

Mississippi Folklife



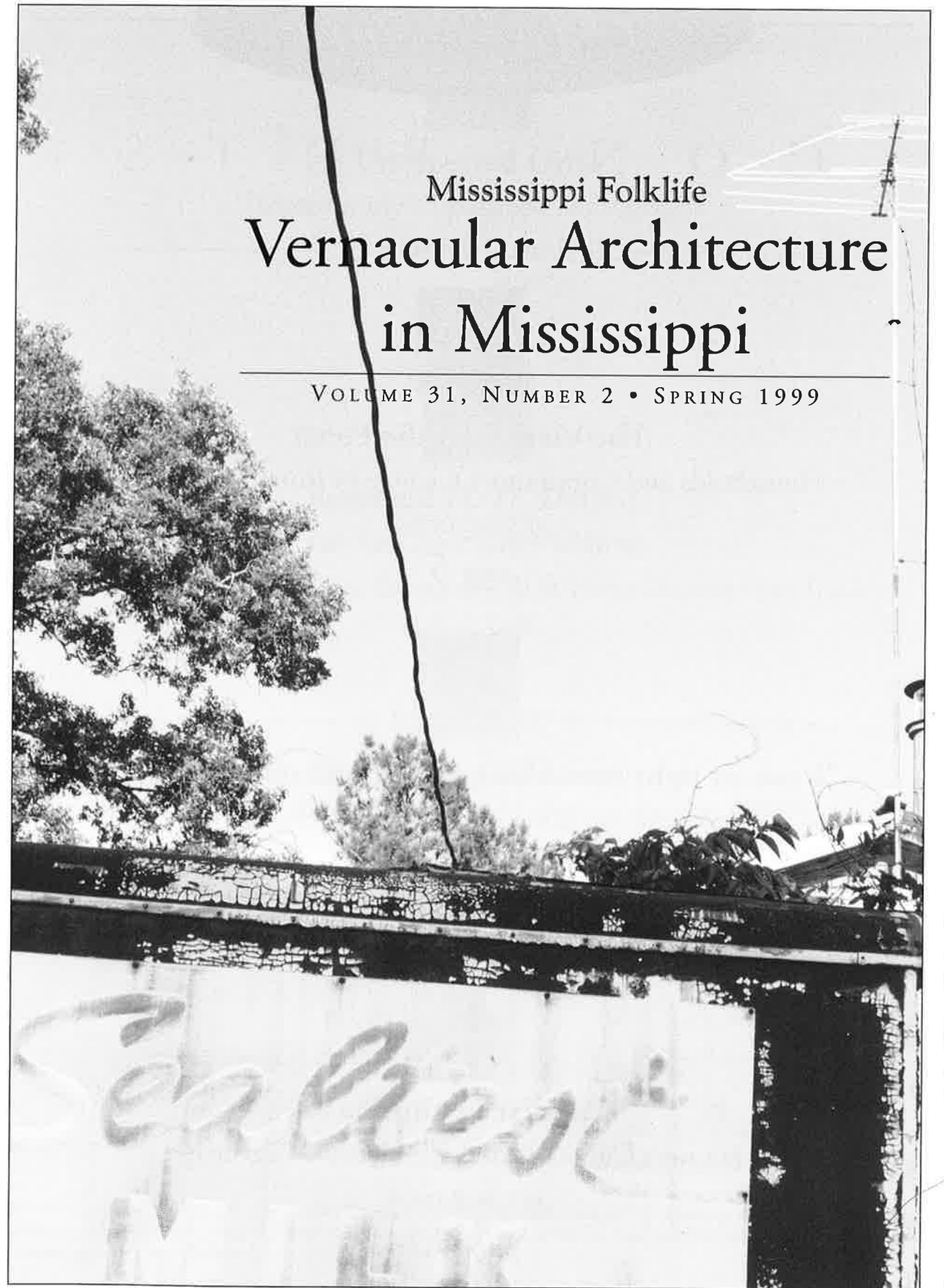
VOLUME 31, No. 2

SPRING 1999, \$5.00

Vernacular Architecture in Mississippi

Mississippi Folklife
Vernacular Architecture
in Mississippi

VOLUME 31, NUMBER 2 • SPRING 1999



VERNACULAR
Architecture
IN MISSISSIPPI

C O N T E N T S

— F E A T U R E S —



The View from the Porch

Households and Community Change in Rural Mississippi

BY SUSAN DITTO

page 5



“I can sit right here, think a thousand miles away...”

Revealing the Blues in the Spaces of Jukejoints

BY JENNIFER NARDONE

page 20



Peculiar Institutions

Mammy's Cupboard and the Natchez Pilgrimage

BY LORI ROBBINS

page 30



Unexpected Gifts

Notes on my Mississippi Photographs

BY NILS GORE

page 42



Reverend H. D. Dennis

and his Church in Vickburg

BY CHRIS THOMPSON AND CHAD CHISHOLM, WITH HELP FROM DOROTHY-DEAN THOMAS

page 50

— R E V I E W S —

Re-Reading a Classic

An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion, (1939)

REVIEWED BY DAVID WHARTON

Reviews of books by Karekin Goekjian and Robert Peacock,
Townsend Davis, Rod Davis, Steve Yarbrough

page 56

— D E P A R T M E N T S —

Editor's Note *page 4*

Parting Hand *page 64*

Cover Photo and page 1 by Nils Gore. Spot photos this spread: View from the Porch, photo MDAH; Revealing the Blues, portrait from Junior Kimbrough's Jukejoint, photo by Jennifer Nardone; Mammy's Cupboard, photo by Lori Robbins; Unexpected Gifts, photo by Nils Gore; Reverend H. D. Dennis, photo by Chad Chisholm.

