there was a lot of rage back in the late sixties at the fact that this white blues thing seemed to have supplanted [the creative work of] African Americans.

One of the arguments I make is that we’re living in the aftermath of that period—and I’m still now thinking critically about that slogan “blues is Black music.” But if you look globally at the blues today, it’s indisputable that the number of non-African American people who play the music, listen to the music, record the music, make use of the music, is a much greater number than the number of African American people who are still doing that.

It’s important, of course, never to forget about the soul blues market. For the sort of clueless white aficionado who says “Black people don’t listen to the blues anymore,” that’s not true at all, if you live where we live in the Deep South. Soul blues is Black music. But if we’re using the phrase “blues is Black music” to say that everybody else in the world who plays it, or only white Americans who play it, are somehow suspect, that a world of judgment can be leveraged against anybody who’s not African American making use of the music, I say, that’s a form of fundamentalism. In that case, the phrase “blues is Black music” is not being used just to honor the music, but to actually beat people back. As an empiricist, I’m troubled by that. Because I want to know the answer to the question, “How is the music being used?”

At the other extreme, there’s the opposing slogan, “No Black. No white. Just the blues.” Now there’s a lot of people, and I’m one of them, who want to roll their eyes when they hear that. It’s a t-shirt slogan. If there’s an argument between slogans, more of the truth is clearly the fact that this white blues thing seemed to have supplanted [the creative work of] African Americans.

GJ: In your book you quote blues poet Tyehimba Jess, essentially saying there is no separation between African American literature and the blues. What do blues fans need to know about the writings of Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, or Sterling Plump for a richer understanding of the blues?

AG: When we talk about the blues, what are we talking about? Kalamu ya Salaam says it’s a mistake that many people make to think that the blues is just music. One thing I do is take the blues apart in a way that I’ve done when I teach it in literature classrooms: I talk about blues conditions, blues feelings, blues music (or blues expressiveness), and the blues ethos. But I think it’s really important to understand that the corollary to me saying that, in the global context, far more non-Black people are using the blues than Black Americans, is that if we add literature in, that’s really not true at all.

There’s a continuing African American literary tradition that uses the blues, that thinks about the blues, that’s as powerful now, in some ways, as it’s ever been. It arguably begins with Langston Hughes. He gets slammed by the Black middle class, the journalists of the time, for putting all this Black working-class stuff, this “sex, drugs, and rock and roll,” on the page, all of this lower-class behavior that the Black middle-class was trying to sweep under the rug. But Hughes says, this is vitality! For many people, and especially for contemporary Black Americans, if I use that word “blues,” they may be thinking about [the band] Southern...
Avenue or B. B. King, but they may also use it as a sort of placeholder for “the Black experience in America,” for historical legacies of pain and oppression, for family life.

There’s some wonderful sort of memoiristic texts that take people into juke joints, where their cousins or grandmothers hung out. Zandria Robinson, our former colleague here at the university, writes about her father and her going back through his recordings, a playlist she’d gotten together for him, and thinking about it from his perspective, thinking about how things hadn’t worked out between him and her mother and thinking about the pain and the loss that were part of his life in Mississippi. There are some deep and powerful meditations. Sterling Plumpp, somebody whose work I’ve taught for a long time, has an amazing poem, “Mississippi Griot,” where blues is not just music. It is music, but it’s a music that contains multitudes, he would say. It gestures at Emmett Till. It gestures at the disappeared down through Black history. So, to talk to blues music aficionados about this would be to say, you get a much deeper and richer understanding of the music if you read, not just imaginative literature, of course, but autobiographies like Father of the Blues by W. C. Handy.

For the last three years, a strange chord progression has haunted Southern Studies and English professor Adam Gussow’s very musical mind. It was an uncommon tune, but it was usually there, in all its weird glory, for the professor who teaches about blues music and is a recording artist in his own right. He’s also a notable figure in the music world from the Netflix documentary Satan & Adam.

The chord progression that haunted him is the backbone of an uplifting new track featuring Gussow, Rod Patterson, and fellow UM professor Alan Gross called “Come Together.” It all started with a noise in his head: a clarion call in A-C-D-F. “There’s some magic to this, I thought,” Gussow said. “It has a sort of blues rock feel to it. I started looking around online thinking, ‘Surely, I didn’t make this progression up.’”

Gussow also plays with Gross in a duo called the Blues Doctors, a play on the fact the band is made up of two guys with PhDs. Patterson is an Atlanta-based motivational speaker who crusades against bullying in the city’s schools.

Patterson and Gussow have an unusual connection: Sterling “Mr. Satan” Magee. Patterson’s uncle’s friendship and collaboration with the professor over twenty-three years is the focus of Satan & Adam. Their partnership began when Gussow and Magee played for five years on the streets of Harlem.

Gussow, Gross, and Patterson all got together in February for a session at a historic home in Water Valley. Gussow had written the music for “Come Together” three years earlier, and he and Gross had subsequently recorded it. Patterson later wrote lyrics over their backing track. The day after they met they had the song.

