

THE SOUTHERN REGISTER

A Publication of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture

The University of Mississippi

NEWSLETTER

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On the last Friday in April, Southern Studies tentatively edged back into the world of human interaction, celebrating our graduates in a socially distanced courtyard gathering, complete with prepackaged snacks and bottled water. We seem to have reached the point in the pandemic when it's impossible not to talk about the pandemic, but pointless to do so all at the same time: of course everybody hopes we're emerging from the anxieties of a global health crisis, even as other parts of the world are breaking infection records. Observations like "the last year has been tough" seem too obvious to offer up, but not to mention it seems out of step with the moment.

So: the last year has been tough, but not just because of a pandemic that became swiftly politicized and divisive, reflecting the national climate. I recently heard one of the lawyers for George Floyd link the nation's physical health and racial health by suggesting that, trapped at home by Covid-19, America finally found that it could not look away or distract itself from the injustice on our screens. Like the 1955 photograph of Emmett Till in *Jet* magazine, the footage of Floyd's murder was there for everyone to see. And finally we did.

No part of the nation remains untouched by the virus or untouched by the boiling points of last summer's ongoing confrontations with the structures of racism and inequity. The Center for the Study of Southern Culture is no exception. Called to self-examination, we have embarked over the last year on a series of workshops and equity audits, guided by both an external agency and by members of the UM Division for Diversity and Community Engagement. Faculty and staff across the Center have engaged in these activities because we are collectively invested in having our practices reflect the world as it can be, not as it has been or as it is.

Looking in the mirror is hard, particularly when you know before the first glance what you want to see. But acknowledging what looks back at you is the first step to really seeing what's there. The truth is that the Center,

like many institutions of higher learning, has historically been a white space. We have worked to tell diverse stories, to understand varying points of view, and to complicate "the South," but multiplicity in storytelling requires multiplicity in life experience. We have not had enough of it. In a state roiled in particular by white/black racial oppression, domination, and violence, and in a state with the highest African American population in the nation, we have never accurately reflected in our make-up the people of Mississippi or of "the South" more broadly construed. By later this summer, we will have articulated more fully our priorities around building diversity, equity, and inclusion into all that we do—student recruitment, hiring, and programming—and we will have mapped those goals on to the coming months and years. We will be asking key questions, too, about the audiences who view, read, and engage with our work and about how the communities we document and study can gain a larger voice in our practices.

When Princeton professor and Mississippi native Eddie S. Glaude Jr. delivered his Black History Month keynote address to our campus earlier this year, he provocatively suggested the South as the key to the nation's puzzles around race. Here, he seemed to suggest, it has always been harder to delude ourselves into trite generalities about equality. If "the South" functions as a broad designation that siphons off national ills, so much more intense is the work that "Mississippi" performs in regional and national self-understandings.

We're going to lean into Mississippi at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture over the next year, taking as our programming focus "Mississippi Voices" and as our practice the belief that in examining one place, we unlock many others. Mississippi, like the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, has a lot to celebrate, but also like the Center, it could benefit from some self-examination. We hope to do both. Our plan is to return to in-person events in the fall, although we will continue to offer a few lectures and events via Zoom. We liked having people joining us from all over the country and the world, one of the silver linings to our health crisis. In amplifying Mississippi voices, we mean not to be myopic. Instead we expect that in drawing close, we will simultaneously open wide to find through-lines to other places, problems, and people that solidify the global interconnectedness that the pandemic made it no longer possible to deny. Merely surviving the illnesses of the past fifteen months cannot be our only reward. The promise lies in emerging changed from them.

Katie McKee

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Zaire Love Joins Southern Foodways Alliance as Pihakis Filmmaker

The Southern Foodways Alliance is delighted to welcome Zaire Love as the Pihakis Documentary Filmmaker. Love is a filmmaker, music maker, and writer whose mission is to honor, amplify, and archive the stories and voices of the Black South. A graduate of Spelman College, Houston Baptist University, and the University of Mississippi's MFA program in Documentary Expression, she was recently honored by the Oxford Film Festival for her film *Road to Step*.

"I'm ready to join such an enthusiastic team that loves southern folks and food just as much as I do. Creating dynamic films while uplifting the communities that make these films what they are is work that I'm excited to get done," she said.

Love's artistry is an ode to being Black and southern in America because the Black South has always had meaningful "cornbread" to share. In her TEDx talk, "Baby Hair + Hot Sauce = Embrace What They Ain't," she explored the power that Black women from the South like Beyoncé and Fannie Lou Hamer possess, a power that stems from embracing what others are not.

In addition to her work with Southern Foodways Alliance, Love continues to make and create with



her film production studio, Creative Cornbread. What's creative about cornbread? Everything, she says. She describes Creative Cornbread's approach as "knowledge, facts, and authentic art that raises the consciousness of those who partake."

Love received a grant from the If/

Then x Hulu Short Documentary Lab for a project about Black swim culture in Memphis. She'll wrap that film, *Slice*, later this year. According to SFA managing director Melissa Hall, "SFA's documentary film program began here at the Center over fifteen years ago with our first filmmaker, Joe York, then a graduate student in the Southern Studies program. Since then, a cadre of talented filmmakers based in the South and beyond have moved SFA's documentary mission forward. We're beyond excited about Zaire Love's vision as an artist and as a student of the South."



Southern Foodways Alliance

Living Blues News

It has been twenty years since Shemekia Copeland first graced the cover of *Living Blues*. Back then she was a twenty-one-year-old phenom who was exciting everyone who heard her. Now she is a wife, a mother, and a fully realized artist with plenty to say, and on April 16, after a year of Covid-19, she gave her first live performance in over a year on the *Mountain Stage* radio show in West Virginia.

We are over four hundred days into a global pandemic, and our world is still upside down. There are more than three million dead globally, more than 567,000 dead in the United States, and more than 7,000 dead here in Mississippi. But there is hope. As of late April, more than 130 million adults in America have received at least one vaccine, and the vaccines are our hope of getting back to something like normal. If we want to have live music and blues festivals without masks and without fear, we've got to get the shots. I've talked with a number of blues artists over the last couple weeks, and it seems like a great many of them understand that being vaccinated is the key to getting back to making a living playing music. Deitra Farr told me that everyone she knows has

gotten the shot or will be getting it soon. Ninety-two-year-old Jimmy Johnson got his. Texas artist Gregg A. Smith told me he got his. Stevie J of Jackson, Mississippi, got his. And perhaps eighty-nine-year-old Willie Cobbs summed it up best when he said, "Hell, yeah, I got it! I want to get back out and play music!" Here's hoping that everyone will join with Willie and, hell, yeah, get that shot.

Things are beginning to turn the corner. We had our first blues festival in Mississippi in over a year, Juke Joint Festival over in Clarksdale. In the state with more blues festivals than any other state, that is big news. Several more are planned here, as well as others around the country. Please see our annual *Living Blues* Festival Guide in the new issue for the most up-to-date information on 2021 festivals.

It is time for the 2021 *Living Blues* Awards. Please go online to www.livingblues.com and vote for your favorites. This year's best live performer category is a bit difficult, but think back to pre-pandemic times, and also think about artists who shifted to live streaming their performances.



by David Whiteis



This issue's edition of "Let It Roll!" takes a look at the recording session of one of blues' most enduring songs, Elmore James's August 5, 1951, recording of "Dust My Broom" for Jackson, Mississippi-based Trumpet Records. Writer Jas Obrecht also takes a deep dive into the fascinating history of the song itself.

Three passings I would like to note. Louis Arzo "Gearshifter" Youngblood, whose grandfather Arzo Youngblood learned guitar from Tommy Johnson, died on March 3, 2021. One of the last direct links to Johnson, Gearshifter was a wonderful artist. His death and the death of Ben Wiley Payton in December leave a huge hole in the hearts of Mississippi blues fans. Also, one of the last of the old-school record men in America, Quinton Claunch, died on April 4, 2021, at the age of ninety-nine. Claunch and his partners, Bill Cantrell, Ray Harris, and Joe Coughi, founded Hi Records in 1957 and, after selling his interest in that label, he went on to form Goldwax Records in 1964. For full details on his remarkable life story, see our two-part feature in *LB* #239 and #240.

Brett J. Bonner

Celebrating Spring Graduates

Graduate Students Prevail over Pandemic Challenges

All of the Southern Studies graduates this year overcame the hardships of being in school and finishing their degrees during a global pandemic. Hats off to these five who made it through!

Andrea Morales

Andrea Morales used her photographic lens to focus on Memphis, Tennessee, as a place of resistance. While working on her MFA in Documentary Expression, she made photographs regarding representation, race, history, and memory in a project titled “Roll Down Like Water.”

The written portion of Morales’s thesis locates her work in the tradition of documentary photography while also thinking critically about how that approach also requires examination of power dynamics. “I read a lot of critical theory about documentary, power and depictions of the US South,” Morales said. “It definitely evolved from a broader essay about what living in Memphis looks like right now to series of photographic verses that ask us to think about the future. ‘Roll Down Like Water’ made me think about existing images and future image-making quite differently beyond form and technique,” she said. “I was hoping to experiment more with bookmaking, alternative process, and installation during my time here as a way of diverging from my regular practice of digital photography and publishing. I don’t feel like I’m at a loss, though. I think life has been hard for me, like many of us, and I’m glad that while this final product is much different than what my high expectations had been designing, I was able to accomplish



This semester’s graduates at a year-end celebration at Barnard Observatory. Left to right: Andrea Morales, Martha Grace Mize, Christina Huff, Keon Burns, and Brittany Brown, who will graduate this summer. Not pictured: Christian Leus.

something that honors what is at the heart of the work.”

“Roll Down Like Water” changed during the course of the years she worked on it, some of which was due to working full-time and being in graduate school part-time, all during a pandemic. What at first seemed like a time to slow down and work didn’t always turn out that way. “In many ways, this has been like slow-motion trauma and also opened up a lot of space for existing issues in the micro and macro to reassert themselves,” she said. “I continue to work as a freelance journalist, both as practice and as a way to continue supporting my family back home in Miami (who had a rough year), so I spent much of the last year processing the stories of how this world has been affecting all of us. Thank goodness for therapy, communal support

from my coworkers and cohort, and hand sanitizer.”

Christian Leus

While doing historical research on her hometown of Altheimer, Arkansas, Southern Studies graduate student Christian Leus stumbled across an article about a nineteen-year-old girl named Irene Taylor. The girl was murdered in 1939, with her body dumped into the bayou that runs through town. “It turns out, she was a distant cousin of mine,” Leus said. “So that was really surprising to discover.”

Leus, who defended her thesis, “What Remains: Telling the Story of Irene Taylor’s Murder,” on April 16, made a few short films about the murder before she settled on the idea of a podcast. “The podcast takes listeners through my research of the case and the implications that it has

JAMES G. THOMAS, JR.

on how I understand my family and my region,” she said. “My research involved a lot of digging through newspaper archives, as well as doing some family interviews and field recordings at places connected with the case. It was a surprisingly emotional process, as the story is some pretty rough material to work with, but it was really satisfying to be able to bring some nuance to a story that, as I found out through my research, has kind of been either overlooked or exploited in the past.”

During her two years at the Center, the biggest thing that had an impact on her was contextualizing her surroundings. “One of the most impactful things I’ve learned in this program is the idea of looking at landscape and region as a text that can be read—whether that’s through learning about the environmental history of a place, or by contextualizing it through documentary or other research,” Leus said. “Everything has a history and a context, even if that history and context has been erased or obscured.”

Although the final year of graduate school during Covid has been stressful, there are upsides, too. “Even with the pandemic, I feel like I’ve grown a lot professionally and academically,” she said. “This program has a super supportive community, and I would recommend it to others based on that alone. But I think the program and the faculty are also really great at facilitating engaging, exciting, and creative work from their students.”

Christina Huff

An assignment for a documentary class ended up expanding into a thesis for Christina Huff. In 2019 Huff enrolled in John Rash’s class and had to document a small community. She decided to attend a drag show in Tupelo, Mississippi, and reach out to the group of performers.