EDITOR'S NOTE

This special issue studies vernacular architecture in Mississippi. Scholars of folklife have largely been interested in two forms of Mississippi architecture: dogtrot homes and huge mansions. This issue studies forms of architecture that have been less often studied: farm houses in northeastern and central Mississippi, juke joints in the Delta and north-central parts of the state, a uniquely Mississippi form of road architecture outside Natchez, buildings that seem to come and go as they catch a photographer's eye, and a roadside "church" in Vicksburg.

Uniting these pieces is their authors' emphasis on telling the human stories of how people used the buildings. The articles do not track house types and search for their origins. Instead, they study how people use or react to buildings, often in creative ways. Susan Ditto studies how farming people changed their homes, Jennifer Nardone analyzes how people use and decorate juke joints, Lori Robbins interprets the meanings of Mammy's Cupboard Restaurant in relation to the Natchez Pilgrimage, Nils Gore describes his relationship to buildings as part of the Mississippi landscape, and a short article describes how a preacher uses his house and a uniquely designed bus as part of his ministry. This effort to see people as part of the story seems an especially valuable way to study architecture. It allows us to see how people interpret buildings, who is welcome and who is not welcome inside them, and how those buildings change. One change took place after these articles were written. Junior Kimbrough's Jukejoint, discussed in Nardone's article, burned this spring.

A review essay in the "Re-reading a Classic" section revisits Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor's *An American Exodus*, a 1939 work that combined photography and text to document the movement of farming people away from the farm and, usually, away from the South.

Photographs in the articles by Nils Gore, Lori Robbins, and Jennifer Nardone, were color photographs.

Future issues of *Mississippi Folklife* will have special themes, but some will not. Readers should feel free to suggest general topics or specific people, buildings, practices, or events that deserve more attention. Folklife belongs to all of us, and all of us should feel welcome to contribute to discussions of what we should document and how we should study it.

Special thanks go to the Mississippi Arts Commission for its support of this journal.

Ted Ownby

Mississippi Folklife

EDITOR

Ted Ownby

BUSINESS MANAGER

Mickey McLaurin

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Molly McGehee

Vanessa Bliss

CIRCULATION ASSISTANT

Braden Van Winkle

EDITORIAL BOARD

William R. Ferris, University of Mississippi

William Hays, Delta State University

Sylvester Oliver, Rust College

JoAnne Prichard, University Press of Mississippi

Tom Rankin, Duke University

Dorothy Shawhan, Delta State University

Charles Reagan Wilson, University of Mississippi

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Bea Jackson, Ivy Pages, Oxford, MS

Center for the Study of Southern Culture
THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Charles Reagan Wilson, Director

Mississippi Folklife is published under the auspices of the Mississippi Folklore Society and the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi. Subscriptions are \$10.00 per year, which includes membership in the Mississippi Folklore Society. Individual issues, when available, may be purchased at \$4.00 per issue, excepting "Special Issues," which are \$5.00. Subscription correspondence, requests for back issues, and other business should be directed to *Mississippi Folklife*, Center for the Study of Southern Culture, University of Mississippi, University, MS 38677. Manuscripts, books, tapes, films, and CDs for review, and other editorial communications should be sent to Ted Ownby, Center for the Study of Southern Culture, University of Mississippi, University, MS 38677. Manuscripts should be submitted on computer disk, preferably either in Microsoft Word or WordPerfect formats. Submissions not on disk should be double-spaced.

Copyright 1997

The Mississippi Folklore Society

US ISSN 0026-6248

The University complies with all applicable laws regarding affirmative action and equal opportunity in all its activities and does not discriminate against anyone protected by law because of age, creed, color, national origin, race, religion, sex, handicap, veteran or other status.

The View From the Porch

HOUSEHOLDS AND COMMUNITY CHANGE IN RURAL MISSISSIPPI

by Susan Ditto

Changes in the front, back, and side porches on farm houses in central and northeastern Mississippi reveal dramatic transformations in farming people's ideas about work, family, and community.

Lamenting the disappearance of porches in America, historian Kenneth Jackson reminisced that "with a much used front porch, one could live on Andy Hardy's street, where doors need not be locked and where everyone was family."¹ Today, thanks in large part to nostalgic recollections of small town life, the porch is making a comeback. Some architects and community-minded developers have recently begun to combat the numbing isolationism of cookie-cutter suburban subdivisions by incorporating nineteenth-century house designs and streetscapes into modern housing developments. This movement, known as neo-traditionalism, has helped to stimulate a resurgence in the number of porches found on newer homes. In the words of one neo-traditionalist architect, "Everyone's image of a home includes a front porch."² Although this is undoubtedly an overstatement, the movement's proponents have hit on a larger truth. Both in history and in cultural memory, porches have meant openness, neighborliness, and relatively low levels of both for-



mality and privacy. As spaces that belonged to everyone and to no one, functioning as both private property and public space, porches once helped bring communities together.

In Mississippi a century and a half ago, front porches provided equal place for women to sew or shell peas, men to smoke or whittle, young couples to court, and children to play. Back porches were literally a jumping off point between home and fields, where the wanderings of pets and livestock; the labors of family, friends, and hired hands; and the lines between housework and farmwork often crossed and intertwined like the pieces of a patchwork quilt. As a result, porches were both genderless and ageless, encompassing both home and land, domesticity and manhood, labor and social life.