The band wrote the tune out of frustration with divisions in the country, specifically with racism and intolerance. The song began in 2017 as an instrumental. When Patterson wrote the lyrics to the song, they were about a metaphorical virus. Covid-19 wasn’t making nearly as much news then, Gussow said. It seems eerie to him now. “This was mid-February,” he said. “Nobody in America was really talking about Covid-19. Patterson’s lyrics spoke to this thing that wants to kill us, but at the time the virus was racism.”

Michael Newsom
The Center Publishes New Study the South Essays
New Work Focuses on Racial Injustice and Health Disparities in the American South

On September 24, 2020, Study the South published the essay, “Vanishing Acts: Civil Rights Reform and Dramatic Inversion in Douglas Turner Ward’s Day of Absence.” In his essay, GerShun Avilez examines Ward’s satirical stage play about an imaginary southern town where all Black people have suddenly, and mysteriously, disappeared. According to Avilez, Ward explores Black labor and mobility and, in doing so, creates opportunities to invert the dynamics that have historically characterized US society. Avilez shows how Ward’s experimental play functions as an extended meditation on the precarious lives of Black Americans, concluding his essay by drawing connections between the ideas in Ward’s play and our current social moment. The central concerns in Ward’s play, first performed in 1965, mirror those of contemporary activists for racial justice and suggest that Black Americans are still seeking full recognition as citizens.

GerShun Avilez is associate professor of English and director of graduate studies at the University of Maryland–College Park. He specializes in contemporary African American and Black Diasporic literatures and visual cultures, and he teaches courses on the Black Arts Movement, Black sexuality, art and political activism, civil rights, race and medical humanities, and twentieth-century American culture.

On October 27, 2020, Study the South published a roundtable conversation with stakeholders from across the region who are exploring health conditions of the rural South and the consequences that marginalized groups here (poor/rural/people of color) disproportionately experience. This essay, “Health Landscapes in the South: Rurality, Racism, and a Path Forward,” not only explores the health disparity gaps that exist in the rural South, but it focuses the conversation on actional steps for moving the needle in these communities.

“Health disparities in the United States are well documented,” Anne M. Cafer and Meagen Rosenthal write in the introduction to the conversation. “While some of these disparity gaps are closing, three remain consistent: 1) the South fairs worse than other US regions, 2) racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately impacted, and 3) rural spaces do not keep pace with urban centers. In many ways, these disparities, because of their persistence, are normalized or offered up as pretext for why some places are not ‘resilient’ or ‘flourishing.’ Addressing these disparities is difficult, from both a practical and a conceptual standpoint. They are ‘wicked’ problems, multifaceted in nature and require complex, interdisciplinary, multi-stakeholder approaches that are hard to manage and fund.”

Anne M. Cafer is an assistant professor of sociology and Meagen Rosenthal is an assistant professor of pharmacy administration, both at the University of Mississippi. Brookshield Laurent is executive director of the Delta Population Health Institute at Arkansas State University, and Jennifer Conner is deputy director of the Delta Population Health Institute at Arkansas State University. Raeda Anderson is a research scientist focusing on technology and big data analytics for Shepherd Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

Study the South is a peer-reviewed, multimedia, online journal, published and managed by the Center for the Study of Southern Culture. Contact James G. Thomas, Jr. at jgthomas@olemiss.edu for more information.

Upcoming essays include work on John Kennedy Toole’s portrait of small-town southern life. To read essays in the journal, please visit www.southernstudies.olemiss.edu/study-the-south.
From the Vault is a regular column exploring southern artwork found in the permanent collection of the University of Mississippi Museum.

Stuart Purser, the former Chairman of the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Mississippi, first met Jesse James Aaron (1887–1979) while passing by Aaron’s home in Gainesville, Florida, in August 1968. Purser noticed a large wooden carving on the edge of Aaron’s porch and inquired if he could purchase it. Aaron sold him the piece and insisted he would have new and better ones the following week. When Purser returned he was so impressed with the work that he quickly coordinated to have Aaron exhibit alongside him at the teaching gallery at the University of Florida that October. A key advocate of Aaron’s work, Purser introduced him to curators, coordinated exhibitions, and drove Aaron to events across the country.

Jesse James Aaron, one of twelve children, was born to a Seminole mother and an African American father in Lake City, Florida, in 1887. He spent most of his professional life as a baker, though he worked several jobs over the years, and he was an avid gardener, teaching neighborhood children about plants in his yard. When his wife Lee Anna (also spelled Lee Ana and LeeAnna elsewhere) lost her eyesight, Aaron was desperate to find the money for her cataract surgery. As Purser once wrote, “He prayed to the Lord to give him work that no one else in Gainesville could do and something that would be useful. ‘At three o’clock in the morning,’ the Lord told him, ‘Jesse, go carve.’ He got up and went to his workshop and made his first carving.” Over the course of a year, Aaron was able to pay for his wife’s operation, and he began each day in his shop at three o’clock in the morning.

Aaron worked intuitively. He would see forms in tree stumps and limbs before he even began carving. The slight octogenarian would often haul these heavy pieces of unhewn wood back to his studio on his own. He would use chainsaws, chisels, and pocketknives to reveal the form from its raw material. Aaron occasionally added stains to the final product (never paint), but often opted for burning the wood to add color and texture. He did sometimes
incorporate accessories to his pieces, and he would use bits of metal or resin for the eyes. His forms were representational, depicting people as well as animals, and sometimes a combination of both.