“I had gauged the interest of two drag queens by the names of GoDiva Holliday and DeePression Holliday, and after I spent an entire afternoon with them, we talked about the possibility of working together long term,” said Huff, a documentary and experimental filmmaker. “The research was tricky because while I spent a lot of time digging for articles and journals on drag performance in the South, the materials I was looking for were scarce. There were some, but I was hoping that there would be a much larger, broader range of work of studying queer subculture in the South, more specifically drag performance. I felt frustrated by the lack of work that was available, but it also just further solidified that this was the work that I was supposed to be doing.” Huff used her research to put together her thesis, “Queer Subculture in the Conservative South: A Study of Drag Performers in Mississippi.”

As has been the case for most of the last year, Huff had to navigate the world in the time of Covid, which was especially difficult for a documentarian who works in the field. “I had no idea how I was going to navigate

my documentary work online, especially with a topic that relied on in-person work such as attending drag shows,” she said. “I also missed the smaller things that we often take for granted in school, like seeing my colleagues and mentors in the hallways or catching up with friends while walking to class. I had no idea how much I was going to miss the people and the small but pertinent conversations that you hold on to for the rest of your life that makes graduate school the unique experience that it is. I can always go back and capture footage and tell a story, but I can’t really go back and make up for the lost time that I could have spent making friendships and gaining lifelong mentorships. Coming to grips with that is hard, but even with Covid-19, I was able to stay in contact with my closest mentors, and that has meant a lot to me as a student.”

The biggest lesson Huff learned is that rolling with the punches is important, and her work has not gone unnoticed: she won first place at the 2021 Oxford Film Festival in the Mississippi Short category for her film *Genderf*ck Drag*.

Keon Burns

When the archives closed due to Covid, Keon Burns had to change his original idea for his thesis and focus on something closer to home. So he chose a paper he wrote for Catarina Passidomo’s SST 555: Foodways course about his great-grandparents’ grocery store in Bolton, Mississippi.

That paper morphed into his thesis, “Black Grocers, Black Activism, and the Spaces in Between: Black Grocery Stores during the Mississippi Freedom Struggle Movement.” In the original paper, he only discussed the food-related research that he came across, but the store represented much more than a food source to the community. “For the project, I wasn’t able to find any significant information on the store through a traditional source such as land deeds or store ledgers,” Burns said. “Therefore, I decided that this project would be perfect for me to apply oral history methods to collect information, but again, I ran across a problem. The store operated from around 1940 to 1979, so many of the people who experienced the store had passed away or didn’t feel comfortable discussing the store on the record.”

Eventually, he found a couple of narrators who felt more than comfortable on the record. “As I expanded this paper, I highlighted the larger role that Black-owned grocery stores played in the Mississippi civil rights movement,” he said. “I focus on three other Mississippi grocers: Gus Courtship, George Lee, and Booker Wright, who exemplify how vital grocery stores were to the movement, and I also focus on how food was weaponized and politicized to halt or progress the movement.”

Burns, who is originally from Clinton, Mississippi, has enjoyed his time at the Center for the Study of Southern

Culture, but wished the pandemic hadn't cut the in-person aspect short. "After my first semester, I had just started to develop a rapport with the faculty to just stop by the Center if I wanted to talk or get some direction on a project," he said. "I believe this is one of the unspoken strengths of the Center. Everyone from the top down is so invested in your work and growth."

He will be further expanding on those possibilities after graduation, when he begins his journey at Pennsylvania State University as a joint PhD candidate in history and African American studies. He has been awarded several fellowships and scholarships including the Bunton-Waller scholarship and a fellowship at the Center for Black Digital Research.

Martha Grace Mize

If earning a graduate degree seems like a daunting task, imagine obtaining two at once. Martha Grace Mize accomplished this, and she is the first person to earn dual master's degrees in Southern Studies and anthropology from the University of Mississippi. "I think the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology are two programs that were just a natural fit," Mize said. "The combination made sense for me and my potential research interests when I applied."

Mize has been extremely proactive in designing her simultaneous degree programs so that she would meet all the requirements of both degrees within three years. As a result, Mize won a Graduate Student Achievement Award from the College of Liberal Arts, and she received the Jay Johnson Prize for the Outstanding Graduate Student in Anthropology.

Her thesis, "Revitalization in the Alabama Black Belt: Cultivation of a New Civic Hegemony in Rural Main Street America," drew upon qualitative ethnographic methods: participant observation and interviews conducted in Marion, Alabama, a town of approximately three thousand inhabitants, the majority of whom are African American. She investigated the economic development initiatives and situated her ethnographic work within theoretical frameworks from both anthropology and Southern Studies, which contribute to existing scholarship on the cultural anthropology and human geography of the area.

"I grew up in a county bordering the Alabama Black Belt, and it's been a part of my life for as long as I can remember," Mize said. "The region has many similar cyclical struggles to those of Appalachia and the Delta, but that's not the most important thing about the place. Conversations and interviews with various individuals and local organizations helped me delve further and taught me even more than when I lived in the community."

Rebecca Lauck Cleary

Prizes in Southern Studies, Spring 2021

Gray Award for Outstanding Undergraduate Paper
Kathryn McCullough, "Changing Times of Oxford, Mississippi, Spring 2021," a final project for SST 598, "Photographing Place in the American South," taught by David Wharton

Coterie Award for Outstanding Undergraduate Paper
Mattie Ford, "When Women's Work Goes beyond 'Women's Work': The Rich History of Women's Employment in Mississippi from the Twentieth Century Onward," a final project for SST 402, taught by Catarina Passidomo

Sue Hart Prize for Outstanding Paper in Gender Studies

Christina Huff, "Queer Subculture in the Conservative South: A Study of Drag Performers in Mississippi," an MA thesis, directed by Andy Harper

Peter Aschoff Award for Outstanding Paper in Music

David Larson, "The Role of Audience in Blues Performing and Recording," a final paper for Independent Study with Adam Gussow

Sarah Dixon Pegues Award for Outstanding Paper in Music

Tyler Keith, "North Mississippi Hill Country Blues: How the Last Genre of the Blues Came to Be, through Family Tradition and Documentation, in a Place Called the 'Hill Country,'" an MFA thesis, directed by Andy Harper

Lucille and Motee Daniels Award for Outstanding Paper by a First-Year Graduate Student

Matthew Streets, "Transgressing Tradition: The UNC-CH Food Workers' Strikes of 1969," a final paper for SST 555, "Foodways and Southern Culture," taught by Catarina Passidomo

Lucille and Motee Daniels Award for Outstanding MA Thesis

Keon Burns, "Black Grocers, Black Activism, and the Spaces in Between: Black Grocery Stores during the Mississippi Freedom Struggle Movement," an MA thesis directed by Shennette Garrett-Scott

Ann Abadie Prize for Best Documentary Project

Christian Leus, "What Remains: Telling the Story of Irene Taylor's Murder," an MA thesis directed by Andy Harper

Outstanding MFA Thesis

Andrea Morales, "Roll Down Like Water: Photography, Social Movements, and Surveillance in Memphis, Tennessee," an MFA thesis directed by Ralph Eubanks

New Southern Studies Funds Help Attract Top Students

Funding is an important part of the decision when choosing a degree program, and the Center is establishing two new ways to support both undergraduate and graduate students.

The new Southern Studies Graduate Support Fund will help students with extra funds, thanks to Helen Blanks Abraham.

Abraham, originally from Greenville, Mississippi, where she taught K-12, has lived in Meridian for many years. Although she received her BA in English in 1959 from the University of Mississippi, she has supported the Center for the Study of Southern Culture for more than thirty-five years.

Because of Abraham's interest in Southern Studies, Nikki Neely Davis, an executive director for University Development, introduced her to Ted Ownby, who was then director of the Center. "Together we explored ways to support the Center through this scholarship," Abraham said. "I think that advancing your education

is very important, especially going beyond the bachelor's degree, so this is a good way to get people involved and interested in graduate studies in Southern Studies. I've enjoyed doing what I've done for the university, and I probably will want to do a little more as time goes on."

Abraham also encouraged others to give back to the university if they are able. "I would tell them that it's a very rewarding thing to do," she said. "Providing this scholarship allows students to go ahead with what they want to do in life."

Katie McKee, director of the Center, said the Southern Studies Graduate Support Fund will allow the work of students to continue. "It will allow us to enhance the stipends of our outstanding incoming students, which enhances our ability to recruit a diverse student pool," she said. "Since the academic program is the center of the Center, this helps us fulfill our mission to study an always-changing American South, and that

helps us to understand the nation."

In addition to the Southern Studies Graduate Support Fund, the new Rose Califf Gross Scholarship is a way undergraduate Southern Studies students can expand their learning opportunities. The award was first established in 2000 by Rose Califf Gross (1927–2001) of Clarksdale, Mississippi, who earned her BBA in business in 1964, majoring in accountancy.

"We are developing a process for how to select students, and we look forward to being able to award it immediately," said Katie McKee.

The award will be for a rising junior and a rising senior who are studying either the Mississippi Delta or Southern Jewish life.

For more information on ways of supporting the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, contact Claire Moss at claire@southernfoodways.org.


Rebecca Lauck Cleary

MINOR IN

MUSEUM STUDIES


Curious about what really happens in a museum?

Interested in what kind of jobs museums offer? From art and culture to history and science, museum studies is an interdisciplinary field that explores the world of museums and all they encompass: collections, exhibitions, education, archives, research, and more.



Includes courses related to museums and their functions from Art and Art History, Anthropology and Sociology, Classics, History, and Southern Studies and a partnership with the University of Mississippi Museum.

Contact Kariann Fuqua
 Director of Museum Studies Minor
 Meek Hall 118A • kfuqua@olemiss.edu • 662-915-5015
www.museumstudies.olemiss.edu



Serving the Community

Lilly Gray Works to Make Healthy Food Accessible

An Oxonian since 2005, Southern Studies undergrad Lilly Gray understands and cares deeply about her community, and she works to promote “beneficial things” through extensive volunteer work. She has been volunteering at the Oxford Community Market since 2018. Based at the Old Armory Pavilion, the weekly Mississippi-certified farmers market aims to make healthy local food accessible to all people in the community. Despite her hectic school schedule, Gray works hard packing up and chatting with the vendors who have become friends.

Every Friday, Gray also works at the C. B. Webb Housing Complex neighborhood garden, a partner project of Oxford Community Market. Established by Lydia Koltai, the project fights food insecurity and creates community through planting vegetables and greens in a garden that C. B. Webb residents nurture. The project hopes to create educational programming that will teach and encourage children to grow their own produce. They are coordinating with University of Mississippi sororities and fraternities and local chefs to distribute fresh food in the C. B. Webb neighborhood, Gray explained. She also connects with Walnut Hill neighborhood residents to understand their needs. During the mid-February snowstorms, she went out to check on those without access to enough support.

Gray said her community work and her academic work are closely connected. She recently created a flow chart explaining “how things could move sustainably through communities” after an influential interview with Doug Davis, associate professor of leadership and counselor education at the University of Mississippi and owner and operator of Yokna Bottoms Farm. That conversation led Gray to



Lilly Gray at the Oxford Community Market

understand that “Oxford’s wealth is disguising poverty and food insecurity, and its resources are being devoted to things like construction and hospitality. Those things aren’t going to create long-lasting resources in the town.” The volunteer projects Gray devotes her time to provide sustainable, community-focused alternatives and highlight that there is a need in Oxford.

Gray has taken Southern Studies classes that have helped her develop “a broader insight about our country and the South specifically,” she said. She recently wrote a paper on David “Honeyboy” Edwards for her Anthropology of Blues Culture class. The paper highlights his story as one that “connects you to the past” and shows the “importance and resilience of Mississippi. I think that’s important. The resilience of Mississippi,” she reiterated.

Having lived in the state all her life, Gray is glad she attended a local university. “Young folks are leaving

Mississippi,” she said, but she intends to be one who stays a while to help contribute to its progress. Although she hasn’t decided exactly where, Lilly wants to work with “thoughtful people” in an “active environment.” Accordingly, Gray loves to get out and about in Oxford’s outdoor spaces, and, of course, cooking. Even over Zoom, her enthusiasm and care for the community is evident and inspiring.