By the turn of the twentieth century, however, the fluid nature of porches no longer seemed an asset. Many Mississippi homeowners decided to enclose or do away with their porches in favor of more specialized spaces. Those porches that remained were more for pri-

Figure 1: A "much used" porch. Lloyd Irby Dogtrot, Carroll County, Mississippi. PHOTO MDAH

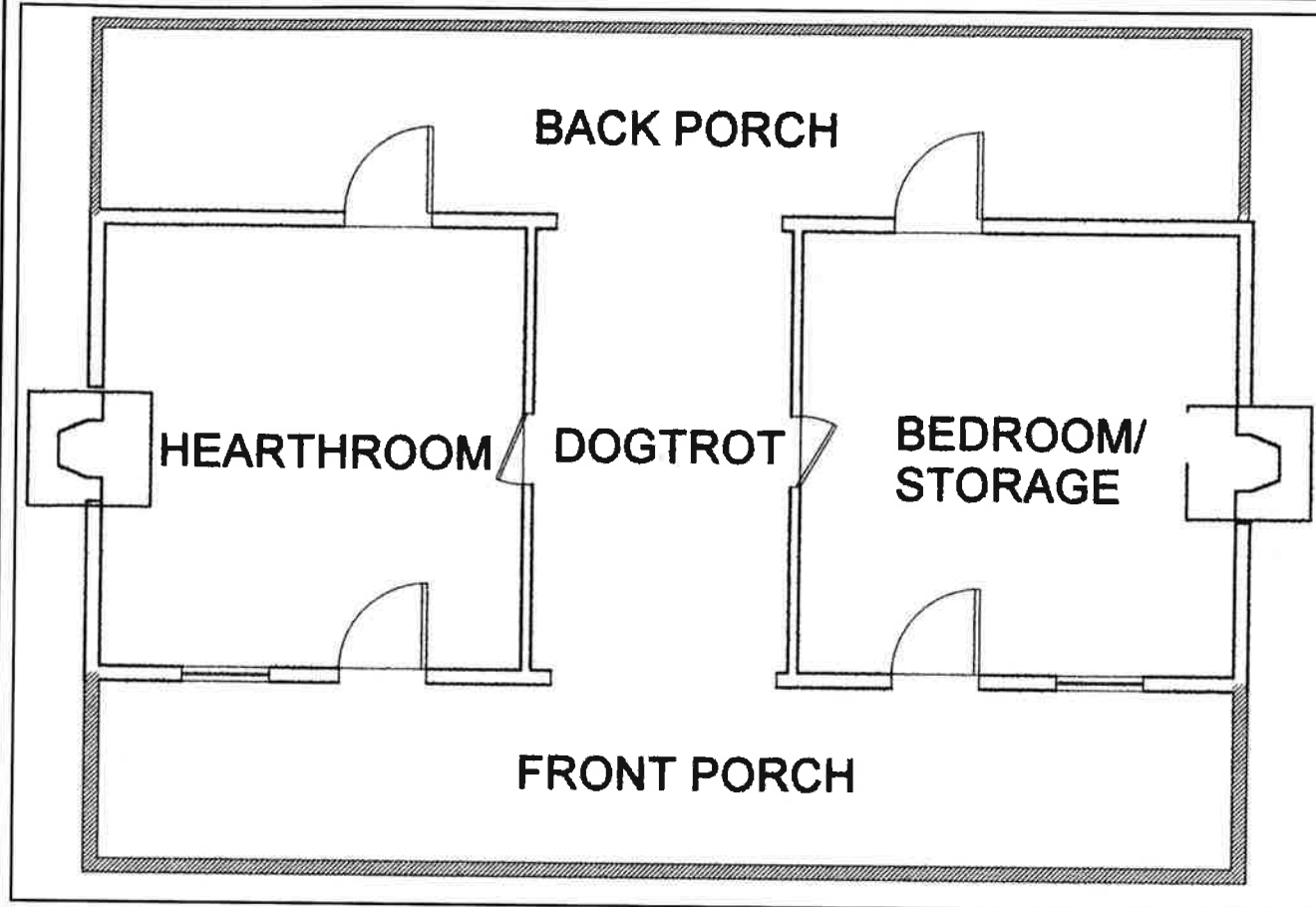


Figure 2: Floor plan of a typical rural Mississippi house, 1830-1880. ILLUSTRATION BY AUTHOR

vate use than for hospitality. Parlors, living rooms, kitchens, and bedrooms began to displace porches as the focal points of sociability and family life. The old sense of community, so carefully rendered a generation before, was quickly becoming a thing of the past. Yet the cultural attachment to porches remains.

This article tours the porches—front, back, dogtrot, and side or wrap-around porches—rural Mississippians built in the 1800s and early 1900s and ponders the meaning these changes held for the region's families and their communities. Why did so many people in nineteenth-century Mississippi build houses with porches? Why did they later choose to do without them? What can porches tell us about the values and lifestyles of ordinary people living and working in rural Mississippi?

The virtually untapped resource of housing data kept by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History's Historic Preservation Division provides a way to answer these questions. The office's collection, which includes photographs and detailed descriptions

of thousands of structures built in Mississippi before 1950, makes it possible to identify patterns in the development of houses and landscapes over the history of the state.

This study focuses on records from 23 counties in northeastern and central Mississippi. With its rolling, only moderately fertile clay hills, most of Mississippi north of the piney woods and east of the Delta was more naturally suited to producing corn, yams, and field peas than cotton. As a result, after it was wrested from the Choctaws and Chickasaws in 1830-32, the area attracted few large planters. Instead, it became dotted with small family farms owned and worked mainly by yeomen of Scotch-Irish, English, and German descent. They raised enough pigs, chickens, and cattle to feed their large families, but few owned slaves. Men hunted, fished, and fought with equal enthusiasm, while women kept the home fires and the light of their evangelical Protestant religion burning.

Other than these generalities, the folk that populated the Mississippi hills left behind few traces of

their values and concerns. Letters, diaries, and other documentary accounts of yeoman life anywhere are rare. But their houses remain, like windows into a vanished way of life. And—contrary to popular belief—walls *can* talk.