Founding director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, William Ferris, along with his wife, Marcie Cohen Ferris, gifted the University of Mississippi Museum with *Untitled (Three-Horned Head)* in 2019. The piece, which Aaron created in 1975 in the middle of his short but prolific artistic career, is indicative of his characteristic style. The sculpture is made of cedar with metal and acrylic for the eyes, and is reminiscent of both human and animal forms. As with this piece, his creatures aren’t always recognizable, yet they somehow seem natural to this world. As Stuart Purser said of Aaron’s work, “As he walks through the woods and looks at trees, logs, stumps, and knots, he sees exotic forms and faces—all suggested by the physical material itself. He then does something about it.”

Amanda Malloy

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


On the dustjacket of Memorial Drive, the Pulitzer Prize–winning poet Natasha Trethewey is an infant in the arms of her smiling mother, Gwendolyn Turnbough, of Gulfport, Mississippi, in 1966. The memoir ends several years later with an annual mother-daughter drive from Atlanta for Natasha to spend summer vacation in her birthplace with her maternal grandmother’s tightknit family. These journeys began after Turnbough divorced her white Canadian husband and moved to Georgia to begin graduate studies in social work and develop a new life for herself and their six-year-old daughter. In the closing scene of Memorial Drive, Natasha is a teenager, stretching from the passenger seat to lean against her mother and take the wheel on the empty road for an impromptu steering lesson on the way to Mississippi, “following the arc of the sun west toward home.” Decades later, Trethewey recalled that they sat “so close we seemed conjoined, and I could feel her heart beating against me as if I had not one, but two.” She must have felt the same closeness when she was a baby hugged by her mother in the cover photograph.

Shockingly, however, the memoir begins three weeks after Gwendolyn Turnbough was fatally shot on June 5, 1985, in her Atlanta apartment on Memorial Drive. Like the volume’s closing journey, the tragic opening segment is italicized for emphasis and introduced with empty brackets rather than a chapter heading. Along with three additional untitled vignettes, these short reflections stand apart from the memoir’s chronological progression, serving as intense and dreamlike meditations in notably poetic prose. In the terrible vision that introduces the book, Turnbough appears to the nineteen-year-old Natasha with light shining through the bullet hole in her forehead, just as she appeared at the end of Trethewey’s elegiac fifth poetry volume, Monument: Poems New and Selected (2018). The memoir describes the dead mother making a “slow revolution” along an “oval track,” walking shoulder to shoulder with her daughter, when they encounter the killer. “This time I think I can save her,” Trethewey believes, even though she understands her mother is already dead in the dream.

Reversing a mother’s quest to reclaim her daughter from the land of the dead in the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone, Trethewey’s vision was revelatory and transformative. “Through the metaphor of the dream,” she says, “I had acknowledged the undeniable presence of my deepest wound.” She has frequently remarked that this wound “hurt” her into becoming a poet—a writer who achieved national recognition as nineteenth poet laureate (2012–14) for an unusual double term that overlapped with her appointment as Mississippi’s state poet laureate. In the memoir, Trethewey reflects: “Even my mother’s death is redeemed in the story of my calling, made meaningful rather than merely senseless. It is the story I tell myself to survive.” The fact that it took seven years to complete Memorial Drive suggests the devotion and heartbreak entailed in her calling to become a writer. Her close acquaintance with pain was clear even in her first collection, Domestic Work (2000), which includes the poems “Cameo,” “Hot Combs,” “Limen,” and other portrayals of her mother.

Although Trethewey withholds the identity of her mother’s killer at the beginning of Memorial Drive, readers of her poetry realize from the start he was Trethewey’s stepfather—Turnbough’s second husband, who relentlessly stalked her after they were divorced. The book’s account of his physical and emotional abuse is so unforgettable that PBS interviewed Trethewey in October 2020 to mark Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Further regarding the current pandemic, she told journalist Michel Martin that family tensions have increased in many cases, and she stressed the long-term effect of domestic violence on survivors, including children. Frequently driving her on the long...
loop around Atlanta, her stepfather had repeatedly threatened to abandon Natasha or commit her to a mental health facility, even though she was only seven when her mother married him and gave birth to his son. Speculating that they met when her student-mother worked at the Mine Shaft club in an entertainment district called Underground Atlanta, Trethewey views him as “the lord of the underworld”—the same myth she evokes in relating her dream of her dead mother. In her 2006 poetry collection, Native Guard, the villanelle “Myth” is another rendering of this legend of wrenching loss.

Yet, Trethewey emphasizes that “the tragic facts of my mother’s life and mine” are “not the story” of Memorial Drive. Rather, the book relates a broader narrative of remembering and forgetting. The title of the final chapter, “Before Knowing Remembers,” comes from William Faulkner’s comment in Light in August: “Memory believes before knowing remembers.” The title of the book likewise speaks of memory; Memorial Drive runs from mid-Atlanta to the huge Stone Mountain monument commemorating heroes of the Confederacy. In her prologue, Trethewey says she could see this “lasting metaphor for the white mind of the South” from the gate to her mother’s apartment complex: “as if to remind me what is remembered here and what is not.”