Feeling “antsy” after a year of online classes, she is ready to get back in the classroom in the fall. Her upcoming classes include the Environmental History of the South, the Southern Environment, and Environmental Ethics. She recently completed her junior year, and she is on schedule to graduate in 2023. Gray has just changed her minor to environmental studies, something she is “very excited about.”

Lily Benn

JAMES G. THOMAS, JR.

Home, Healing, Hope

Teah Hairston Is Advocating Locally and Making a Difference

Southern Studies graduates go on to do a wide variety of things, and Teah Hairston is no exception. Hairston's primary role is as a research data specialist at the Board of State and Community Corrections in Sacramento, California, but that is just the beginning of her involvement in the community. As a research data specialist for the past four years, she evaluates grant programs intended to help reduce incarceration and recidivism.

She is also the vice president of Safe Black Space, whose mission has been to "mobilize a growing collective of local practitioners, community members and activists, faith leaders, educators and others of African ancestry." According to its website, Safe Black Space "provides culturally specific strategies and resources to help Black people heal from historical and current wounds, both individually and collectively."

Additionally, Hairston is the vice president of Sacramento Area Congregations Together (ACT), whose mission is to "empower ordinary people to identify and change the conditions that create economic and racial injustice," and she is program coordinator of Be Love Holistic Wellness, a program for Black women who have experienced pregnancy loss, early infant death, and infertility.

Her time at the Center has a large influence on her work at all of these places. "My experiences in Southern Studies influenced me to delve deeper into understanding the origins of Black pain, Black struggle, Black excellence, and Black resilience," Hairston said. "Learning about the Deep South and the heavy influence Black people made on culture, capital, and the progress of this nation, in general—all while being mentally and physically killed, tortured, enslaved, dehumanized, mistreated, traumatized, et cetera, truly inspired me to explore our



resilience and how we were able to survive and still be great! That eventually led me into the exploration of healing, which is how I got involved with Safe Black Space and why I created Be Love Holistic.”

While at the University of Mississippi, Hairston worked on a master’s thesis titled “Black Male Incarceration and the Preservation of Debilitating Habits of Judgment: An Examination of Mississippi” and earned her MA in Southern Studies in 2013. She used her research to discover how mass incarceration and other historical methods of racialized social control in the South have preserved and reinforced habits of judgment that adversely affect the social mobility of Black males in Mississippi. She located and analyzed recurring themes of habitual judgment patterns justifying age-old systems of social control and how those patterns have influenced the current trend of Black male incarceration at disproportionate rates.

She earned her BA from San Jose State University in psychology and African American studies. After earning her Southern Studies MA, she taught at the University of Missouri, where she earned a second master’s degree and a doctorate. Although she does not teach anymore, she does facilitate workshops on Black mental health, Black maternal health, racial stress and trauma, and self-care for Black people, most of which are geared toward Black women.

“Southern Studies is such a great program because it is interdisciplinary,” Hairston said. “There are so many directions one can go in academic inquiry just beginning with the South. I would encourage anyone considering the program to just start digging, and I bet studying the South will take them on a journey around the world!”

Rebecca Lauck Cleary



The Emmett Till Interpretive Center in Sumner, Mississippi

ASHLEIGH COLEMAN

Breaking the Silence

Emmett Till Interpretive Center Receives Mellon Foundation Grant

One of the five projects to be funded as part of the Mellon Foundation's Monuments Project is the Emmett Till Interpretive Center (ETIC) in Sumner, Mississippi. The conversation between the Mellon Foundation and the ETIC began when a board member attended a tour the ETIC gave to the Association of African American Museums in the summer of 2019. Covid-19 interrupted the Mellon Foundation's planned visit to the ETIC in March 2020, but by September 9, 2020, the \$1.1 million grant was finalized. The ETIC began implementing the grant this January, and the specific memorials the grant will help create or develop are to be announced soon.

The ETIC was the vision of Jerome G. Little, the first Black president of the Tallahatchie County Board of Supervisors, who organized the Emmett Till Memorial Commission (ETMC) in 2006. "In order to properly remember and honor Emmett Till," the commission reasoned, the county "needed to first break the silence and take responsibility for their role in the injustice." In 2007 community leaders in Sumner offered a formal apology to the Till family. The apology was delivered in a public ceremony on the steps of the Tallahatchie County courthouse, where Emmett Till's murderers were tried and acquitted in 1955.

The first line of that apology reads: "Racial reconciliation begins by telling the truth." The ETIC put these words into action by restoring the courthouse to its 1955 condition and establishing the Emmett Till Interpretive Center in 2012. The center exists to "tell the story of the Emmett Till tragedy and to point a way towards racial healing." The ETIC uses arts and storytelling to "help process past pain and to imagine new ways of moving forward."

Christina Huff, recent Southern Studies MA graduate and the ETIC's inaugural graduate assistant, helps do this work. She conducts documentary filmwork for the center, including a short weekly series called "Thoughtful Thursdays"

Patrick Weems with the most recent memorial sign at Graball Landing, where historians suggest Emmett Till's body was recovered from the Tallahatchie River.



with museum director Benjamin Saulsberry. She also interviews board members, conducts oral histories, and works on special projects.

Southern Studies alum Patrick Weems is the ETIC's executive director. Weems has worked with the ETIC ever since he was an undergraduate intern for the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation. The institute "works with communities that have undergone historical racial trauma," he explains. He watched the ETMC form and take a "restorative justice route." In 2013 he moved to Tallahatchie County to learn about the organization and see "how [he] could be supportive of it."

Weems's Southern Studies work was also based on Emmett Till and the ETIC. When he graduated in 2014, the ETIC immediately offered him a job. The Southern Studies program informed Weems's work through "understanding southern history, whether that be through books like John Dittmer's *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*, or whether it be taking Jodi Skipper's class on cultural tourism." Weems said he "gained a better understanding of how cultural tourism is complicated" through the program, and he said "there's a richness of stories in the South. Southern Studies helps us understand how to go about protecting and sharing them in an

ethical and conscientious manner." Accordingly, Weems sees Southern Studies as "partly a public history program. While many students go the academic route, you'll notice that many Southern Studies alumni work in public history," he explained. "Whether that's by creating memorials or in the museum space."

Weems defines the three central areas of the ETIC work as memorialization, education, and community development. Memorialization, he said, consists of "securing historic sites related to Emmett Till and beginning a process of creating memorials and interpretation at these sites." Education is rooted in K-12 instruction and continues by pursuing public history. Community

development includes "programs and projects that we can do that directly benefit the community" and "having intentional community conversations around race."

The grant from the Mellon Foundation will help the ETIC continue their work in these areas and will support the ETIC institutionally by providing two years of staffing funding and funding to create new memorials to honor Emmett and Mamie Till.

About the Monuments Project, Elizabeth Alexander, president of the Mellon Foundation, said, "Monuments and memorials powerfully shape our understanding of our country's past and determine which narratives we honor and celebrate in the American story. Future generations ought to inherit an inclusive commemorative landscape that elevates the visionary contributions and remarkable experiences of the many different communities that make up the United States. With these five grants, we are affirming our commitment to support organizations engaged in creating and contextualizing monuments and memorials that convey the extraordinary multiplicity of our complex history." The initiative "has taken on greater urgency at a moment of national reckoning with the power and influence of memorials and commemorative spaces."

Lily Benn

Historical marker outside of the Tallahatchie County courthouse.



Center Alumni, Staff, and Advisory Committee Members Win Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters Awards

This year, a Center alum, a Center alum-staff member, and a Center Advisory Committee member will all gather in Pass Christian, Mississippi, along with the 2020 awards winners to receive Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters awards for excellence in the arts. The annual gala banquet will be held at the Oak Crest Mansion Inn on June 12 to honor both 2021 and 2020 winners.

Out-of-state judges who are experts in their fields have selected the state's outstanding artists for works published, performed, or shown in 2020 and in 2019. The institute's board of governors selects Lifetime Achievements Awards.

Born in San Antonio and currently living in Nashville, Odie Lindsey, a Southern Studies MA graduate, is the winner in the category of Fiction for his first novel, *Some Go Home*, named one of "8 Major Debuts of the Summer" by *BookPage* and a "standout" debut novel by *Library Journal*. The story is set in the fictional town of Pitchlynn,



DANA DELOCA

Odie Lindsey

Andrea Morales



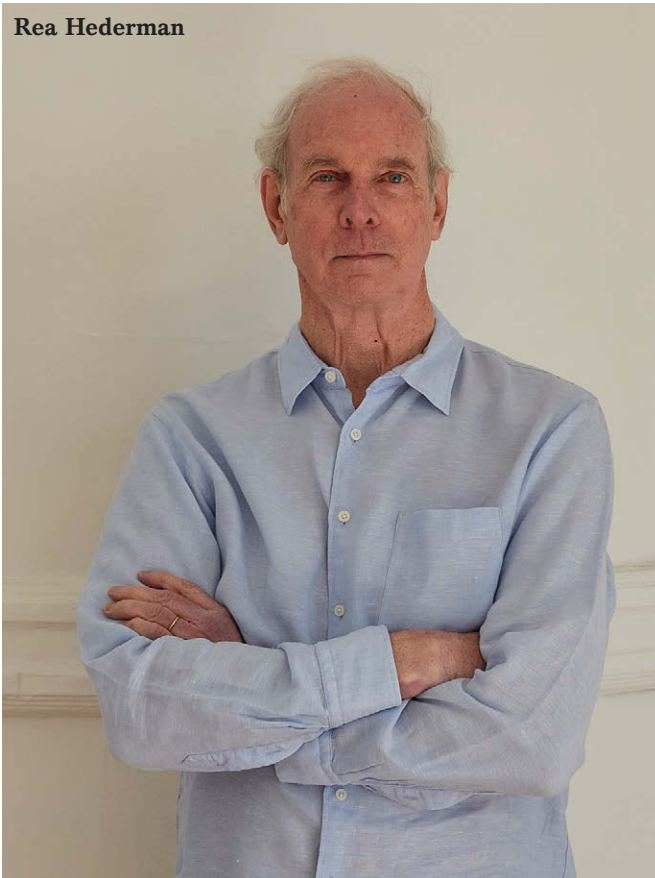
BRAD VEST

Mississippi. A Desert Storm veteran, Lindsey explores the effects of the Iraq war on his characters. In an interview, Lindsey said that he "wanted to write about war *culture*. About war as hell brought home."

Lindsey is the author of the short story collection *We Come to Our Senses*, included on two "Best of 2016" lists. His stories have appeared in *Best American Short Stories*, *Iowa Review*, and *Guernica*, among others.

In addition to his MA in Southern Studies, Lindsey has an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. While in Oxford, Mississippi, he worked as a bookseller at Square Books and took a course from Barry Hannah. He served as associate editor of the *Mississippi Encyclopedia*, which he described as "pivotal" to *Some Go Home*.

Rea Hederman



ANNIE SCHLECHTER

Lindsey is currently writer-in-residence at Vanderbilt University's department of Medicine, Health, and Society.

Andrea Morales, a recent Southern Studies MFA graduate and producer at the Center's Southern Documentary Project, is the winner in the category of Photography for her exhibition *Roll Down Like Water*, sponsored by the Center for Photographers of Color at the University of Arkansas, which collaborates with artists from diverse backgrounds whose work challenges the monolithic historical narratives within culture and art.

Born in Lima, Peru, Morales grew up in Miami's Little Havana. She earned a BS degree in journalism from the University of Florida and an MA in visual communication from Ohio University. In 2011 she won *Time* magazine's inaugural student-based photojournalism competition. She had an internship with the *New York Times* and has worked for such newspapers as *El Sentinel*, the *Concord Monitor*, and the *Washington Post*.

The title for Morales's exhibition *Roll Down Like Water* is a phrase taken from Martin Luther King's "Mountaintop" speech the day before he was assassinated in Memphis. The work was inspired by the Memphis-based project MLK50: Justice through Journalism that focuses on everyday life in Memphis five decades after King's assassination. Morales is the visuals director and primary photographer for the project. In her words, her

work "attempts to lens the issues of displacement, disruption, and everyday magic."