For most of the nineteenth century, the average Mississippi family lived in a two room house, twice as wide as it was deep, made of notched logs or some combination of logs and framed lumber. One room was used mainly for sleeping and storage; the other—known as the hearthroom—was the site of every imaginable household activity. [Figure 2] Although a peek into these two rooms could tell us a lot about the people within, some of the most revealing clues to the nature of families and communities in frontier Mississippi are found just beyond the hearthroom out on the porch.

THE FRONT PORCH

In the 1850s, traveler Frederick Law Olmsted described a village he encountered on the Southern frontier, as "every bit a Southern one...all the houses being one story in height, and having an open verandah before them."³ Olmsted could have been describing almost any settlement in the yeoman counties of Mississippi where unpretentious houses with prominent front porches conveyed to visitors and neighbors alike a sense of welcome, unity, and quiet watchfulness. Whether they are called galleries, balconies, verandas, or piazzas, these rooms without walls by any other name have long been central to most Mississippians' vision of home.

The earliest structures in most frontier societies tend to be designed for expedient shelter, lacking all but the most essential architectural elements—a roof, four walls, often without even a floor. But of the 158 houses surveyed for this study that were constructed between 1830 and 1880, two thirds had a front porch. [Figure 3] Some of these early porches, as one might expect, were little more than a shed or lean-to, but most were essentially outdoor living space—wide and deep, covered by the same side-gabled roof that sheltered the rest of the house. [Figure 4] As the population grew, porches came to stand for the rural, subsistence-oriented agricultural way of life and of the sense of community that bound the residents of distant farmsteads together.

As places for "observing the world, for meeting friends, for courting and for a half a hundred other

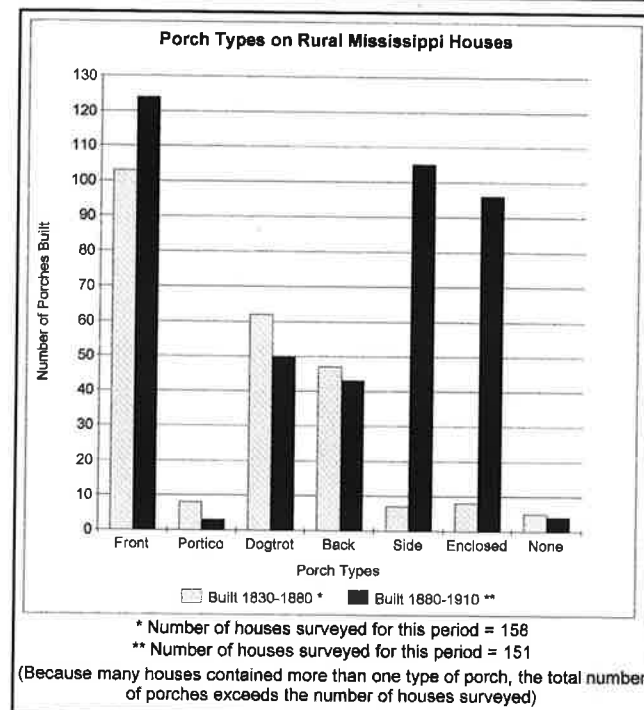


Figure 3: Porch types on Rural Mississippi Houses. TABLE BY AUTHOR

human activities," front porches were a mode of communication.⁴ Unlike planters, who liked to site their houses at the end of long, wooded drives, common farmers built their homes along the roads to county seats like Ripley, Kosciusko, Pontotoc and other trading centers. Porches, especially the wide open central passageways of dogtrot-style houses, literally and figuratively extended the roadway into the house, providing a space from which one could see and be seen and which encouraged passers by to stop and visit a while, helping to alleviate some of the isolation of rural life.⁵

Porches were also symbols of informality. Only five percent of otherwise humble early-to-mid-nineteenth century homes in yeoman areas of Mississippi had front porticos instead of porches. Often imposingly tall and significantly narrower than porches, porticos were not particularly welcoming. With classical columns inspired by the same Greek Revival architecture that influenced grand plantation homes throughout the Deep South, porticos denoted wealth and status—or at least aspirations thereto. Choosing a front porch over the more pretentious portico was a way for the other 95 percent of Mississippi yeomen to express their preference for neighborliness over exclusivity and practicality over display. [Figure 5]



Top: Figure 4: Traditional porches are like rooms without walls. Robert Johnson House, Rankin County, Mississippi. PHOTO MDAH
Below: Figure 5: Greek Revival Portico. Walker House, Lee County, Mississippi. PHOTO MDAH

DOGTROTS

The dogtrot, also known as a “possum trot,” “turkey trot,” “dog run,” or “two pens and a passage” was a house with a covered breezeway running right through the middle. Part porch, part hallway, often ten feet wide or more and open at both ends so that one could theoretically “trot” straight through the house from front to back, the space offered a shaded, alternative living area which was particularly attractive during the warmer months of the year.

One of few indigenous American porch types, the open passage of the dogtrot-style house is a space and a symbol intimately associated with the culture of common whites in the deep South. From the literary imaginations of William Faulkner and Eudora Welty to the unforgettable images captured by Walker Evans, the dogtrot immediately identifies rural Southern farming folk and distinguishes them from their more affluent or more formally educated neighbors. More distinctive than front galleries and more numerous than back porches, dogtrots were the dominant vernacular housing feature in Mississippi for most of the nineteenth century.⁶ [Figure 6]

Part of the reason for the popularity of dogtrots was climatic. A study of the environmental advantages of dogtrot architecture found that on a typical summer day the open passage was the coolest place in or around the house. During the hottest part of the afternoon, the breezeway was several degrees cooler than either the front porch or a shaded field.⁷ A.L. Riddle, a resident of

the Bay Springs community in Tishomingo County, Mississippi recalled of his family’s dogtrot, “A hot day you could sit down here in this hall and if there’s any air in the settlement a going that was the coolest place you could find.”⁸ In Mississippi, in households with no servants to perform the sweatiest labor nor detached kitchens to mitigate the heat of cooking, the appeal of an airy space like the dogtrot is easy to see.

