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## The South in Review

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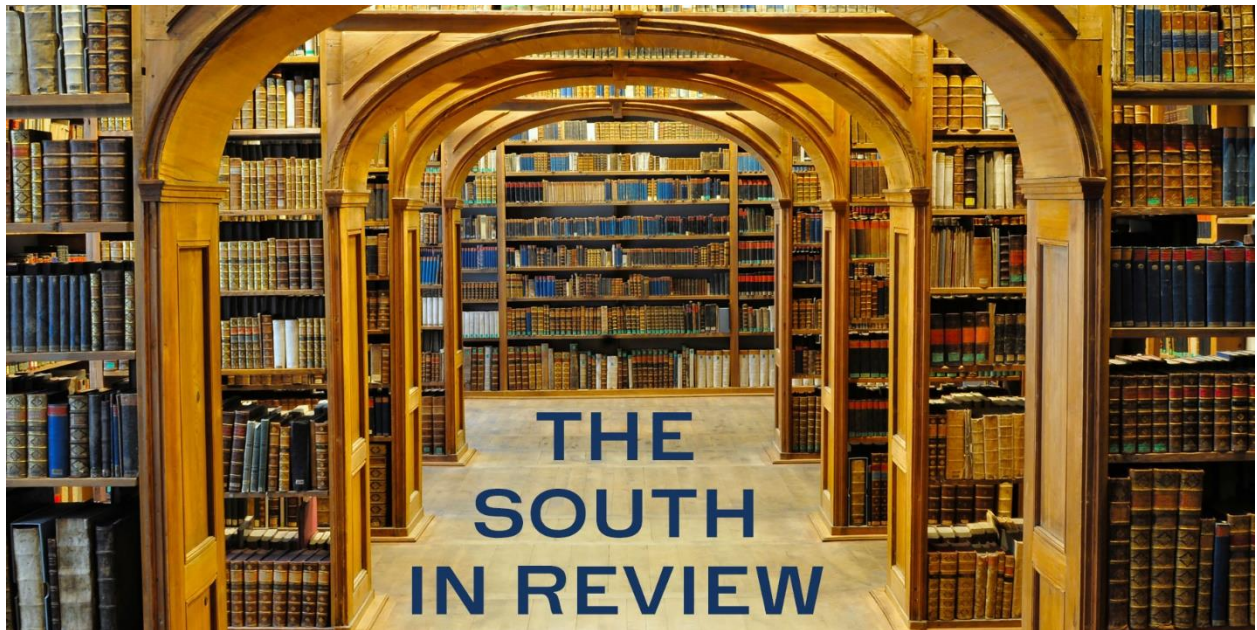
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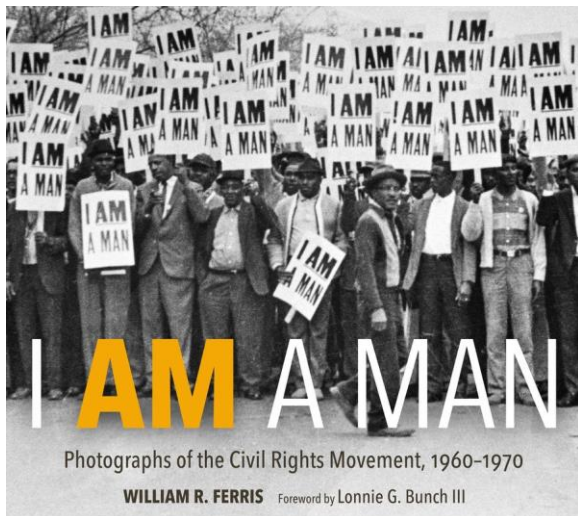
## The South in Review



PUBLISHED APRIL 25, 2022

### 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. Since that exhibition, *I AM A MAN* has traveled to the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum and other 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.