Rea Hederman is recipient of the Noel Polk Lifetime Achievement Award. A native of Jackson, Mississippi, Hederman has been publisher of the *New York Review of Books* since 1984 and is new member of the Center's Advisory Committee.

A graduate of Murrah High School in Jackson, Hederman earned degrees at the University of Virginia and the University of Missouri. After working as editor for a weekly newspaper in Canton, Mississippi, he served as city and then managing editor of the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* and became executive editor in 1980. Under his leadership, the paper turned away from its conservative roots to execute "one of the most dramatic turnarounds in American journalism," according to the *Washington Post*.

Pulitzer Prize-winning author Richard Ford, who, like Hederman, was born and raised in Jackson, Mississippi, said of Hederman: "Brought up in 1950s apartheid Jackson, a child of affluence and influence, whose future would've been assured and beyond comfortable, he elected instead to take on the responsibilities of his family's journalistic mini-empire with a profound and controversial commitment not only to civil rights, but to truth-in-journalism on the widest scale."

Hederman has previously received an award from the Robert F. Kennedy Center in Washington for Journalistic Excellence and the Honor Medal for Distinguished Service in Journalism from the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

Other 2021 Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters awards winners to be celebrated at this year's awards banquet include Eddie S. Glaude, the winner in Nonfiction for his ninth book, *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own*; Deborah Wiles, winner in Youth Literature for her book *Kent State*; James S. Sclater, winner of the Music Composition (Classical) award for his composition *Angels*; Steve Azar, winner for Music Composition (Contemporary) for his album *My Mississippi Reunion*; and Cathy Hegman, winner in Visual Arts for her exhibition *Pandemic Perceptions*.

Center associate director emerita Ann Abadie will also be celebrated at this year's banquet as the 2020 Noel Polk Lifetime Achievement Award winner. The duo Bark (Susan Bauer Lee and Tim Lee) won in 2020 for their album *Terminal Everything*. Susan Bauer Lee is a graduate of the Southern Studies graduate program and the graphic designer of the *Southern Register* and of *Living Blues*.

For more information on this year's in-person awards banquet, please visit www.ms-arts-letters.org/awards-weekend.html.

The South, in Brief

A Conversation with Charles Reagan Wilson

By Katie McKee

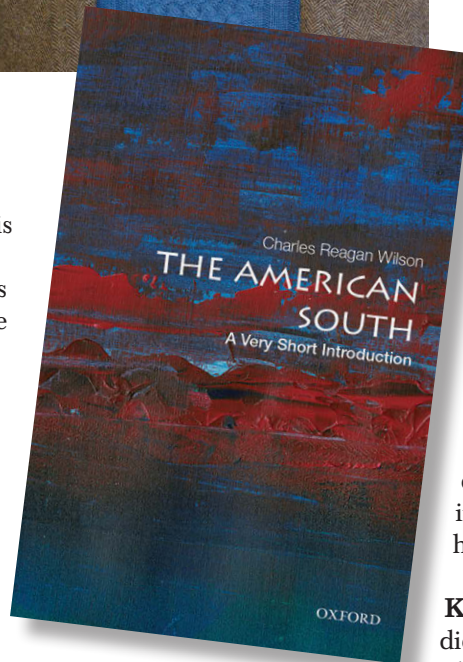
One of the great pleasures of my time at the University of Mississippi has been the opportunity to team-teach classes with my colleagues in Southern Studies. Charles Wilson and I have spent quite a bit of time in the classroom together. He might say that we learned from each other, but the imbalance tipped in my favor. I included his latest book, *The American South: A Very Short Introduction*, on the syllabus for Southern Studies 101 this past spring, and even though Charles has retired, it felt as though our teaching team was reunited.

Katie McKee: What was the motivation to write a short history of the South?

Charles Reagan Wilson: The editor of the series, Nancy Toff, approached me, actually, one year at the Southern Historical Association, about making a proposal for this project. This appealed to me as I thought about it, because I realized I could make this *Very Short Introduction* a cultural history of the South, which is what I've always wanted to write. There was no other book about the South that was going to do what I proposed to do, which was to have history, but also to include cultural materials—religion and race and memorialization and food and music and literature—all of this. It's all rooted in my work in teaching Southern Studies, and in working on *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* project and *The Mississippi Encyclopedia* for so long. Those were all long



JAMES G. THOMAS, JR.



projects, and this is short, so this was, indeed, a challenge. But I've written so many encyclopedia articles that I knew how you can adjust what you want to say to the format. If it needs to be short, it needs to be short. So I went into this feeling confident I could do it, but I've got to say it was much harder than I thought.

KM: Why was it harder than you thought?

CRW: Well, it's just hard to condense all of southern history and culture down to thirty-three thousand words. There are hundreds of books in this *Very Short Introduction* series, and they're all thirty-three thousand words. The editors won't let them be any bigger, so that's it. I knew that, but I thought, well, maybe—I didn't know that they were going to be that rigid. So I just wrote. I thought I had done a good job of not writing a huge book, but it was still about sixty thousand words, twice as many as it was supposed to be. That was a challenge: to go back after you have a draft and to pare it down. I was confident I could do it in the end. I did, but it was a lot of hard work along the way to edit.

KM: What was your process? How did you decide what to keep and what to cut?

CRW: Well, I knew it had to be selective. In the introduction, I outlined a series of six or seven themes: what makes the South different from other places, how does it embody national characteristics, the global context, the multicultural context, all these kinds of things. So that gave me the guideline to think about what to include, because I wanted to reflect those themes. Also, it came out of my work on the encyclopedia projects and from teaching Southern Studies. The kind of things that we dealt with in Southern Studies was what I wanted to do with the book.

The early chapters are a historical chronicle, and they deal with the American Revolution and the Civil War, obviously, but there's a lot about enslaved peoples and Indigenous peoples. I learned from Robbie Ethridge, of course, teaching Southern Studies, to include Native Americans always when you talk about the South, so I argued that the South begins with the Native Americans.

KM: You came up with the themes or does the series prescribe them?

CRW: I had total leeway, really. When they asked me to make a proposal, they sent me several of the books in the series, including one on the blues, which Elijah Wald wrote. There's one on the American West that, of course, was a good model for me. I studied those to see how they did it, and that gave me a lot of guidelines, a lot of clues, about what to do. Those themes were ones that, again, came out of my teaching Southern Studies. Those are the kind of themes we talk about.

KM: Is there anything that concision actually does better than expansiveness?

CRW: Well, it forces you to get to the point, I think, and that's good. Often I had written two or three pages about a topic, and I had to cut it down to one. It's better. You think, "Well, what is it I want to say in this exactly?" You have less detail, you have less supporting evidence, but it makes you say what you want to say clearly and directly and with less verbiage. Now, my prose, of course, is brilliant and I hate to give it up [laughs], but on the other hand, I can see the value of that in terms of producing this clarity that I think the series is all about and that I came to appreciate.

KM: What is one thing, though, that you had to leave out and it's still bugging you?

CRW: I don't think there's one thing, but there are people that I really regret not being able to talk about. One of them is Huey Long. I had written two pages on

Huey Long. He's a colorful figure and an important figure and says a lot about the Depression and politics and populism. But it came to "I'm going to have to leave out not just a sentence here or there, but big things." So I had two paragraphs on Huey Long. Zap! They're gone.

I didn't talk about Hank Williams, who I think is a huge, important southern creative figure, but I made the decision that if I had to have only one country singer, I was going to have Jimmie Rodgers. So Jimmie Rodgers is in there, but not Hank Williams.

And Mark Twain. I am a big believer that Twain says a lot about the South, and he was a southerner, you know. Clearly he identified as a southerner as well as being American and being shaped by the frontier West, but the editor, Nancy Toff, said, "No, Mark Twain's an American writer. He's not really a southern writer." So I could have left something else out, I guess, but I realized I was going to have to spend so much time explaining why Twain was a southerner, that I wouldn't be able to talk about other things about Twain that I thought were important. So I just made the decision at the last minute to omit Mark Twain.

KM: So you were in some ways deciding what you could talk about without having to justify it.

CRW: Yes, that's a good way to put it. That's sort of how I conceived of this: What do these topics tell us about the South?

KM: Now, when you were imagining a person reading this book, who was that person?

CRW: The reader I had in mind, after discussions with the editor, is the general reader. I hope, of course, scholars of the South will scoop up multiple copies of my book, but the target audience is not scholars; it's really a general audience. All these books in the Very Short Introductions series are designed for people who have a variety of interests and want a book that will fill them in in a very efficient way. That can be a wide audience. Nancy Toff helped me to realize that in doing that, I needed to go beyond generalizations and to be specific, because readers need that.

The example I think of, in talking about Native Americans as the first southerners, that they had creation stories about the place where they came to be, but I left it at that. And Nancy Toff said, "No, no, you need to tell us those stories." So I did some more reading, and what I used was the creation story of one of the Louisiana tribes of a crawfish diving down into the bottom of the sea and coming up with dirt that became Louisiana, the home of these Native Americans. When I talked about the Scots-Irish influence on the South, I said something like, "And

there was a Scots-Irish influence on the South.” Nancy said, “Well, tell us what it was.” So the ballads the Scots-Irish brought with them became the basis of later country music in some ways. The whiskey-making of Kentucky came out of the Scots-Irish bringing their whiskey-making tradition from Ireland, Northern Ireland. So, clearly, realizing it’s the general reader that wants to know specifics, not just generalities, made it a better book.

And stories. Nancy encouraged me to tell stories. Eugene Walter, the Mobile writer and actor in Fellini films who lived in Rome much of his life, he kept mint plants on his balcony in Rome so he could make mint juleps, and he grew other vegetables and southern black-eyed peas on his balcony. And, of course, the story about Gabriel Márquez coming to Oxford in the 1980s out of his respect for William Faulkner, and pouring whiskey on Faulkner’s grave. Well, that’s a wonderful story I’ve always wanted to tell somewhere, and I’d never had the occasion to tell it, and then I thought, “Wow, this is it! This will end that chapter on literature.”

KM: It’s counterintuitive to think that the shorter thing actually requires the greater specificity, but I can see how that makes sense, because the general reader can’t do a lot with generalities.

CRW: That’s right.

KM: Now tell me—what is the title of the magnum opus, the big book that you were working on at the same time?

CRW: *The Southern Way of Life: History of a Concept*. It’s probably going to be out early next year; it’s with UNC Press. We’re still working on the illustrations. It’s a big book, you know, but it’s sharply focused on an argument that I’m making, which is that you can understand the southern identity through three concepts. First, southern civilization that began attaching the whole idea of the South to this idea of civilization in the 1700s that lasted until the early twentieth century, and then you had the decline in general of civilizational thinking in the Western world that included the South. What came instead was the idea of the southern way of life that originally the Vanderbilt Agrarians first popularized with agrarianism as an alternative to industrialization and modernization.

And then “the southern way of life” really became more popular, extraordinarily popular, in the civil rights era as a term that defined segregation as the southern way, racial segregation as the southern way. The Citizens’ Councils and politicians constantly used that term, “southern way of life,” evoking emotional attachment to this supposed essence of the South. Well, that

ended with the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. The Google Ngram allows you to put in a term and then it shows you how it appeared, where it appeared, in all the vast literature online. So I tracked that, and the term declined precipitously after 1965. White southerners just did not want to use it anymore. Black southerners didn’t use it anymore either, because they hoped that this was dead.

The term that arose as the third of my three concepts is “southern living.” *Southern Living* magazine began publishing in 1966, a year after the Voting Rights Act. So this last version of this conceptual history is “the new southern way.” This concept moved to the suburbs and into the middle class, and *Southern Living* magazine defined it.

Now, in that last section, I go way beyond that and talk about other concepts. I have a lot on our friend Zandria Robinson’s “country cosmopolitan” idea in her book about Memphis. So I argued African Americans created their own version of “southern living.” And then, of course, most recently there are Latinos relating to this whole idea that there’s a southern way or southern living. What is it? So in the end, I argued that the twenty-first-century South is a hybrid South—that is the most recent multicultural version.