The breezeway was often the principal living space of the house even though it was not technically *in* the house. In his notes on *Social Relations in Our Southern States* (1860), Daniel R. Hundley observed that in the South “the people ‘live out of doors’...their very houses, ever wide open, are themselves ‘out of doors’.”⁹ With a dogtrot, one could sit in the middle of one’s home and yet remain very much in sight of nearby roads and fields. Literally betwixt and between the home’s two main rooms as well as the front and back porches, dogtrots were occupied equally by all members of the household. Residents and visitors, men and women, children, old folks, and animals alike crossed the dogtrot many times in the course of an average day and congregated there to share work, socialize, and rest.

In contrast to the dogtrot, the most popular house type among upper-class white Southerners was the central hall plan, the principal feature of which was an enclosed, almost unused space between the front and back doors. Housing historian Henry Glassie describes the formal central hall as a “social lock,” designed to keep visitors at bay rather than to welcome them.¹⁰



Figure 6: Dogtrot. Johnny Sparks House, Rankin County, Mississippi. PHOTO MDAH

Upon entering a central hall house, one saw neither the hearth nor the family but only the closed doors to interior rooms and perhaps a stairway that descended from the family's private apartments. The formal hall was used to receive but not to entertain guests and to act as a buffer zone between outsiders and the privileged world of the planter and his family.

The dogtrot possessed none of the characteristics of the social lock. Practical-minded farmers were impatient with wasted space and had no use for entry halls.¹¹ The open breezeway typified the perspective of yeomen who did not choose to erect social barriers between themselves and their neighbors.

Travelers to the Southern frontier were sometimes appalled at the way that "houses spilled out into yard and yard into house in total disregard of basic notions of order and morality."¹² What so confounded observers was the contentment with which yeomen households embraced liminal spaces lacking clear attachments to any one gender, generation, class, or function and accepted broad definitions of public and private. In the urban, commercialized world from which most literary sojourners through the region came, compartmentalization bordered on obsession. Preoccupied with the notion of separate spheres, Victorian culture sought to segregate home life from work life, female domesticity from male competitiveness, childhood innocence from adult corruption, and public spaces from private retreats. They created an elaborate code of manners in order to distinguish people of the better classes from their would-be servants, and divided their homes into numerous highly specialized spaces including parlors for visiting, separate bedrooms for family members of every age and gender, and clearly defined servants' quarters.¹³

Every space in the home of an average rural Mississippi family served multiple purposes and most furnishings had numerous uses. The independent mentality of yeoman farmers, along with the conservative nature of their religion, dictated that they strive for self-sufficiency and avoid becoming slaves to debt. Farming folk viewed home made goods, serviceable hand-me-downs, and furnishings which served a number of functions as more sensible than and even morally superior to fashionable store-bought items.¹⁴

Probate inventories from antebellum Mississippi suggest that most porches and dogtrots reflected this sense of combined austerity and practicality. Before the 1870s, only one yeoman household in thirteen owned

a rocking chair. Rarely did a family own more than one rocker. Nor did they own swings, hammocks, or gliders such as those seen on the picturesque Southern porches of myth and memory.¹⁵ Because rocking chairs symbolize leisure rather than work and are more closely associated with elderly relatives than with the younger, more productive members of the household, yeoman farmers may have considered rocking chairs an indulgence. Porches were for sitting, but not necessarily for leisure.

By the 1890s the average number of farm households with rockers had more than doubled to about one in six.¹⁶ About the same time, some owners of dogtrot-style houses began to enclose their breezeways with doors at both ends, transforming their homes into copies of the more formal central hall type. The link between open dogtrots and the open roads had clearly changed by the 1920s when the grandchildren of William Butler abandoned the house he and his son had built in northeast Mississippi seventy years before, and a relative used the trot as a garage for his Model-T.¹⁷ These subtle differences in the way families used and thought about their porches signal some fundamental changes in the home and community life of rural Mississippians at the turn of the last century.

BACK PORCHES AND SIDE ROOMS

A much earlier casualty to changes in the domestic culture of yeoman farmers was the back porch. Just as front porches faced town, neighbors, and roadways, providing a transitional space between home and community, back porches faced crops, livestock, and outbuildings. In the miniature village of the farmyard, domestic labor and agricultural labor converged. Back porches hovered between the dependent household members within the home and the outdoor work necessary to assure their subsistence. Duties like carrying water, chopping firewood, making soap and starch, dairying, gardening, poultry keeping, and curing meat all used the back porch to some degree as a threshold between domestic production and farm production.

One common feature of back porches in some parts of Mississippi was the water shelf, a symbol of both the transitional nature of porches and of yeoman practicality. A horizontal board placed at one end of the back porch about three feet high, the water shelf had a hole in it to hold a wash basin or a bucket. Another vessel, filled with water, hung from a hook placed in the rafter overhead.¹⁸ [Figure 7] A passage in

Brother to a Dragonfly by Mississippian Will Campbell offers a memorable example.