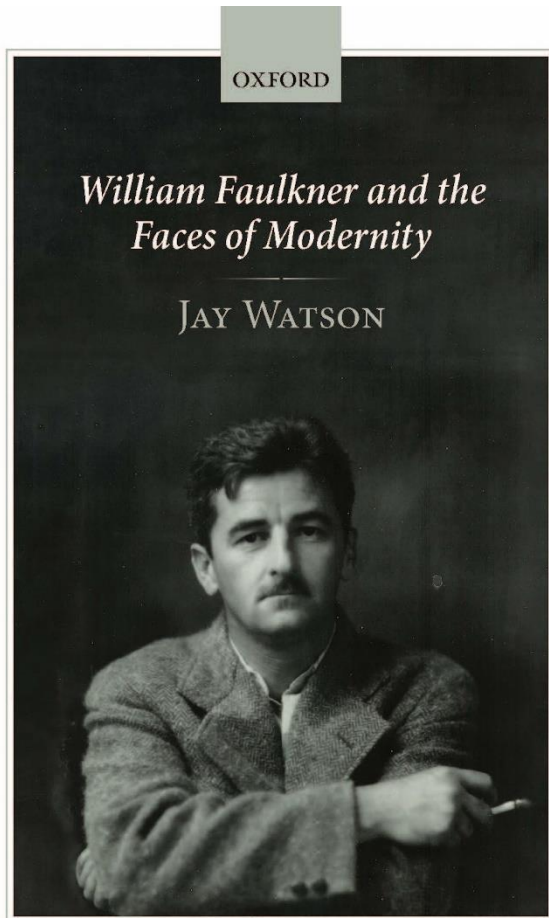
The catalog for *I AM A MAN* is organized chronologically with "chapters" from every year between 1960 and 1970 (with the curious exception of 1969). It includes images from several of the civil rights movement's highlight moments (though, again, not the best-known photographs of these events)—the Freedom 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.

Review by David Wharton

## 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 that Faulkner's stylistic flourishes—the escaped mule's "evanescent" movement and appearance/disappearance from the urban scene of Mrs. Hait's Jefferson years—offer a figural expression of the onetime farm animal's gradual disappearance from the north Mississippi agricultural economy.

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, 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* 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.

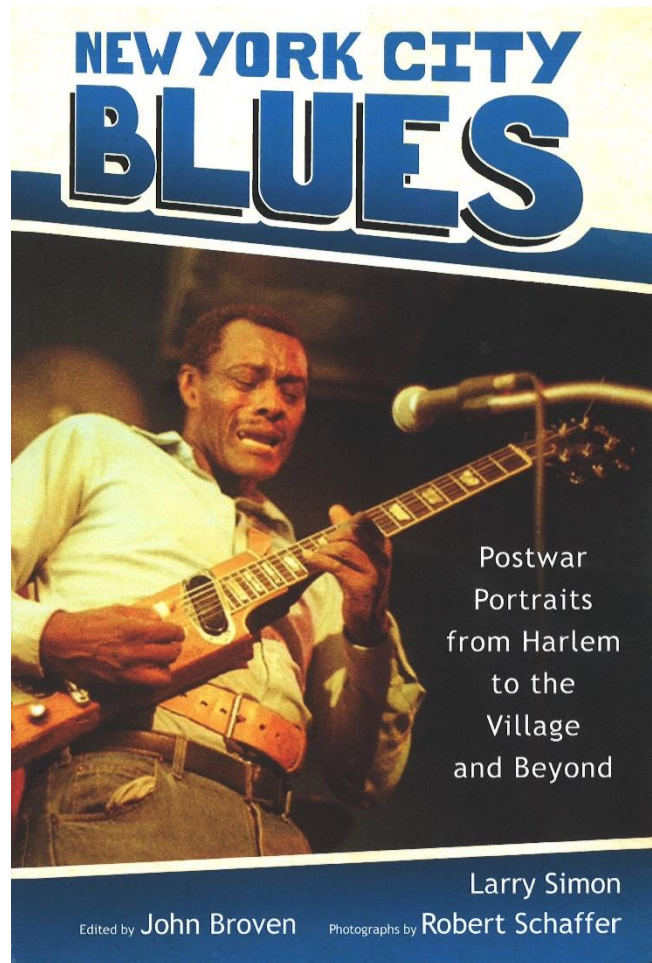
A new kind of Faulkner scholarship appears in these pages. Synthesizing not only Hegel’s “universal history” in his dialectical model of the master-slave dialectic, but Susan Buck-Morss’s historicizing of it, Michel Rolph Trouillot’s theorizing of the Haitian Revolution’s impact on European thought, 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 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 heroic.

Review by Peter Lurie

## NEW YORK CITY BLUES: POSTWAR PORTRAITS FROM HARLEM TO THE VILLAGE AND BEYOND

By Larry Simon. John Broven, ed. Photos by Robert Schaffer. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2021. 340 pages. \$99.00 cloth, \$28.00 paperback.



New York City blues? I can almost hear the reader's objection to what may feel like a category error, the obverse of the equally unlikely "Mississippi jazz"—although the latter is a thing, of course, and includes luminaries like Cassandra Wilson, Wadada Leo Smith, Milt Hinton, Jimmie Lunceford, and Mulgrew Miller. But I get the objection. What is New York City blues, after all? Does it have a characteristic sound, like Chicago blues, or Delta blues, or Piedmont blues? Did the Big Apple produce some heretofore unacknowledged cohort of influential stylists—the East Coast equivalents of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf? The answer to both questions is . . . not really, but it's complicated.