So my point in this long harangue I’m giving you, Katie, is that the big book is very much a thesis-driven book, and that was my criteria for selecting what went in: how does it relate to one of those three key concepts? I was looking for the terms themselves. When did the terms appear? They appeared in politicians’ talks, in ministers’ writings, in entertainers’ words, all of this. The *Very Short Introduction* in some ways is bigger; it’s broader in its scope because it’s not focused just on a concept, whereas the big book is pursuing in great, great depth the conceptual history of the South.

KM: Maybe in that case it’s even easier to see what to cut out because you have the thesis to tell you.

CRW: You’re right. As I went along with the research, I was casting a wide net, trying to find the evidence wherever I could find it, and so I’d come across things that I thought were going to tell me something about one of these concepts, and in the end, they didn’t really. I’m not just talking about the South in this big book. I’m talking about the southern way, southern civilization, southern living. So if it didn’t fit those concepts, then I decided I shouldn’t go there.

Wilson’s The American South: A Very Short Introduction was published in January by Oxford University Press.

An Interpretation of American Regionalism

Hale Woodruff's *Selections from the Atlanta Period*

From the Vault is a regular column exploring southern artwork found in the permanent collection of the University of Mississippi Museum.

A key artist and advocate for African American art in the mid-1900s, Hale Aspacio Woodruff began his artistic career at a young age. Born in 1900 in Cairo, Illinois, Hale and his mother Augusta moved from Cairo to Nashville, Tennessee, after the death of Hale's father, George. Hale graduated from Pearl High School in Nashville after serving as the cartoonist for the school newspaper. After high school he went on to study at the Herron Art Institute in Indianapolis, Illinois. In 1927 Woodruff began a four-year sojourn in Paris, France, with the financial help of an award from the Harmon Foundation. It was there that he joined a group of other expat Black artists, including Henry Ossawa Tanner, Augusta Savage, Alain Locke, and Josephine Baker.

In 1931 Woodruff returned state-side to begin a fifteen-year career at Atlanta University. He was the first professor of studio art in the state of Georgia and eventually developed the university's art department, initiated the Atlanta University Art Annuals, and coordinated twenty-nine national exhibitions for Black artists. He stated, "I wanted to do more than teach art; I wanted to bring art to the community as a whole."

Woodruff was proficient in several artistic mediums, including illustration, paint, prints, and murals. He explored cubism during his time in Paris, and his interest in murals developed after spending the summer of 1938 studying with Diego Rivera in Mexico. But it was during his time in Atlanta that Woodruff's interest in the American regionalist style developed. American regionalism began around



Hale Woodruff, *Old Church*, 1935, printed in 1996, from the series *Selections from the Atlanta Period, 1931–1946*, linocut image 6 1/16" x 4 1/16"

1930 and developed as a response to Eurocentric artistic trends and depicts realistic scenes of rural and small-town America.

Woodruff's interpretation of American regionalism focuses on Black life in the South—from daily chores to brutal lynching—and stylistically incorporates influences from his study of African art and sculpture. It was during his time in Georgia that Woodruff created *Selections from the Atlanta Period*, a series of linocut images based on these themes, made between 1931 and 1946 and printed posthumously in 1996. (Woodruff passed in 1980.)

From this series, *Old Church* (1935) uses deeply contrasting shapes and lines to portray the reality of rural Black life in the South. In fact, the art department Woodruff founded at Atlanta University became known as the "Atlanta School" or the "Outhouse School." The latter moniker was inspired by Woodruff's belief in including of all aspects

of life in art, including outhouses, which we can see in the left-hand side of this image. With no humans present in the scene, the curving architectural lines imply a well-worn, but inviting, structure.

In 1946 Woodruff moved to New York to teach at New York University. He continued to create art, exploring abstract expressionism and other styles. He explained, "It's very important to keep your artistic level at the highest possible range of development and yet make your work convey a telling quality in terms of what we are as people," which is exactly what his work accomplishes. Particularly during his time in Atlanta, Woodruff was passionate about depicting the daily lives of African Americans, as well as highlighting the work of other Black artists. It is no wonder that artistic greats Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, and many others considered him a mentor.

Amanda Malloy

COLLECTION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM

Faulkner & Yoknapatawpha Conference

“Faulkner, Welty, Wright: A Mississippi Confluence”

July 18–21, 2021

After a long and uncertain Covid year, there is much to report concerning this summer's Faulkner & Yoknapatawpha Conference, “Faulkner, Welty, Wright: A Mississippi Confluence,” scheduled for July 18–21, 2021. First and foremost is the fact that this year's conference will be a remote event, at which registrants will gather online, via Zoom, for four days of keynote lectures, scholarly panels, film screenings and discussions, teaching sessions, and daily debriefings at a series of virtual “cocktail hours.” Second, please note that this year's conference is a four-day rather than the usual five-day affair; because of remote delivery, there will be no guided-tour day, so we have shortened the conference schedule accordingly. Third, the conference registration fee has been reduced to \$100 for standard registration, \$50 for student registration, and \$50 for one-day registration. Registration is online through the conference website at www.outreach.olemiss.edu/events/faulkner.

Thanks in part to the comparative focus of this year's conference, the lineup of keynoters features a number of speakers making their first appearance at Faulkner & Yoknapatawpha. Suzanne Marrs, professor emerita of English at Millsaps College, is one of the world's leading authorities on the work of Eudora Welty. Marrs is the author of *Eudora Welty, A Biography, One Writer's Imagination: The Fiction of Eudora Welty*, and *The Welty Collection*. She is also the editor or coeditor of three books about the author and her work.

Jerry W. Ward Jr., a Richard Wright scholar, taught for thirty-two years at Tougaloo College and for a decade at Dillard University before retiring in 2012. Among his many books are *The Katrina Papers: A Journal of Trauma and Recovery*, the edited collection *Trouble the Water: 250 Years of African American Poetry*, and the coedited volumes *The Richard Wright Encyclopedia* and *The Cambridge History of African American Literature*.

Julia Wright, the elder daughter of Richard Wright, is the executrix of his estate and the editor of the *Richard Wright News Bulletin*. She studied sociology under Georges Balandier at the Sorbonne University before becoming a journalist, essayist, and poet. She wrote the introductions

to Mumia Abu-Jamal's *Death Blossoms* and Richard Wright's *A Father's Law* and is at present completing a memoir on her father.

Returning to keynote this year is Susan V. Donaldson, National Endowment for the Humanities Professor of English and American Studies emerita at the College of William and Mary and a veteran of numerous Faulkner conferences. Also returning to the conference to deliver this year's Library Lecture

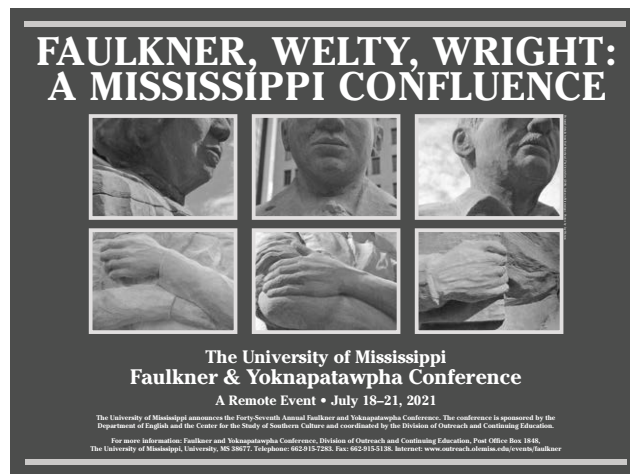
is Carl F. Rollyson, professor emeritus of journalism at Baruch College, CUNY. The organizers are also thrilled to welcome former US poet laureate Natasha Trethewey, who will make her debut at Faulkner & Yoknapatawpha as the inaugural Ann J. Abadie Lecturer in Southern Studies.

In addition to the keynote speakers, forty-two scholars have been selected through the conference call for papers to present their work at “Faulkner, Welty, Wright.” Film director Michael Modak-Truran will screen material from a rough cut of his new documentary, *The Past Is Never Dead: The Story of William Faulkner*, and Malcolm Wright, grandson of Richard Wright, will lead a screening and discussion of *Almos' a Man*, the 1976 film adaptation of the Wright short story, “The Man Who Was Almost a Man.” Special sessions will focus on “Teaching Faulkner, Welty, and Wright” and on “Reparative Teaching: Faulkner, Welty, and Wright in the Antiracist Classroom,” and bookseller and collector Seth Berner will lead a session on “Collecting Faulkner.” Members of the Digital Yoknapatawpha team will provide their annual update on the landmark database and visualization project at the University of Virginia.

The visual design for this year's conference publicity materials honors the work of another Mississippi artist, sculptor Rod Moorhead, whose 2008 installation, *The Storytellers*, places limestone carvings of Faulkner, Welty, and Wright together at the intersection of Capitol and Lamar Streets in downtown Jackson. In this way the Mississippi confluence continues into the present day.

For further conference details or other inquiries, contact Jay Watson, director, at jwatson@olemiss.edu.

Jay Watson



Ann J. Abadie Lecture in Southern Studies Is Established

The Center and the Faulkner & Yoknapatawpha Conference have joined together to create a lasting tribute to one of the founders of the Faulkner Conference. The new Ann J. Abadie Lecture in Southern Studies will take place annually at the Faulkner & Yoknapatawpha Conference as a tribute to Ann Abadie, associate director emerita of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and a longtime organizer of the Faulkner Conference. The overarching goal of the lecture is to add broad context to Faulkner's world by connecting it to other writers, places, and movements.

The Abadie Lecture will add diverse speakers and topics to the conference line-up. A committee at the Center made up of the director, both associate directors, and at least one faculty member will consult with the Faulkner Conference director to learn each

year's theme and then reach a decision about whom to invite as the Abadie Lecturer. This year's inaugural lecture will be delivered by Mississippi poet and memoirist Natasha Trethewey, and the theme of the conference is "Faulkner, Welty, and Wright: A Mississippi Confluence."

"This annual lecture is an appropriate tribute to Ann Abadie and the many years she spent helping make the Faulkner Conference among the most-respected literary conferences in the country," said Jimmy Thomas, associate director for publications at the Center. "Now in its forty-seventh year, the conference still attracts Faulkner readers and scholars from



across the world. Ann's devotion to both the conference and to the Faulkner Series that is a result of each year's proceedings is in large part the driver of that success."

When topically appropriate, the lectures in the Ann J. Abadie Lecture in Southern Studies may be considered for the subsequent volume of conference proceedings. Fundraising for the lectures will proceed through the Foundation. Gifts received in honor of long-time Center supporter Patricia Land Stevens will serve as the initial source of income.