The two bodies were brought across the road on a mule-drawn ground slide and placed on the back porch beside the water shelf. Most rural porches had such a water shelf. A cedar bucket was there, a stainless steel or gourd dipper beside it, and a wash basin. Beneath the shelf would be elephant-ear plants, those stout stem plants with leaves looking like their name. Water used for washing hands and faces was always poured onto the elephant ears, the soap and dirt and moisture making them grow to mammoth size as the summer advanced...the blood of Mr. Lum and Aunt Stump dripped onto and around the elephant ears, and...they grew so big and so tall that they had to be cut down with an ax...the doctor, summoned to pronounce them dead, had washed the brains of Aunt Stump before placing them back in her head."¹⁹

In Campbell's account, the back porch is both functional enough to serve the needs of the doctor and a solemn enough site for tending to the bodies of the dead, yet public enough for several neighbors to witness the scene.

Back porch water shelves were central to farm life in other, less dramatic, ways. Agricultural laborers, hunters, or dirty children paused at the water shelf to quench their thirst or to clean up before a meal. In homes without indoor plumbing, the dangling bucket provided a reasonable approximation of running water for washing hands, hair or dishes while the basin below conserved precious fresh water for cleaning fish, poultry, or vegetables or for other housework, minimizing the onerous labor of hauling it from the well or creek.

As the nineteenth century became the twentieth and the rural agricultural environment of the Southern frontier began to change, the homes of yeoman farmers and their relationship to the world around them changed as well. By far the most visible sign of things to come in rural Mississippi households was the disappearance of back porches in favor of shed rooms.

In the early 1900s, fewer people were sharing more household space than ever before. A typical yeoman household before the Civil War contained six people; fully one quarter had at least eight members, and many held upwards of ten. In 1860, thirty-five percent of yeomen shared their homes with boarders, live-in field hands or extended family members in addition to the nuclear family of parents and their children—all in a two-room house.²⁰ In contrast, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the average household size had decreased to five members and live-in help had all but disappeared.²¹ At the same time, the number of rooms in rural houses grew. By 1910 ninety-three percent of farm houses in turn-of-the-century Mississippi had three to five rooms.

The most common and easiest way to add rooms to a traditional house was to turn a back porch into a shed room. Between the outside wall of the house and the existing porch roof and floor, shed rooms were already half built, needing only three more walls to "box in" the room.²² With a shed room or two, most families could have separate bedrooms for children and parents plus another room in which no one regularly slept such as a kitchen, dining room, or pantry. Beginning in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, an increasing number of farm families chose from the outset to construct one or more rear shed rooms and

forego the back porch all together.

The Tishomingo County home once owned by Tobe and Nancy Eaton is a typical example of the way many families modified the traditional two-room house plan to create private sleeping area for their male and female children. [Figure 8] Constructed around 1894, the Eaton home consisted of a long front porch, two sixteen by sixteen foot rooms and two much smaller shed rooms. One of the larger rooms served as a bedroom for the couple's two sons Lee and Fletcher. Tobe, Nancy, and their infant daughter Mattie slept in the adjacent front room which doubled as the family's living room during the day. Behind this multipurpose room, was a shed bedroom for Tobe and Nancy's older daughters Liddy and Eller—in safe proximity to their parents and, unlike their brothers' room, with no direct access to the