And, to be honest, I'm incapable of being objective about all this. I wasn't just an active participant in the New York City blues scene for almost two decades before moving to Oxford in 2002, but I knew, performed with, and recorded with a number of the individuals featured in this invaluable new interview-feast cum cultural history, including guitarists Wild Jimmy Spruill, Larry Johnson, and Bob Malenky, producers Bobby Robinson and Len Kunstadt, and harmonica player Paul "Brooklyn Slim" Oscher. Page 191 offers a photo, new to me, of Bobby Bennett, aka Professor Six Million, playing

washtub bass on a Harlem sidewalk with guitarist Sterling “Mister Satan” Magee, four years before I wandered along and sat in on harmonica with both men. The duo act that Magee and I ended up creating on 125th Street and working at intervals for the next thirty-odd years, Satan and Adam, is mentioned on the following page. So I’m deep in it: the ultimate unreliable narrator, or reviewer. I, too, have tried, as participant/observer, to chronicle and explain the New York blues world I knew, both in a memoir, *Mister Satan’s Apprentice* (1998), and in *Journeyman’s Road: Modern Blues Lives from Faulkner’s Mississippi to Post-9/11 New York* (2007).

What makes *New York City Blues* so valuable—and, from my perspective, so thrilling—is that it’s the first study of that scene to focus on the postwar decades, when the musicians and record men that I came to know later as formidable elders were young movers and shakers trying to take what they’d brought with them as southern-born Black migrants, mostly from the Carolinas and Georgia and, abetted by a handful of Brooklyn-born Jews, forge careers in New York’s bustling and heterogenous entertainment zone. Simon, a jazz-blues guitarist who conducted half of the book’s interviews, happens also to be responsible for bringing Spruill, pianist Bob Gaddy, guitarist Larry Dale, and several other of his interviewees back into circulation in the early 1990s, taking them on tour and backing them up with his band. Broven, a veteran UK blues journalist and editor of this volume, contributed four interviews from his time as a correspondent at *Juke Blues*. *New York City Blues* fills a yawning gap in the city’s blues history between the Samuel Charters/Leonard Kunstadt volume, *Jazz: A History of the New York Scene* (1962), which offers excellent coverage of the blues craze of the 1920s and its 1930s aftermath, and my own efforts as chronicler of the post-1980 period.

I knew Bobby Robinson (1917–2011), for example, as the gruff but irrepressible owner of Bobby’s Happy House Records in Harlem, the legendary producer of everybody from James Cotton and Gladys Knight to Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five. In 1989 he told me first-hand the story of how he’d taken Wilbert Harrison into the studio and ended up with the million-selling “Kansas City,” featuring Spruill on that spare, catchy, chunk-a-chunk guitar. When I was trying to finalize the contract for the first Satan and Adam album, *Harlem Blues* (1991), Bobby and I wrangled briefly—the aging Black record man who’d paid every sort of dues five times over, the younger white harmonica player bursting with ambition—before settling our differences. Here, though, I encountered Bobby as a much younger man and found out several things that surprised me.

One was the comparative privilege in which he’d grown up as a farm boy in rural South Carolina. He was the grandson of a preacher who’d purchased his own land in 1892, a fact which gave the family economic independence and meant, as he told Simon, that “I never had a hungry day in my life.” “See, we could raise what we want to. We could do what we wanted. And that was very rare. [I was] very, very lucky. Especially black farms, there was only two or three in the whole county that I knew. Everybody else worked sharecropping.” This unusual family background clearly enabled the entrepreneurial spirit that led Robinson to open his Harlem record shop in 1946—the first Black-owned business on 125th Street—and, against all odds, start his own record labels and forge ahead.