This year's Abadie Lecturer, Natasha Trethewey, served two terms as the nineteenth poet laureate of the United States (2012–14). She is the author of five collections of poetry: *Monument*, *Thrall*, *Native Guard*, *Bellocq's Ophelia*, and *Domestic Work*. Most recently, she is the

author of the memoir *Memorial Drive*. Her book of nonfiction, *Beyond Katrina: A Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast*, appeared in 2010. She is the recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Beinecke Library at Yale, and the Bunting Fellowship Program of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard. At Northwestern University she is a Board of Trustees Professor of English in the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences. In 2012 she was named Poet Laureate of the State of Mississippi and in 2013 she was inducted in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

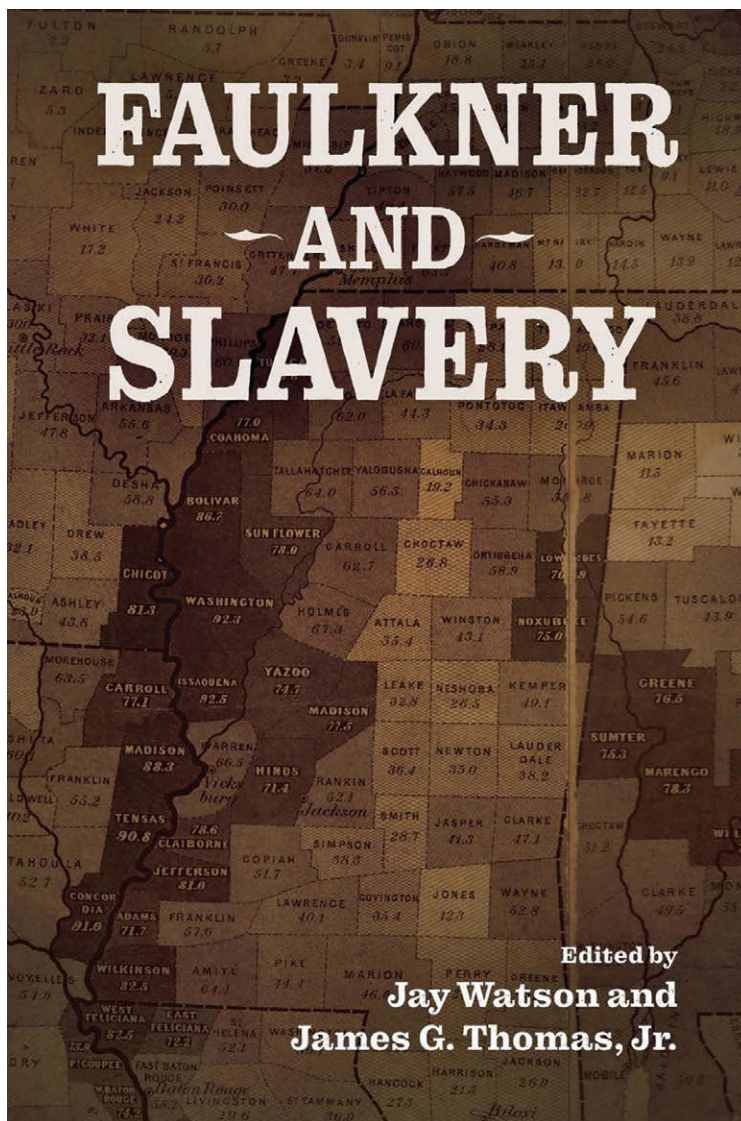
The lecture will take place virtually on Zoom on the evening of Sunday, July 18, and is open to the public. For information on how to register for the lecture, visit the conference website: www.outreach.olemiss.edu/events/faulkner.

New Volume in Faulkner Series to Be Published in June

In 1930 William Faulkner moved into Rowan Oak, a slave-built former plantation home in his hometown of Oxford, Mississippi. The same year he published his first work of fiction that gave serious attention to the experience and perspective of an enslaved individual. For the next two decades, Faulkner repeatedly returned to the theme of slavery and to the figures of enslaved people in his fiction, probing the racial, economic, and political contours of his region, nation, and hemisphere in work such as *The Sound and the Fury*; *Light in August*; *Absalom, Absalom!*; and *Go Down, Moses*.

Faulkner and Slavery is the first collection to address the myriad legacies of African chattel slavery in the writings and personal history of one of the twentieth century's most incisive authors on US slavery and the long ordeal of race in the Americas.

Contributors to this volume examine the constitutive links among slavery, capitalism, and modernity across Faulkner's oeuvre. They study how the history of slavery at the University of Mississippi informs writings like *Absalom, Absalom!* and trace how slavery's topologies of the rectilinear grid or square run up against the more reparative geography of the oval in Faulkner's narratives. Contributors explore how the legacies of slavery literally sound and resound across centuries of history, and across multiple novels and stories in Faulkner's fictional county of Yoknapatawpha, and they reveal how the author's



remodeling work on his own residence brought him into an uncomfortable engagement with the spatial and architectural legacies of chattel slavery in north Mississippi. *Faulkner and Slavery* offers a timely intervention not only in the critical study of the writer's work but in ongoing national and global conversations about the afterlives of slavery and the necessary work of antiracism.

Contributions to the volume are by Tim Armstrong, Edward A. Chappell, W. Ralph Eubanks, Amy A. Foley, Michael Gorra, Sherita L. Johnson, Andrew B. Leiter, John T. Matthews, Julie Beth Napolin, Erin Penner, Stephanie Rountree, Julia Stern, Jay Watson, and Randall Wilhelm. The essays are collected from the 2018 Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, which

took place on July 22–26 in Oxford and on the University of Mississippi campus. The volume is published by the University Press of Mississippi and edited by series editors Jay Watson and James G. Thomas Jr.

Watson is Howry Professor of Faulkner Studies and professor of English at the University of Mississippi. His many publications also include *Forensic Fictions: The Lawyer Figure in Faulkner* and *William Faulkner and the Faces of Modernity*. Thomas is associate director for publications at the University of Mississippi's Center for the Study of Southern Culture.



THE NEON BIBLE, FROM PAGE TO SCREEN:

JOHN KENNEDY TOOLE'S PORTRAIT OF
SMALL-TOWN SOUTHERN LIFE

Study the South Publishes New Essay

A native of New Orleans, John Kennedy Toole is best known for writing *A Confederacy of Dunces*, the novel for which he was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1981. Toole, however, also penned an earlier novel, *The Neon Bible*, published in 1989, which he wrote in 1954 when he was only sixteen years old. Although this short novel has not garnered as much critical attention as *A Confederacy of Dunces*, *The Neon Bible* still boasts a wide readership and is noteworthy for the dark portrait it paints of small-town life in the South. This new *Study the South* essay, “*The Neon Bible*, from Page to Screen: John Kennedy Toole’s Portrait of Small-Town Southern Life,” by Heather Duerre Humann, explores the time and place within

which Toole lived when he wrote his first book. At the same time, Humann investigates British filmmaker Terence Davies’s interpretation of Toole’s scathing indictment of mid-twentieth-century small-town southern life.

Heather Duerre Humann is the author of four books: *Domestic Abuse in the Novels of African American Women: A Critical Study* (2014), *Gender Bending Detective Fiction: A Critical Analysis of Selected Works* (2017), *Another Me: The Doppelgänger in Twenty-First Century Fiction, Television, and Film* (2018), and *Reality Simulation in Science Fiction Literature, Film, and Television* (2019). She earned a PhD in American literature from the University of Alabama and currently

teaches full-time in the Department of Language and Literature at Florida Gulf Coast University.

Study the South (www.studythesouth.org) is a peer-reviewed, multimedia, online journal, published and managed by the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi. The journal, founded in 2014, exists to encourage interdisciplinary academic thought and discourse on the culture of the American South, particularly in the fields of history, anthropology, sociology, music, literature, documentary studies, gender studies, religion, geography, media studies, race studies, ethnicity, folklife, and art. Contact James G. Thomas, Jr. at jgthomas@olemiss.edu for more information.

READING THE SOUTH

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

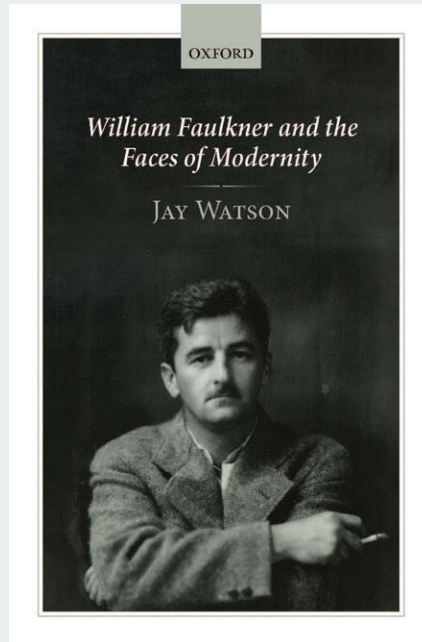
William Faulkner and the Faces of Modernity

By Jay Watson. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. 396 pages. \$85.00 cloth.

Jay Watson's book shows us what an exciting time it is to be a Faulknerian. Appearing hard on the heels of Julian Murphet's *Faulkner's Media Romance* (2017) and John T. Matthews's *William Faulkner: Seeing through the South* (2009), and followed by Michael Gorra's *The Saddest Words* (2020), Watson's study joins these monographs in its sustained focus on the writer's corpus and their discussion of it along historical and cultural-historical lines of inquiry. Beyond their approaches, Watson offers a striking reorientation of Faulkner's output as a thoroughgoing, varied manifestation of modernism's animating dynamic. As such he allows us a definitive way to see both Faulkner's achievement and modernist studies in ways we have not imagined before. Modernism as malleable guide across Faulkner's career appears in several guises and as differently understood responses to a modernity that, Watson shows, Faulkner did not reject or critique but which furnished new ways to depict his characters' interior and collective selves, in the process also finding new aesthetic forms.

This is a stunning accomplishment. And it is one that has been in the making for Watson's already notably accomplished career.

Watson's introduction efficiently shows the main ways he defines Faulkner's "modernisms." The first—and the first that he shows Faulkner to dispatch—is the well-known "Great War Modernism" of his near-contemporary Paul Fussell and, in our time, Pearl James and her concept of "new



death." Yet Faulkner transcends those like James who saw the postwar veterans living a kind of death-in-life, showing the stilted, enervated selves that subdued to melancholy like Bayard Sartoris or the various pilots of Faulkner's war stories. This is the first modernist "face" Watson shows Faulkner working from in fashioning his major innovative fiction.

The book's first section, "Rural Modernization," positions novels published more than a decade apart but, as Watson reveals, share deep affinities. With characteristic flair in both his reading of an illustrative story ("Mule in the Yard") and his rendering of its historicity, Watson shows Faulkner's stylistic flourishes—the escaped mule's "evanescent" movement and appearance/disappearance from the urban scene of Mrs. Hait's Jefferson yard—offering a figural expression of the onetime farm animal's gradual disappearance from the north Mississippi agricultural economy.

This is a particular example of what Watson shows is a defining feature

of Faulkner's rural narratives: their revealing the modernizing tenets of formerly conceived "rustic" characters and presences. One of the signs of the book's thoroughness is Watson's ability to use examples in the stories to show how pervasive was Faulkner's thinking about modernity across his oeuvre. Short works like "Mule in the Yard" and "Shingles for the Lord," in Watson's hand, point up shifts in modes of labor and in economics of production. Moreover, the stories show Faulkner's use of a sophisticated means of expression not generally associated with the figures in them. Phantasmagoria, figural excess, stylistic inventiveness all serve Watson's account of these works' modernism and their responses to modernity.

The first section's second chapter finds a version of Bill Brown's modern, material unconscious in the furniture and made environment of Mississippi lurking within the Gothic narrative workings of *Light in August*, one that relies on shifts in the timber and lumber industry. Lying beneath the deceptive "stillness" that Alfred Kazin ascribed to the novel's world generations ago in his essay "The Stillness of *Light in August*," Watson finds the violent mutations of resources and, then, of the bodies they're meant to shelter and protect. In the novel's climatic paroxysm of Christmas's murder, Watson finds echoes of both Elaine Scarry's sense of "object-awareness" and Georges Bataille's "sacred apotheosis" in Hightower's overturned table that fails to shield Joe—a furnishing made of the same wood that offers the complicit townspeople their alibi as they gather around their supper tables sloughing off the causes of Joe's murder. Lumber and wood displace "King Cotton" in Watson's ingenious reading of the novel's more acute historicity.

Chapter 3, “Faulkner on Speed,” introduces a new section to the book (“Technology and Media”), and it trains its eye on the increased velocity of lived experience in modernity along with Faulkner’s self-conscious emphasis on his work’s modernist approach. Watson here reads *Sanctuary*, first, as a meditation on roadways and the manipulation of speed as central to its mock-generic potboiler plot, as well as to its anomalous “clipped” style. Drawing on Paul Virilio and other “speed theories,” this chapter moves from the automobile and Faulkner’s rendering of the “fast” detective genre to his ariel narratives as avatars of a speed-infused culture that few in his period dared to envision. The other chapter in this section revisits Faulkner’s modernism’s intersections with cinema and Watson’s singular attention to the role in Faulkner’s work of synchronized sound.