Figure 7: Water Shelf, Jess Watson House, Rankin County, Mississippi. PHOTO MDAH

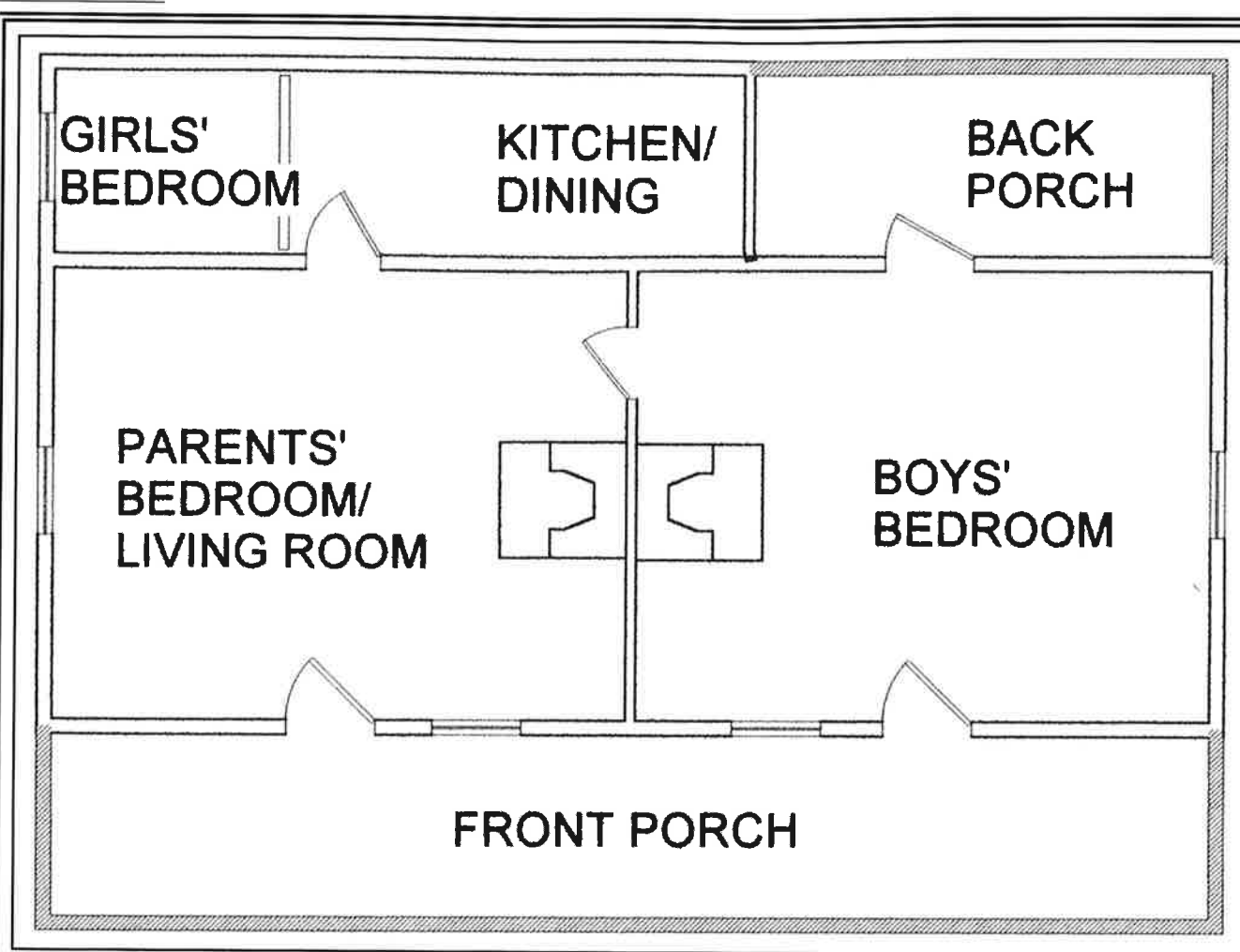


Figure 8: Floor plan of Eaton home, 1894. Tishomingo County, Mississippi. ILLUSTRATION BY AUTHOR

outdoors. The other shed room served as a combination kitchen/dining area. Next to the kitchen, behind the boys' bedroom, was a shortened back porch. By 1910, that porch too had been enclosed to provide an additional bedroom and storage space.²³

After embracing the two-room house type for three generations, why did rural Mississippians shift seemingly overnight away from back porches and toward private bedrooms? The answer lies in economic and demographic changes in the last two decades of the nineteenth century resulting in the end of subsistence oriented agriculture as Mississippians had known it. Although late nineteenth-century Mississippi could scarcely be described as urbanized, neither was it the same world of community and kinship relations that had once revolved on an axis of agricultural production and biological reproduction.

On yeoman farmsteads of the early 1800s, procreation was a readily observable fact of life "in the barn-

yard as well as the house."²⁴ Most families cooked, ate, worked, played, slept, conceived their children and bore them in one main room—the hearthroom. Many children shared a room, if not a bed, with their parents or other adults. The agricultural landscape with its never ending cycles of life was equally familiar territory. In a culture where children worked side by side with their fathers, mothers, siblings, hired hands, and slaves if the family owned any, all kids knew the job of the bull in the pasture and the rooster in the hen house.²⁵

After the turn of the twentieth century, however, home-raised livestock began to play a less crucial role in many families' subsistence. As new farming practices diminished the importance of children's labor on the farm, rural families no longer felt compelled to raise large broods of their own. Gradually, many parents came to view children as helpless dependents rather than productive members of the household. As such, children needed to be sheltered from the moral com-

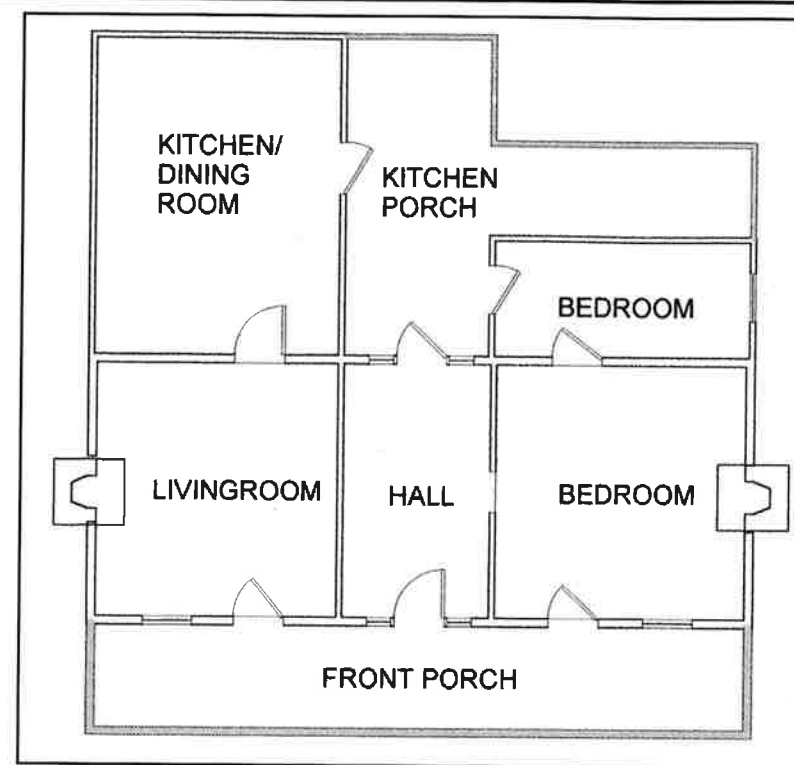


Figure 9: Floor plan of a typical rural Mississippi house, 1880-1910. ILLUSTRATION BY AUTHOR

plexities of the adult world. One way to accomplish this was to seclude young children from adults or adolescents and to separate children of opposite sexes from one another.

By 1900, growing numbers of people were living away from farms entirely, and extended family networks were beginning to erode. Increasingly powerful evangelical churches began to replace traditional patriarchal control over the household and its occupants by pushing a more idealized version of the home as a bastion of Christian morality centered around women and children. Further, the myth that aggressively virile black men potentially lurked around every street corner intent upon the rape of white women culminated in the 1890s in a hysteria known as the rape complex. This phobia, in turn, laid the foundation for an idolatrous cult of Southern womanhood that placed white women atop a pedestal of virtue from which they descended at their peril. As a result of all these factors, common white Mississippians, like their porches, began to literally turn away from their communities.