But what gave him a feel for the blues, and for what southern-born Black migrants wanted to hear, was the gutbucket experience he’d managed to accrue as that same South Carolina farm boy. His interview with Simon offers this extraordinary evocation of Depression-era blues life:

When I was a kid I knew I was going to get a whipping. Saturday night they used to have what they called a frolic. This is as low as they get. Way out in the country a bootlegger he had this thing way out in the cotton field, way in the country there. I was fourteen or fifteen. [. . .] I’d go down the road apiece from my house after it got dark, and the guys would come and pick me up. This is a dangerous place because the guy is a bootlegger, illegal liquor dealer, and whatnot. And the guy would have three



lanterns tied to the porch. There was no light. And you'd walk in the house past where the beds was and just two chairs and two guitar players, that's all that was in the room then you go ahead into the kitchen coming from the living room across the kitchen there was a table, and there was two big women there frying fish and chicken and whatnot all night long. Every time you go you have to buy a piece of fish or chicken or a drink. Man those guys, they got there in the corner facing each other with guitars, acoustic guitars, and they sang the blues, and they get onto dancing and after a while after three or four drinks of that good strong liquor, they were gone. It was like that all night long. I was fascinated with it. Here were people who worked hard on the farms all day long. They went out on a Saturday night with liquor and music and dance and they let their hair down. This was for real. [. . .] They didn't worry about money. There weren't no money to be got. I'm talking about the '30s. So they got drunk and danced until day. Two guitars, that was the real blues.

What is New York City blues? It is, or was, the product of Black southern migrants like Robinson, and my longtime partner Magee (b. Mount Olive, Mississippi, 1936), both of them veterans of the US military, who carried this sort of juke joint sensibility into the hustle and bustle of Harlem and made something new of it, updating the sound without losing the feel. But it was also women like Victoria Spivey (1906–1976), Houston-born, a celebrated blues queen in the 1920s who later resettled in Brooklyn, cohabited with her much younger admirer, producer Lenny Kunstadt—I knew him as a sprightly older man who chattered like Jimmy Durante—and made her house a haven for younger white blues and folk artists like Paul Oscher and Bob Dylan, the latter of whom credits her with giving him his start as a performer in Greenwich Village. “I ain't got nothing but young boys around me,” she told journalist and photographer Val Wilmer. “They keep me young.”

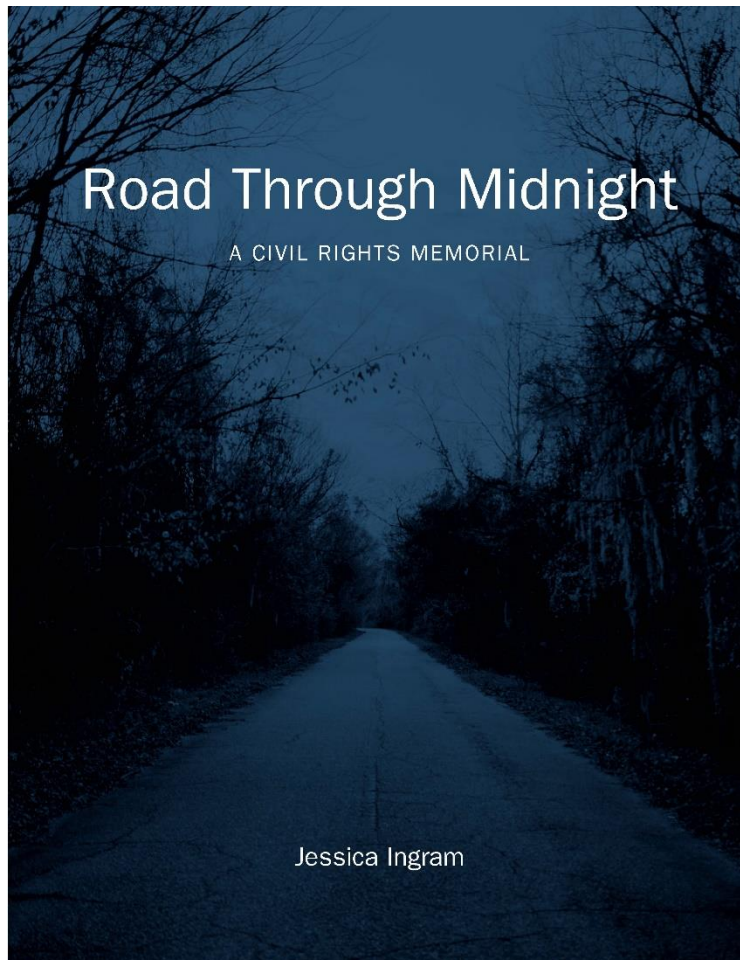
The pleasures of this book are legion and include an invaluable introductory essay by Broven in which he acknowledges that prewar New York, a recording industry hub, was “effectively a clearinghouse for the blues, not a permanent domicile,” even while making a case for the national importance of Spruill, Robinson, and their peers, black and (later) white, including songwriter/blues shouter Doc Pomus, author of “Lonely Avenue,” and Greenwich Village native John Hammond Jr. Songwriter Rose Marie McCoy (b. 1922), a native Arkansan, wrote hits for Big Maybelle, Ruth Brown, Nat King Cole, Nappy Brown, and Elvis Presley; “[W]e used to write songs in Beefsteak Charlie's,” she remembered of her early 1950s' midtown Manhattan beginnings in the Brill Building. “We used to come in there at six o'clock in the morning and we had a booth and we could write in there. We would buy a glass of wine for thirty cents and we would sip on it. And they would take our phone calls and all the big publishers used to come there and hear our songs.”