In her memoir (her focused remembering), Trethewey compares the nation’s “cultural amnesia” to the erasure of individual histories like her mother’s. Gathering official reports of Turnbough’s death, Trethewey learned that “the record shows murder, shows May 31, gets the day wrong, makes the date she died invisible in the document, takes five days from her, from me, as if they were irrelevant, as if it didn’t matter, as if it were not important to be precise, to get it right.” Natasha’s birth on Mississippi’s centennial Confederate Memorial Day provided another lasting image of lives that are spent on society’s fringe. Suffering labor pains on the drive to the “segregated ward” of Gulfport Memorial Hospital, Gwendolyn Turnbough felt “the tenor of the day, witnessing the barrage of rebel flags lining the streets: private citizens, lawmakers, Klansmen (often one and the same) raising them in Gulfport and small towns all across Mississippi” on April 26, 1966.

Months earlier, when Natasha’s grandmother, Leretta Dixon Turnbough, asked the town newspaper to announce her daughter’s Ohio wedding, the older woman was put on a watch list. Mississippi did not recognize mixed-race marriages like that of Gwendolyn Turnbough to Eric Trethewey; and Ross Barnett “was monitoring interracial activity.” Leretta Turnbough further risked attention by supporting Mennonite missionary efforts in the Black community; their volunteer work led to a bomb threat against the Baptist church across from the Turnbough house, where Natasha and her parents also lived. Trethewey says she was “too young to recall the night the Klan burned a cross in our driveway,” but the family’s “act of remembering, recounting that story” trained her to be always on watch. Even though Natasha and her parents “met with a great deal of hostility most places we went,” her home life as an only child meant she had the “comfort of that small enclave of close relations” who doted on her, as they had doted on her mother when Gwendolyn was a girl. Natasha went fishing and gathered figs, persimmons, and pecans with her great-aunt Sugar, the “family heroine” who always had “a sharp-tongued comeback” to white people’s “routine terms of diminishment.”

In contrast, Sugar’s afternoon tea parties with her little niece made “All the days sweet like that.” The elegant “high yellow” great-uncle Son Dixon and Aunt Lizzie owned a nightclub, a Cadillac, and an airconditioned house with a Bible on a reading stand “beneath portraits of Jesus, Kennedy, and King.” Eric Trethewey commuted from graduate school in New Orleans and spent hours walking with Natasha, telling her stories and classical myths. A student of literature and creative writing, he said his daughter would be a writer, too—a dream that her stepfather later threatened to crush. “Most of all,” Trethewey says, “I loved watching my mother.” In this “place of my childhood wonder, of my parents’ fleeting happiness,” everything was “a marvel”—from the jar of wildflowers catching the “bottled light” of the sun to “the rhythm of language and the power of words to alter what I saw.” Memorial Drive glows with this power.

Joan Wylie Hall

Mississippi Poets: A Literary Guide


In his preface to A Dictionary of the English Language (1755), Samuel Johnson says, “The chief glory of every people arises from its authors.” He could just as easily have been talking about the celebrated and versatile writers from the state of Mississippi, but “to most of the world’s readers,” according to the entry on poetry in The Mississippi Encyclopedia, “the literature of Mississippi is a literature of prose and drama.”

In Mississippi Poets: A Literary Guide it is Catharine Savage Brosman’s aim to correct that gap by highlighting forty-seven of the state’s poets of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many of whom have been overlooked or underappreciated, even in their native or adopted state. Brosman is a poet, essayist, and scholar who retired from Tulane University in 1997 after a career of nearly thirty years. She and Olivia

The Southern Register Winter 2021 Page 33
McNeely Pass, who contributed five of the articles in this book, recently coauthored *Louisiana Poets: A Literary Guide*, and they bring the same erudition and thorough detail to the study of the poets of Mississippi.

The question often raised by both scholars and readers alike is, what makes someone a regional poet, and, in particular, what makes a Mississippi poet? William Faulkner said, “To understand the world, you must first understand a place like Mississippi.” There is no denying that to understand any region or any writer who is born in that region or whose works reflect its culture, one must also understand the physical landscape, the history, and the people. Brosman asks, “Do the place, and its history, make the poet?” C. Leigh McInnis, one of the book’s featured poets, says, “If what happens in Mississippi has an immediate effect on your work, you are a Mississippi writer.” There is a “Mississippi imagination,” Brosman argues, and her introduction also quotes Natasha Trethewey, two-term US poet laureate and the fourth poet laureate of Mississippi: “Geography is fate.” It is Brosman’s purpose in this book to bring to the forefront the lives of the poets of Mississippi and to serve as a *literary guide* to their upbringing, influences, style, and best-known works.

Of the forty-seven poets in this work, twenty-six are also featured in *The Mississippi Encyclopedia*, though none written by Brosman herself. It is worth noting that this reviewer wrote the entries on D. C. Berry and John Stone, also included in her critical study. By their encyclopedic nature, however, they are much briefer than the eight and four pages she devotes to them. She takes the time and space necessary to give more details to individual volumes and is able to cite specific poems, as well as flesh out influences on each poet’s work. I got a deeper understanding of Berry’s and Stone’s poetry from her book and did not feel that I was reading another entry from an encyclopedia.