One of the most important aspects of the book is Watson’s focus on race in the third section, “Racial Modernities.” In one of the most original and important contributions to Faulkner scholarship we have, he uses two characters from the beginning and end of Faulkner’s “matchless time” of immense artistic productivity to chart the author’s turn toward imagining and representing enslaved consciousness. Watson does so by way of what he calls Faulkner’s “turn toward death” in depicting the terror of Black subjects as, following Paul Gilroy, the first modern people. I can only sketch in the briefest ways here the depth and sensitivity of Watson’s reading of the nameless bondsman in “Red Leaves” who desperately seeks to escape a ritual murder following his native owner’s death and, twelve years later, Ike McCaslin’s tortured, slow discovery of his grandfather’s enslaved lover Eunice’s suicide in *Go Down, Moses*. With great deliberation and care, Watson’s reading follows several thinkers like Gilroy and Sharon Holland to “let the dead” speak, and thus gives Eunice’s act a meaning that changes our understanding of Yoknapatawpha and the

role in its chronicle of both white and, newly here, Black modernity.

A new kind of Faulkner scholarship appears in these pages. Synthesizing not only Hegel’s “universal history” in his dialectical model of the master-slave dialectic, but Susan Buck-Morss’s historicizing of it, Michel Rolph Trouillot’s theorizing of the Haitian Revolution’s impact on European thought, Paul Gilroy’s massively influential *Black Atlantic*, and the New World historicizing of Ian Baucom, Watson discovers extraordinarily meaningful shifts in characters’ understandings of slavery and the enslaved in moments such as the Guinea man’s capture or Eunice’s suicide. This section of the book and, specifically, chapter 6, “Slavery, Modernity, and the Turn toward Death in the Black Atlantic World of Yoknapatawpha County,” incorporates “Red Leaves,” *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *Go Down, Moses* as a triumvirate of texts that, Watson shows, reveal Faulkner’s ultimate commitment to recognizing enslaved consciousness and to writing of its resistance to white hegemony.

Watson closes with a final face of modernity. He devotes the book’s last section to a chapter on Faulkner’s late *A Fable*, which he reads through the lens of Foucaultian biopolitics. Compressing the idea of biopolitics here, as I must, I offer an account of Watson’s own admirable compressing, but also meaningful explicating of Foucault’s lament for the modern state’s capacity to enlist the well-being of its citizenry in an ongoing, peacetime form of threat to its health and freedom, the recognition of which prompted Faulkner to claim that *A Fable* “is not a pacifist book.” Perhaps not. But the novel’s repeated and several actions of rebellion against the war machine that Faulkner included in his career-long response to modernity show the efficaciousness of nonviolent protest in the name of life—registered in the runner’s final line, “I’m not going to die.” What Watson shows is the generative force in the novel (and beyond it) of fabulation. At the end of his remarkable reorienting of

Faulkner’s oeuvre, Watson shows the ways that storytelling—linking here the embedded narrative of the stolen racehorse to the English runner’s second mutiny—performs an ongoing power “to compel the imagination, to create faith in humanity—and indeed in all autonomous life—and to kindle action.” If we allow that literary scholarship, at its best, performs a kind of action—purposeful, responsive to history and to other scholars, inventive in its encounter with language, and capable, amazingly, of spurring new interpretive interventions in a field as established as Faulkner studies. Watson performs a singular kind of action himself. One we might even call noble.

Peter Lurie

Buildings of Mississippi

By Jennifer V. O. Baughn and Michael W. Fazio, with Mary Warren Miller. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2021. 424 pages. \$65.00 cloth.

Buildings of Mississippi offers overdue recognition of the place that African Americans and modern architecture occupy in Mississippi’s built environment, fifty years following social shifts associated with the sixties.

Simultaneously, the survey of Mississippi structures suggests that what was contemporary and cutting edge in the first half of the nineteenth century remains the alpha and the omega, architecturally, 170 years later. Unfortunate inability to escape antebellum antecedents is evident in upscale subdivisions where contemporary houses are derivative variations on an Old South theme—valuing columned verandas and circular driveways—while, elsewhere in America and overseas, postmodernism is deemed desirable, climate change dictates design, and technological innovation portends paradise impending.

Fixation upon what was fashionable in antebellum architecture deprives Mississippians of the aesthetic elan existing before the salvo at Fort Sumter. Had southerners transcended prewar paradigms, pursuing a future in which Yankees struggled to compete with former Confederates, current construction in the South could be cutting edge and carbon neutral.

Buildings of Mississippi underscores that southern architecture is often as antediluvian as other instances in which the South represents the rear-guard. The most inventive structures in Mississippi were built before the Civil War: next to nothing designed following Secession is as daring and electric as that conceived earlier. Excitement evaporated.

Anomalies—such as Fay Jones’s Pinecote Pavilion for the Crosby Arboretum at Picayune, Frank Gehry’s Ohr-O’Keefe Museum in Biloxi, and post-Katrina housing on the Gulf Coast—are exceptions proving the rule that Mississippi appears trapped as if a fly in amber, architecturally, given antipathy to advancing beyond antebellum archetypes.

Standout structures in the book are predictable (through no fault of the authors, who celebrate each epoch of architectural history, to their credit). Natchez is the epicenter. Holly Springs, Columbus, Canton, and Aberdeen offer fine examples of structures from that time. Wilkinson, Lafayette, Jefferson, Claiborne, and Amite Counties contain landmark instances of the same.

Fresh ground is broken identifying people of color as inhabiting other than invisible supporting roles, in what serves as official proclamation designating what is noteworthy. “The Forks of the Road Slave Market, the second largest slave market in the Deep South from c. 1830 to 1861” is acknowledged, as is the abomination that Auburn slavemaster Stephen Duncan “owned approximately a thousand slaves by the 1850s on his eleven plantations in Mississippi and Louisiana.” Recognition that antebellum affluence depended upon slavery is revealed repeatedly, as should have been recorded in histories written at all junctures.



Similarly, analysis appreciates that, under segregation, “towns with large black populations—notably Jackson, Greenville, Meridian, Hattiesburg, and Clarksdale—often developed a separate, self-contained African American community with its own business district, hotels, churches, cultural center, schools, and funeral homes. Although often located adjacent to industrial or flood-prone areas, these districts gave African Americans relative security to form their own institutions without white interference. Because churches were one of the few institutions owned and run by black leaders, they became the anchors of such neighborhoods.” Sites central to the civil rights movement—including the Medgar and Myrlie Evers House in Jackson and the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) office in Meridian—are also considered.

Midcentury modernism is identified as being as important as antebellum, Victorian, and 1920s architecture. Overcoming ongoing aversion to modernity in Mississippi constitutes a sea change: appreciation of advances that accompanied the 1950s and 1960s

provides a significant improvement.

Avatars of modern architecture in the South include members of my extended family—Samuel G. Wiener is said to have been the first modern architect in the South—providing a catbird seat into the book’s Achilles heel: whenever one identifies errors easily, one cannot help but wonder where misinformation intrudes that readers may not readily identify. My late aunt and uncle’s house in Jackson is attributed to Samuel G. Wiener and William B. Wiener. My aunt never once indicated that S. G. was its architect, over decades, during discussions about her home. My mother mentioned, when asked to corroborate my memory, “S. G. did not design houses.” A focus on nonresidential architecture meant that the rare home that S. G. did design tended to be less interesting than the residential architecture created by his younger brother.

The Ed and Marion Cowan House on Eastover Drive in Jackson is said to be “reportedly based on Marion Cowan’s ancestral home on Atlanta’s Peachtree Street.” Her October 2014 obituary would have provided clarity, had research been pursued: “Marion was raised at the family home—Knollwood—designed by famed Atlanta architect Phillip Shutze for the Kiser family in 1929” on West Paces Ferry Road—modeled upon Chatham, an eighteenth-century estate in Stafford County, Virginia. Such errors and omissions shall surprise cognoscenti and scholars.

Buildings of Mississippi is dichotomous: the guide has much to commend, catalyzing incisive insights into Mississippi’s architecture, alongside not inconspicuous shortcomings. One never comprehends the deadlines and budgetary constraints confronting authors—their ability to address inadequacies. Hopefully what went wanting can be augmented, given that, at its best, which is often, the book’s abundant attributes are nothing less than magisterial.

Operas often endured emendation before becoming beloved canons of the repertoire. Giuseppe Verdi’s *Aida*, *Un Ballo in Maschera*, and *La Traviata* and Giacomo Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*

are among admirable initial efforts enjoying *éclat* because their composers eliminated excesses. Should *Buildings of Mississippi* receive revision, a timeless masterpiece shall ensue, enduring until the end of time.

Jay Wiener

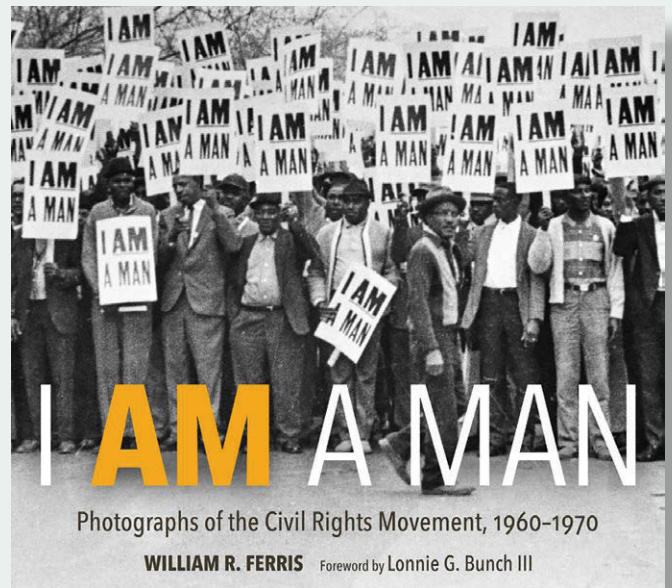
I AM A MAN: Photographs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1960–1970

By William R. Ferris. Foreword by Lonnie G. Bunch III. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2021. 152 pages. 25 color and 113 black-and-white photographs. \$40.00 cloth.

In 2017, French photo historian Gilles Mora invited noted Mississippian William Ferris to curate an exhibition of photographs from the civil rights movement in the American South during the 1960s. After an extensive archival search, Ferris and his team of researchers at the University of North Carolina narrowed a first-round selection of more than 5,000 photographs to about 350. Many of those images found their way into the exhibition *I AM A MAN*, shown at the Pavillon Populaire in Montpellier, France, from October 2018 through January 2019. *I AM A MAN* is now showing at the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum (through late August) and will then travel to museums throughout the United States. The accompanying catalog, published by the University Press of Mississippi, is the English-language version of the earlier French catalog.

It's an impressive collection. With the notable exception of Memphis-based Ernest Withers, it skips over pictures by many of the best-known photographers of the civil rights movement—figures such as Danny Lyon, Gordon Parks, Charles Moore, Bruce Davidson, Roland Freeman—all of whom made images that have become iconic over the years. Instead, the photographers whose work dominates the catalog are lesser known. A few worked for national-level publications, but most were regionally or locally based.

In my opinion, this is one of the collection's strengths. Instead of the several dozen civil rights photographs we've seen over and over again for the past five decades (almost to the point of having memorized some of them), *I AM A MAN* presents us with views of the movement that seem fresh and encourage us to think more deeply about the racial, social, and political conditions in that time and place. As individual pictures they may not be as spectacular as some of the more iconic images, but they remind us that the civil rights movement was more than a single large event—that it was many separate struggles and events instead, events that took place throughout the South (and elsewhere) for more than two decades. This is a valuable reminder.



The catalog for *I AM A MAN* is organized chronologically with “chapters” from every year between 1960 and 1970 (with the curious exception of 1969). It includes images from several of the civil rights movement’s highlight moments (though, again, not the best-known photographs of these events)—the Freedom Rides, James Meredith entering the University of Mississippi, the Selma-to-Montgomery March, the Sanitation Workers Strike in Memphis—but we also see pictures of more localized struggles, pictures with a seemingly greater focus on individuals and specific places.

As I paged through *I AM A MAN*, many of the images I encountered hit me hard, harder than some of the well-known photos that I have looked at dozens of times over the years. Some examples: an effigy of a lynched James Meredith hanging from a dormitory window at the University of Mississippi; a North Carolina Klan cross-burning with entire families entranced by the spectacle; bare-bones living conditions at Resurrection City on the National Mall during the Poor People’s Campaign; Dr. King’s blood on the balcony floor of the Lorraine Motel; three African American men held “up against the wall,” at gunpoint, in the aftermath of Dr. King’s murder.