That, pal, is, or was, New York City blues.

Review by Adam Gussow

## ROAD THROUGH MIDNIGHT: A CIVIL RIGHTS MEMORIAL

By Jessica Ingram. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. 240 pages. \$35.00 cloth, \$27.99 e-book.



The book reviews I write are usually about photographic books. Doing so involves studying the photographs (both their content and style), whatever verbal materials accompany them, how the images are grouped and sequenced, and the book's larger purpose. All are important, but if the pictures are unremarkable I rarely find many positive things to say about the book as a whole. *Road through Midnight* is an exception. The photographs are largely unremarkable, yet this is one of the most powerful books of documentary content I know of. Indeed, some of its power may lie in just how unremarkable the photographs are.

Jessica Ingram began work on this project in the early 2000s. Traveling throughout the Deep South, she photographed sites of 1960s-era civil rights murders, recorded interviews with victims' friends and family members, searched archives for contemporaneous accounts of the murders and the investigations undertaken (or not) by local authorities, and talked with journalists who had reported on the murders for local newspapers. Somewhat later, she was granted the use of materials from the Southern Poverty Law Center. The fieldwork and research took nearly two decades and were no doubt exhausting.

But the extent and duration of Ingram's work are not the only reasons for the power of *Road through Midnight*. Instead, its strength is in how the various pieces cohere, with each providing context for the others. The book is divided into twenty-two segments, almost all of which focus on a civil rights-era murder, in some cases of more than one individual. Each "chapter" begins with a photograph or two, full-bleed across the gutter of facing pages. These pictures are usually of the murder site: the dusty crossroads in rural Mississippi where Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner were shot; the ragged neighborhood where Frank Morris was burned alive inside his Ferriday, Louisiana, shoe shop; Medgar Evers's driveway. Following the photographs are straight-forward, deadpan accounts of the crime, usually including the eventual fate of the murderers (many of whom were never charged or convicted). Next comes a variety of materials: recorded conversations with family members, written pieces by local journalists or others with memories of the crime, photocopies of contemporaneous newspaper articles and photographs, reproductions of church funeral programs, pictures from family photo albums. Each segment is a dizzying and disheartening array, demonstrating both the power of context in documentary work and the profound evil at the heart of these events.

As mentioned above, the photographs in *Road through Midnight* are fairly ordinary in and of themselves. They seem distanced and lacking in emotion. Yet the book as whole packs an emotional wallop, in large part because of Ingram's seeming detachment. In many ways this approach brings to mind what has come to be known as "the banality of evil," a phrase coined by political theorist Hannah Arendt in her account of Adolph Eichmann's 1963 trial for masterminding the murders of millions of Jews in Nazi concentration camps. (It's perhaps worth noting that Eichmann's trial and the murders described in *Road through Midnight* were occurring more or less simultaneously.) It might be the book's greatest strength that it reminds us that terrible things can happen in ordinary places, in seemingly ordinary times, and that they could yet again.

Review by David Wharton

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Adam Gussow** has a joint appointment in English and Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi's Center for the Study of Southern Culture. His books include *Mister Satan's Apprentice: A Blues Memoir*, *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition*, *Beyond the Crossroads: The Devil and the Blues Tradition*, and *Whose Blues? Facing Up to Race and the Future of the Music*.

**Peter Lurie** is the author of *Vision's Immanence: Faulkner, Film, and the Popular Imagination* and of *American Obscurantism: History and the Visual in US Literature and Film* as well as the coeditor, with Ann J. Abadie, of *Faulkner and Film: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 2010*. He is associate professor of English and film studies at the University of Richmond and the coeditor of the *Faulkner Journal*.

**David Wharton** is an assistant professor of Southern Studies and the director of documentary studies at the University of Mississippi's Center for the Study of Southern Culture. He has a BA from Colgate University, an MFA in photography from the University of Texas at Austin, and a PhD in American studies, also from University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of three books of photographs: *The Soul of a Small Texas Town: Photographs, Memories, and History from McDade, Small Town South*, and *The Power of Belief: Spiritual Landscapes from the Rural South*. A fourth book, *Roadside South: A Photographic Journey*, will be published in the spring of 2022.



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