To get a sense of the overall structure of the entries and the typical method of presentation in *Mississippi Poets*, it will help the reader to highlight a particular author: Beth Ann Fennelly, the most recent poet laureate from the state (2016–20). Fennelly’s current and former academic affiliations and a brief biography begin the entry, including any non-poetic works, and prizes she has won. The entry is in chronological order, and so each volume is explained by the kind of verse form the poet usually uses and the subject matter, especially as it relates to the region. Brosman writes in a clear, concise manner; she does not gush about the author’s work, is complimentary when she deems it warranted, and gives the reader enough examples, even in the four-page entry, to illustrate Fennelly’s subject matter, tone, and style. There is a summary paragraph that makes judgments—“a very able writer”—that are neither effusive nor dismissive. Each entry in *Mississippi Poets* takes this approach, so the reader is informed, not just presented with lists of published works, dates, or awards.

Throughout the entries of varied and unique voices, Brosman gives a rich and detailed cultural background of the place, the literature, and the religion of the state, all in the way of explaining what it means to be a Mississippi poet. They all share a common experience, whether expressed through traditional, postmodern, Beat, experimental, or blues-influenced rhythms. John P. Freeman says, “Mississippi is the very subject of my poetry,” and Brosman quotes Lewis Nordan: “We ache for Mississippi . . . we carry it in us.” Many, however, left the state early and never came back to live, though their memories of family and sense of place imbued their writing. In the case of James Seay, the author notes that “small-town life in Mississippi marked him,” though most of his long career was at the University of North Carolina.

While many of the state’s poets embrace their cultural past, others are critical of Mississippi’s infamous history of slavery, poverty, and deprivation. As Albert Camus once said, “In order to understand the world, one has to turn away from it on occasion.” Poets such as Ann Fisher-Wirth, Derrick Harriell, and C. Leigh McInnis turn away from the status quo of their upbringing and use their poetry to raise consciousness of Mississippi’s racial oppression. Others in Brosman’s book, such as Al Young, believe poetry must be poetry first and “a poet’s loyalty should go to the art itself, not a cause.”

*Mississippi Poets* is a good starting point for readers unfamiliar with that state’s literary heritage. Though there are many well-known writers, such as Faulkner, Ellen Gilchrist, and Richard Wright, more noted for their fiction than their poetry, there are many who Brosman feels deserve a first look or a second reading. An extensive list of all the primary sources for each writer is included, along with a helpful bibliography of anthologies and works about Mississippi literature in general. This is a valuable reference source, and Brosman has done a worthy job of lifting up and appreciating these representatives of “the chief glory” of Mississippi poetry.

Gary Kerley
Road through Midnight: A Civil Rights Memorial
The Southern Register usually asks me to write about photographic books. This involves studying the photographs (both their content and style), whatever verbal materials accompany them, how the images are grouped and sequenced, and the book’s larger purpose. All are important, but if the pictures are unremarkable I rarely find many positive things to say about the book as a whole. Road through Midnight is an exception. The photographs are largely unremarkable, yet this is one of the most powerful books of documentary content I know of. Indeed, some of its power may lie in just how unremarkable the photographs are.
Jessica Ingram began work on this project in the early 2000s. Traveling throughout the Deep South, she photographed sites of 1960s-era civil rights murders, recorded interviews with victims’ friends and family members, searched archives for contemporaneous accounts of the murders and the investigations undertaken (or not) by local authorities, and talked with journalists who had reported on the murders for local newspapers. Somewhat later, she was granted the use of materials from the Southern Poverty Law Center. The fieldwork and research took nearly two decades and were no doubt exhausting.
But the extent and duration of Ingram’s work are not the only reasons for the power of Road through Midnight. Instead, its strength is in how the various pieces cohere, with each providing context for the others. The book is divided into twenty-two segments, almost all of which focus on a civil rights-era murder, in some cases of more than one individual. Each “chapter” begins with a photograph or two, full-bleed across the gutter of facing pages. These pictures are usually of the murder site: the dusty crossroads in rural Mississippi where Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner were shot; the ragged neighborhood where Frank Morris was burned alive inside his Ferriday, Louisiana, shoe shop; Medgar Evers’s driveway. Following the photographs are straight-forward, deadpan accounts of the crime, usually including the eventual fate of the murderers (many of whom were never charged or convicted). Next comes a variety of materials: recorded conversations with family members, written pieces by local journalists or others with memories of the crime, photocopies of contemporaneous newspaper articles and photographs, reproductions of church funeral programs, pictures from family photo albums. Each segment is a dizzying and disheartening array, demonstrating both the power of context in documentary work and the profound evil at the heart of these events.
As mentioned above, the photographs in Road through Midnight are fairly ordinary in and of themselves. They seem distanced and lacking in emotion. Yet the book as whole packs an emotional wallop, in large part because of Ingram’s seeming detachment. In many ways this approach brings to mind what has come to be known as “the banality of evil,” a phrase coined by political theorist Hannah Arendt in her account of Adolph Eichmann’s 1963 trial for masterminding the murders of millions of Jews in Nazi concentration camps. (It’s perhaps worth noting that Eichmann’s trial and the murders described in Road through Midnight were occurring more or less simultaneously.) It might be the book’s greatest strength that it reminds us that terrible things can happen in ordinary places, in seemingly ordinary times, and that they could yet again.