In the catalog’s introduction, Ferris points out that the photographers and the photographs they produced were important forces in the struggle for civil rights. In many instances, local authorities saw the photographers as enemies, so they were often in as much danger of physical harm as the protesters. More importantly, Ferris reminds us that their pictures became “catalyst[s] for moving history forward” that “inspired support for the civil rights movement around the world.” That had certainly been the case in 1955 with photographs of the murdered Emmett Till’s brutalized body, and that influence continued through the 1960s and decades beyond. (Witness the importance of visual imagery in bringing George Floyd’s murderer to justice.) The photographs in this volume may be from more than fifty years ago, but their impact carries through

to the present day, emphasizing the continued need to identify injustice and resist it.

David Wharton

Reconsidering Flannery O'Connor

Edited by Alison Arant and Jordan Cofer. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020. 263 pages. \$99.00 cloth, \$30.00 paper.

Reconsidering Flannery O'Connor owes its title and scope to two National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institutes held in O'Connor's Milledgeville, Georgia, in 2007 and 2014. Designed to support college and university instructors in their teaching and research, the Institutes met at Georgia College and its Ina Dillard Russell Library, home of the Flannery O'Connor Collection. Field trips included a tour of Andalusia, the O'Connor home and dairy farm. Editors Alison Arant and Jordan Cofer attended the 2014 institute, and most of the fourteen essays in *Reconsidering Flannery O'Connor* were contributed by fellow participants. Enhanced by archival work in the O'Connor Collection, many of these analyses had their start at Institute lectures and seminars led by noted O'Connor scholars.

Special pleasures of the volume are the essayists' references to unique resources available to them. The unpublished manuscript of an early story from the college library archive is integral to Arant's essay, "Inscrutable Zoot Suiters and Civil Rights Ambivalence in Flannery O'Connor and Toni Morrison." In writing "Country People: Depictions of Farm Women in Flannery O'Connor's Short Fiction," Monica Carol Miller benefited greatly from exploring the O'Connor property: "Contemplating the real-life



Andalusia farm and the ways in which O'Connor understood its material realities provides a more comprehensive foundation for O'Connor's personal understanding of the lives of the rural characters she created."

Lindsey Alexander had a more disturbing experience. "When I visited Andalusia, a pair of crutches sat cloyingly against O'Connor's twin bed," she writes. In "Silence, Scalpels, and Loupes: Reconsidering O'Connor as Sylvia Plath's Contemporary," Alexander understandably resents that "O'Connor and Plath, like many artists, are perceived largely as sufferers," with O'Connor reduced to those crutches and Plath to a gas oven and death plaque. In contrast, Rachel Watson recalls an interpretation of O'Connor's "Revelation" shared by Marshall Bruce Gentry, editor of the *Flannery O'Connor Review* and Institute codirector. In "'Herself but Black': Richard Wright, Flannery O'Connor, and the 'Near Enemy' of Civil Rights," Watson is "delighted" that conversations with Gentry and visiting professor Robert Brinkmeyer "informed my thinking for this essay immensely."

Arant and Cofer entitle their introduction "Recovering Interpretative Possibilities in the Fiction of O'Connor," and O'Connor's short stories are the essayists' main concern.

Despite limited attention to the novel *Wise Blood* and even less to *The Violent Bear It Away*, the four-part volume is more varied in subjects and methods than other recent essay collections on O'Connor's work. As Gentry affirms in his afterword, "O'Connor scholarship is increasingly diverse." In "Part 1: New Methodologies," O'Connor's association with peacocks inspires Gina Caison to draw on "emergent ideas in object-oriented ontology" and propose a "feather method" for discussing "The Displaced Person" and other stories in terms of four characteristics of peacock feathers. Bruce Henderson presents a "crip-queer" reading of "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" and "The River" in his major contribution to the intersection of disability studies and queer studies, where O'Connor's work has received little attention.

Praxis as a "theoretical construct" guides Alicia Matheny Beeson's analysis of "The Lame Shall Enter First" and "The Comforts of Home"; emphasizing the imbalance between action and reflection that dooms the main characters' attempts at charity, she "encourages readings of O'Connor's stories beyond religious considerations." Explicating "Judgment Day," "A Late Encounter with the Enemy," and "Revelation," Institute lecturer and seminar moderator Doreen Fowler offers models for "using O'Connor to reconsider Lacan." She argues that "the subject of both Lacan's theory and O'Connor's remarkable fiction is a search for transcendental meaning or an ultimate authority."

"Part 2: New Contexts" opens with Doug Davis's intriguing view of "The Lame Shall Enter First" and several other works as "Gothic science fiction" from the "golden age" of sci-fi. This reconsideration "clarifies the author's relationship to history and modernity alike, foregrounding the struggle between the forces of the past and the agents of the future that drives many of her stories." Like Davis, volume coeditor Cofer considers Cold War contexts in his essay on "O'Connor,

Anti-Intellectualism, and the Iowa Writers' Workshop." Although "the southern intellectual was *en vogue* at Iowa," and O'Connor was a favorite in the new MFA program, the "spiritual turmoil" recorded in her prayer journal might be related to her "critique of academe" in early drafts of *Wise Blood* and stories in her thesis. Miller's essay concludes this section by contrasting the pastoral South of the Agrarians' *I'll Take My Stand* with the vulnerability of O'Connor's women farmers in an age of rising agribusiness.

The five reconsiderations in "Part 3: Strange Bedfellows" include William Murray on mystery, myth, and violence in O'Connor and Nietzsche; Alison Staudinger on attractions and critiques of "the Fascist business" reflected in O'Connor's stories and faced more directly in her correspondence with Maryat Lee and Betty Hester; Watson on the intertwining of spirit and politics in O'Connor (e.g., "Revelation") and Wright (especially his *Outsider*); Arant on the disruptive impact of flashy African American zoot suiters in postwar settings of O'Connor's "The Barber" and Morrison's *Home*; and, finally, the collection's most unusual essay: a fiery meditation on O'Connor's appeal to male readers (especially "cishet" men) versus Plath's attraction for females, delivered in poet Lindsey Alexander's distinctively personal voice, her sarcasm tempered by humor.

The two essays of "Part 4: O'Connor's Legacy" issue additional critiques. In his "Saint Flannery, Approximately: O'Connor and the Dogma of Creative Writing," Eric Bennett accuses MFA programs of "distortion and bathos" when they misappropriate O'Connor's comments on writing to support their own "complacent and impoverished" theories of fiction. He further reproaches "scholars who applaud the small alternatives" to "the providential view of history," which "O'Connor astonishingly tried to maintain." Early in the final essay, "Flannery O'Connor's Real Estate: Farming Intellectual Property," Carol Loeb Shloss considers "the map

of property's fate" in O'Connor's "A Circle of Fire." She then traces the confusion resulting from imprecise directives about O'Connor's literary properties in her will. For decades, "the fates of would-be scholars and writers were affected" in a drama involving literary executors, agents, publishers, and O'Connor's mother, Regina. Shloss envisions Flannery O'Connor "burning the woods" (like the angry boys in "A Circle of Fire") "to clear space for the wide fields of the public domain, the claims of the common man, and the creative commons." The essayists of *Reconsidering Flannery O'Connor* stake their claims.

Joan Wylie Hall

Conversations with Donald Hall

Edited by John Martin-Joy, Allan Cooper, and Richard Rohfritsch. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2021. 216 pages. \$99.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper, and ebook available.

From time to time, the art of conversation has been declared to be dead, but thanks to the Literary Conversations Series from the University Press of Mississippi, it is very much alive—and even thriving. Under the current leadership of Monika Gehlawat at the University of Southern Mississippi, the series will have published 191 titles by early next year. Beginning with the inaugural volume on Walker Percy in 1985, these selected interviews with "the world's most notable writers" allow readers to hear the unique voices of artists as they explain the creative process.

Poet Donald Hall, who was working with the editors of this volume throughout 2017 and just a few months before he died on June 23, 2018, at



age 89, is the kind of writer that best exemplifies the purpose of the series. Eminently quotable and opinionated, thoroughly grounded in academia and publishing, and successful in a number of literary genres, Hall led the life of the artist ever since he decided at age fourteen to become a poet. Over a sixty-year career as writer, editor, biographer, freelance essayist, and anthologist, Hall published nineteen collections of poetry, eight books of essays, and twenty books of nonfiction. Educated at Harvard and Oxford, poetry editor of the *Paris Review* (1953–62), teacher at the University of Michigan (1957–75), and US poet laureate (2006–7), Hall won a number of prestigious prizes, including the Caldecott Medal, the Robert Frost Medal, the National Book Critics Award, and the National Medal of Arts, the latter awarded by President Obama in 2011. His poetry and criticism helped to shape contemporary American poetry, and he wrote about and interviewed many of the world's leading literary voices.

Because Hall was so prolific—his papers at the University of New Hampshire credit him with 130 publications—the editors had 170 interviews to choose from. Narrowed down to thirteen, they cover a fifty-seven-year creative period, from 1958 to 2015. Conducted in person,

over the phone, or by correspondence and collected in academic and literary journals, the interviews begin a few years after his award-winning first collection *Exiles and Marriages* (1955), and conclude in 2015 with Hall looking back on his life of writing and marriage to poet Jane Kenyon, who died of leukemia in 1995. (Readers of Hall's poetry would do themselves a favor to read *Essays after Eighty* (2014) and *A Carnival of Losses: Notes Nearing Ninety* (2018), two collections of essays, anecdotes, and reminiscences that parallel many of the observations in these conversations and give an irreverent but honest portrait of a man coming to terms with the vagaries of old age, personal loss, and failing health).

In their introduction to this collection, the editors group the interviews into three distinct periods of Hall's life: early success in publishing and teaching at Michigan, the years in New Hampshire with wife Jane Kenyon, and the "lonely but immensely creative years" following her death. They especially note, throughout the interviews, his generosity, his "dedication to his craft," and the "emotional give and take" he brings to each discussion of the art of poetry. For Hall, poetry was both necessary and organic: "Everything I look at seems to bloom with poetry" (1974) and "I grow my poems now the way a reef grows a coral" (1983). Such an approach for Hall, however, takes time, and revision to him was more important than inspiration: "I enjoy revising. It's the best kind of work" (1989), "the voyage of revision is pure discovery" (1992), and "The greatest pleasure in writing is rewriting" (*Essays after Eighty*). Hall was a relentless reviser of his own poetry, often making sixty to eighty drafts over a long period of time and working over each poem with long-time friend and fellow poet Robert Bly.

Not only do we listen in on Hall's creative process, we also learn that, among other insights, he never attended a poetry workshop, was no fan of anthologies ("I squirm at the taste displayed."), and that too many poets talk too much about poetry. At the end of several of these interviews, Hall admonishes himself and other writers to "get back to the desk" (1997), get back to the purposeful dedication to the written word.

Perhaps the most satisfying aspect of *Conversations with Donald Hall*, surely by design, is that the reader can hear from the poet himself as he examines his life, art, and influences at every stage of a long career. The early glib, dismissive Hall gives way to a more serious personality who is aware of what poetry has come to mean in his life: "a tremendous amount of poetry is elegiac—not just over death, but over the loss of youth, or the loss of friends" (1971). There is also an abiding awareness of how little time there is left: "A great deal of poetry is about loss, love, and death" (2012). In the chronological approach to these conversations, Hall comes full circle to talking about summers spent on his grandfather's Eagle Pond Farm at age twelve, to returning to it with Jane in 1975 and living with her as another working artist until her death. By living close to nature and observing it daily, Hall creates a sensual poetry, a pleasurable stay against time; it becomes "a vehicle for self-discovery" (1971).

At the end of the final interview in the collection, Hall asks, "Has anybody ever noticed that I like to talk about myself?" (2015). Though clearly said with tongue in cheek, many of us are glad he did, and we are richer for having read his words.

Gary Kerley

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