David Wharton

The Saddest Words: William Faulkner’s Civil War
Michael Gorra presents a William Faulkner for the moment in time through which the South, and the nation, are living. Published in the same year when Black Lives Matter became a more compelling movement than ever before, when local communities began taking down or moving Confederate monuments from prominent places, and when Confederate-laced flags were changed, the book uses Faulkner’s preoccupation with the Civil War to unravel the centrality of persisting racial injustices to the American story. Gorra goes beyond issues of strict literary concern to place Faulkner in the sociocultural context of his time and place, and argues for his continuing relevance as a prophetic voice. The study is historical criticism operating at a very high level. The title comes from Quentin Compson, the confused but idealistic figure in Faulkner’s greatest novels. His father, the cynical and materialistic Jason Compson, tells him that was is the saddest word in language, but Quentin discovers that again is even more so. The terms together...
suggest that an event in the past recurs endlessly, in a deterministic cycle that seems to entrap people. Gorra’s sure-footed analysis demonstrates ways that Faulkner’s blurring of past, present, and future come out of the struggle to understand the abiding presence of the issues of the Civil War. Faulkner actually wrote little about the war itself, with the generals sometimes romanticized but of little significance as compelling characters and the battles merely off-stage events. But the war is the dynamic force that brings together the prewar slave society and the postwar effort to reconstitute that society through the Lost Cause—the memory of the Confederate cause.

Gorra’s method is an original one. He incorporates discussion of Faulkner’s novels, short stories, and life in a narrative that runs from the 1830s to the post-World War II years when Faulkner won the Nobel Prize and became a cultural ambassador for the United States government. He treats the writer’s work as a single, sweeping text, as one long story, rather than dealing with the fiction in chronological order. His research is extensive, as he investigates regional and family history, other writings on the war, letters and journals, accounts of battles, Civil War historiography, and war memorials. It is a profoundly learned study, held together by Gorra’s quizzical, informed voice, assessing and evaluating the war, Faulkner, and the issue of race, especially dwelling on what Faulkner’s struggles to present racial issues mean for the disappointing failure of the nation to live into what seems now like an overly hopeful post-racial time. He notes that much scholarship on Faulkner deals with the tension between the Old South and the New South, the Sartorises and the Snopeses, but he sees such issues as “pocket change” compared to what Faulkner has to say about race.

Anyone examining Faulkner’s engagement with issues of race must deal with his unfortunate public statements, and Gorra does not shrink from giving them due weight. Faulkner was a southern moderate of the mid-twentieth century, and that meant that he was for going slow on racial change because he feared southern whites would rise up in violent rebellion if change came quickly. Both James Baldwin and Martin Luther King Jr. took him to task for such views that could suppress momentum toward change that had built through the postwar years. Moreover, a liquor-infused interview had him saying if war between North and South came, he would be in the streets fighting African Americans. He later claimed he had been misquoted, but Gorra concludes that Faulkner was the white southerner in his everyday views at that time, his mind filled with inherited racial stereotypes.

The stunning revelation, though, is that when Faulkner wrote fiction he, more often than not, transcended such commonplace southern sentiments. His African American characters could be one-dimensional, but the searing story of the identity-challenged Joe Christmas and the psychological understanding of Lucas Beauchamp demonstrated a surprising depth of feeling about racial injustices for a white southerner of his time. Gorra insists that no white American writer, then or now, thought deeper and more extensively about racial problems, seen here in how the legacy of the Civil War distorted the southern white psyche for generations. Faulkner lived in Mississippi, the belly of the racist beast, and the daily observation of racial realities gave him the materials to verbalize what was normally not said in polite company. The Jim Crow society was one of silences and shared falsehoods, but Gorra’s Faulkner had the temerity to document the sordid reality of slavery and segregation, the murders, rapes, incest, and general violence at the heart of race relations.

Southern studies has a robust scholarship on the region’s public memory, and this book is a fine addition to it. “The real war,” Gorra writes, “lies not only in the physical combat, but also in the war after the war, the war over its memory and meaning.” Faulkner’s white South cannot forget anything, remembering above all its Civil War defeat, its loss and yearning for a misperceived past utopia while ignoring its rapacious atrocities to its Black population.

Gorra examines the importance of trauma to the white South’s cultural memory and its endless cycle of _was and again_. The delayed response to an experience that seems unknowable at the time can foster trauma and the nightmares and flashbacks that represent an unwilled memory. The Lost Cause in that regard represented what Gorra calls a “doomed reiteration” for a white South that could never acknowledge the sin of slavery and tried to recreate a flawed and unjust vision of life.

In the end, Gorra is profound in emphasizing Faulkner’s passionate exploration of the moral drama, struggle, and paradox in Faulkner’s “attempt to work through our history, to wrestle or rescue it into meaning.” He was able to think his way into the minds of his characters and fearlessly examine the racial demons in his own southern psyche as he judged those characters for their failures. Gorra emphasizes as well that Faulkner’s broodings on race and identity was the nation’s story, making it relevant to our times.

Charles Reagan Wilson
Eudora Welty Awards

Each year the Center for the Study of Southern Culture presents the Eudora Welty Awards in Creative Writing to Mississippi high school students during the annual Faulkner & Yoknapatawpha Conference. Established and endowed by the late Frances Patterson of Tupelo, the awards are given for creative writing in either prose or poem form.

This past year was an unusual year—to say the least—and the Welty Awards and the Faulkner Conference both were cancelled as a result of Covid-19. No winner was named for the Welty Awards in 2020, but the awards will take place again this year.

As in past years, students must be Mississippi residents. The competition is open to ninth through twelfth graders, and writing should be submitted through students’ high schools. Short stories should not exceed three thousand words, and poetry should not exceed one hundred lines. Winning students will be notified at least a month prior to the award presentation. The first-place prize for each category is $500, and the second-place prize is $250.

The winners will also be recognized at the opening of the 2021 Faulkner & Yoknapatawpha Conference on the University of Mississippi campus in Oxford on July 18.

Each entry should be accompanied by the entry form and postmarked by May 14, 2021. Faculty and staff from the Center for the Study of Southern Culture will judge the entries and select the winners. Application and submission requirements will be sent to all Mississippi public and private schools. If you know a Mississippi student currently enrolled in high school outside of the state or who is homeschooled, please e-mail rebeccac@olemiss.edu for a copy. To see a list of past winners or to download or complete the application, visit www.southernstudies.olemiss.edu/academics/high-school-eudora-welty-awards.
Center Remembers Longtime Friends

Since August, the Center has seen the passing of several friends, each of whom had contributed to the success of our work in their own ways.

**Randall Kenan** (March 12, 1963–August 28, 2020) was a writer and creator of his fictional North Carolina hamlet of Tims Creek. He was also a frequent participant in the Oxford Conference for the Book (1998, 1999, 2002) and Southern Foodways Alliance symposia. Kenan was the John and Renée Grisham Writer in Residence at the University of Mississippi in 1997–98, and the Oxford Conference for the Book is paying a special tribute to him with a collective reading by past and present Grisham writers of “The Eternal Glory That Is Ham Hocks,” a story from his latest collection, *If I Had Two Wings*.

Like Kenan, **Julia Reed** (September 11, 1960–August 28, 2020) was also a frequent supporter and participant of the Center’s Oxford Conference for the Book (2004, 2005, 2009, 2012). She was born in Greenville, Mississippi, and was a contributing editor at *Elle Decor* and *Garden and Gun* magazine, where she wrote a regular column on a range of subjects—from politics to foodways—in the American South. Reed is the author of *The House on First Street: My New Orleans Story, Ham Biscuits, Hostess Gowns, and Other Southern Specialties: An Entertaining Life (With Recipes);* and *Queen of the Turtle Derby and Other Southern Phenomena.* Her last book, *South toward Home: Adventures and Misadventures in My Native Land,* was published in 2018.

**Joe Hairston** (September 30, 1937–August 30, 2020) had five college degrees, beginning with a bachelor’s degree from Harvard, which he earned in 1960, and ending with an MA in Southern Studies in 1995. Included in that number was also a law degree, and he practiced law in Austin, Texas, for more than five decades, finding time to visit more than one hundred countries on six continents along the way. Hairston celebrated his seventy-fifth birthday on top of the Eifel Tower. His MA thesis, “Jack Burden’s Children: Out of History into History,” focused on Robert Penn Warren’s novel *All the King’s Men.*

**Patricia Land Stevens** (November 28, 1926–November 1, 2020) was a founding member of the Center’s Advisory Committee and the first woman to serve on the UM Foundation’s board of directors. She attended the University of Mississippi (1946–1948), where she helped organize a chapter of Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority and was selected as one of ten favorites on the University of Mississippi campus. Ever invested in her state, she served on the boards of the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters, the Walter Anderson Museum of Art, New Stage Theatre in Jackson, the Mississippi Humanities Council, and the Mississippi National Science Museum. Stevens lived in a number of towns and cities across the South in her lifetime, but most recently she had returned to live in Jackson, Mississippi. She continued to be an ardent supporter of the Center, and at her passing her family requested memorials to be made to the Center for the Study of Southern Culture.

**Leila Downs Clark Wynn** (February 4, 1932–October 31, 2020) was a supporter of the Center since our founding in 1977. Wynn helped organize the Friends of the Center, and she maintained a seat on the Center Advisory Committee for several years. In 2009 Wynn provided a $100,000 challenge grant that was matched with $100,000 in funds from several sources, including from other members of the Center Advisory Committee. The fund continues to enhance Center faculty research on the American South, as well as impact faculty recruitment and retention. In the Fall 2009 issue of the *Southern Register,* then Center director, Ted Ownby, said, “Leila Wynn has been a great supporter of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and the University of Mississippi for some years. She studied Faulkner here, and she knows the needs of scholars from her work here and at other colleges and universities. She knows that scholars need time to research, think, and write, and this gift will be a wonderful way to allow our faculty the freedom to do that.” In addition to her generous financial support, Wynn often opened her home in Greenville to host Center meetings, events, and receptions.
William Forrest Winter (1923–2020)

As we mourn the loss of Gov. William Winter (February 21, 1923–December 18, 2020), you can learn more about his efforts to advance education and racial reconciliation by reading this entry on him from the Mississippi Encyclopedia.

For all of William Winter’s many contributions to the state of Mississippi, he will be most remembered for the Education Reform Act of 1982, which was passed after Governor Winter called a tense and controversial special session of the legislature. With the exception of that measure, which generated intense debate at the time but is now widely considered a model of progressive educational legislation, Winter’s administration was marked by an efficiency and a lack of controversy rarely seen in Mississippi politics.

Winter was born in Grenada on 21 February 1923. He earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Mississippi in 1943 and then joined the US Army, serving as an infantryman in the Philippines during World War II. He subsequently enrolled in the University of Mississippi Law School, graduating first in his class in 1949. In 1947, while still in school, Winter was elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives, and he won reelection in 1951 and 1955. In 1950–51 he served as a legislative assistant to US senator John Stennis.

Winter conducted his first statewide campaign in 1959, winning election to the post of tax collector and remaining in office until 1964, when the position was abolished on his recommendation. He was then elected state treasurer. Following an unsuccessful race for governor in 1967, Winter was elected lieutenant governor in 1971. He tried again for the state’s highest office in 1975, when the Democratic nomination went to Cliff Finch, and in 1979, when he finally succeeded.

Winter had made education reform a centerpiece of his campaign, and during the first year of his term, he asked the legislature to set up a committee to study the needs of Mississippi’s schools. The committee recommended the passage of a compulsory attendance law, increased education funding, the establishment of a lay board of education, and state-supported kindergartens. But the legislature refused to pass the reform measure during its regular 1982 session. In response, the governor, several of his aides, and First Lady Elise Varner Winter undertook a grassroots campaign designed to drum up public support for reform and increase pressure on the legislature to act. The campaign included more than 450 speeches and public appearances around the state.

In mid-November, Winter called a special session of the legislature to begin on 6 December. The only item on the agenda would be education reform, and the public relations campaign had made sure that Mississippians would be watching. After two weeks of debate, legislators passed the bill. The Education Reform Act of 1982 is considered the most significant educational legislation enacted in Mississippi since the establishment of its public school system in 1870.

Winter left the Governor’s Mansion in January 1984 and made one more bid for public office, losing to incumbent Thad Cochran in that year’s election for the US Senate. Winter returned to practicing law in Jackson, though he continued his public service through a variety of civic organizations. He held office in state and national mental health organizations and served as president of the board of trustees of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, as a trustee of Belhaven College and Columbia Seminary, and as president of the Mississippi Historical Society and the University of Mississippi Alumni Association. He participated in Pres. Bill Clinton’s Initiative on Race and taught for a semester at the University of Mississippi Law School.

The William Winter Professorship of History at the University of Mississippi has been endowed in his honor, and the Institute for Racial Reconciliation and the building that houses the Mississippi Department of Archives and History bear his name. While serving as lieutenant governor, William Winter received the Margaret Dixon Freedom of Information Award from the Louisiana-Mississippi Associated Press for his continuing support for the opening of the political process to both the general public and to the press. In 2008 the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum bestowed its Profile in Courage Award on Winter in recognition of his efforts to advance education and racial reconciliation. He died on 18 December 2020, at the age of 97, at his home in Jackson.
Please give us your correct information:

Name ________________________________
Address________________________________
City ____________________________________
State ____________ Zip _________________
E-mail __________________________________

Fax: 662-915-5814
e-mail: cssc@olemiss.edu • www.southernstudies.olemiss.edu

Please help us reduce waste and postage costs. Complete this form and return it with your mailing label, or fax it to 662-915-5814.

☐ Contact person changed  ☐ Name misspelled
☐ Address wrong  ☐ Received more than one
☐ Add my e-mail to your list  ☐ Delete me from your list

Friends of the Center

Gifts to the Center for the Study of Southern Culture benefit teaching, publications, and outreach at the first interdisciplinary research center dedicated to investigating, documenting, interpreting, and teaching about the American South. Thank you for remembering us as you plan your charitable giving!

The Center’s Friends program provides essential general operating support for a number of Center endeavors. Visit southernstudies.olemiss.edu to learn more.

I/We would like to contribute $_________ to the Friends of the Center.

☐ Enclosed is my check.  ☐ Please charge my credit card.

CREDIT CARD:  ☐ Visa  ☐ MasterCard  ☐ American Express
Account Number__________________________ Exp. Date_______ Signature____________________

Name (please print)________________________

Address________________________________

City ________________________________ State _______ Zip _______________

Phone ________________________________ E-mail ______________________

Please mail this form to:
The University of Mississippi Foundation/CSSC • 406 University Ave., Oxford, MS 38655

MAKE A GIFT ONLINE. Visit www.southernstudies.olemiss.edu/Giving