KITCHEN PORCHES

Another dramatic change to traditional yeoman houses came with the addition of a kitchen. For the first

fifty years of white settlement on the Southern frontier, only thirteen percent of the folk houses constructed in the Mississippi hills contained kitchens. Most women prepared food on the porch or dogtrot or in the hearthroom and cooked it over the same open fire that was the home's principle source of heat and light. Suddenly by 1910 over 60 percent had a special room just for cooking.

Like other trends in vernacular building, kitchen additions followed a distinct pattern. Although a few families put their kitchens in a shed room, the vast majority built kitchen ells—a rectangular wing set at a right angle to the back of the house. Kitchen ells almost always had a full-length porch. Owners of dogtrots, such as the Pond family in Pontotoc County, placed their kitchen porches in line with the breezeway so that the air running through the dogtrot could help cool the kitchen porch as well. If the house had not entirely lost its back porch, the kitchen porch

adjoined it right in the middle, creating an inward-facing L-shaped gallery. [Figure 9]

The kitchen porch gave a new center to the house, drawing the trot visually and functionally backward toward the newly-created, more private, kitchen yard. Instead of shelling peas or peeling potatoes on the front porch or dogtrot, women found it more convenient to bring food-related jobs onto the kitchen porch, which was much less in sight of their neighbors and passers by. Historian Thomas Hubka writes that the kitchen yard or "dooryard" "was the outside center of the farm in much the same way as the kitchen was the inside center" providing "a spatial and experiential focus to life on the family farm."²⁶ [Figure 10]

In the kitchen yard, it was no longer necessary to literally air one's laundry in public. To one standing on the back porch or behind the house, the kitchen ell cut off the view of a third of the landscape, effectively circumscribing the back yard and the activities within it. A number of kitchen porches also had built-in wells or cisterns that provided ready fresh water for domestic tasks, putting an end to the ritual labor of carrying water from a distant source. Most ell kitchens also had coal-burning stoves which eliminated the necessity of gathering or chopping wood to keep a large fire burning in an open



Figure 10: Kitchen porch with yard. Pond House, Pontotoc County, Mississippi. PHOTO MDAH

hearth. Whereas the old back porch had been a threshold to the outbuildings and fields beyond, the kitchen porch and kitchen yard encouraged a much more home-centered view of the world.

At the same time, professional home economists emerged, preaching the gospel of progressive home making and child rearing. They encouraged women to focus on domestic tasks like cleaning, canning, sewing, and home decorating and exhorted men to take control over traditionally female farmyard chores like poultry keeping and dairying. Evangelical ministers joined the chorus, hailing housework as "home heroism."²⁷ The kitchen porch came to not only divide the landscape but to physically define the outer limits of women's daily activities.

VICTORIAN VERNACULAR AND BUNGALOWS

While back porches were becoming an endangered species, the popularity of front porches was on the rise. Eight out of ten rural Mississippians who built new houses between 1880 and the 1910s included a front

porch in their plans. However, these new front porches had little to do with their owners' sense of openness or community. The increasing number of front porches around the turn of the century was largely due to the growing popularity of two new house types — first, the Victorian vernacular or "gable and wing" style and later, the bungalow.

Victorian vernacular houses are basically folk interpretations of the formal architectural style popularly known as Queen Anne. [Figure 11] One can immediately recognize examples of the type by their front-facing gables and porches that extend only two thirds of the way across the front of the house but often wrap around one side. Victorian vernacular houses typically lack the elaborate gingerbread, bay windows, leaded glass, and other details common to polite Victorian cottages. The intent of their builders, however, was the same. Like the porticoed central hall houses before them, Victorian vernacular houses were signs of upward mobility, aspirations to gentility, and exclusiveness from the community.



Figure 11: Victorian Vernacular House Type. John McDaniel House, Pontotoc County, Mississippi. PHOTO MDAH

Many families remodeled their traditional two-room houses to mimic Victorian style, which meant tearing off part of the old front porch to make room for a parlor with a front-facing gable. While the added wrap around porch may have resulted in a net gain of porch space, the new side porch had more to do with women's domestic and social pastimes than with orientation toward the neighborhood. The fact that these side porches faced away from the house, rather than toward the kitchen yard as ell porches did, was a sign that aspiring Victorian women were not very involved in work that went on behind the home. The wrap-around gallery was a beacon to all passers by of their owners' monetary success, consciousness of modern style, and declining interest in yeoman practicality.

In contrast to the welcoming openness of dogtrot, Victorian vernacular houses were designed to limit the access of outsiders to the family within. Picket fences and porch railings, like roadblocks to the free access traditionally shared between rural houses and the landscape, punctuated the growing separation between

family and community. Once inside, visitors stepped into an entry hall or a parlor. Designed for formal visiting, with special furnishings and shelves full of non-functional, impersonal "what nots," parlors showed visitors only those glimpses of the homeowner's family and interests that the host wished to reveal.

The insularity of the Victorian vernacular house type symbolized a society desperately trying to regain control over social and economic factors gone haywire. Decades earlier in northern cities, middle and upper-class homeowners had sought refuge behind the closed doors of their Victorian-style homes from urbanization, immigration, and the frightening social changes that accompanied them.²⁸ In rural Mississippi around the turn of the century, many white landowners were similarly afraid of the increasingly precarious nature of their society.

Death and destruction due to the Civil War and growing economic competitiveness between farmers helped to erode relationships between neighbors. In addition, decreasing corn production, an abundance of



Figure 12: Bungalow converted from a dogtrot. Gilmore House, Rankin County, Mississippi. PHOTO MDAH

already cleared land, and the easy availability of milled lumber and machine-made nails all helped put an end to traditional work-sharing festivities like corn shuckings, fodder pulls, log rollings, and house raisings which had once brought families together.²⁹ The community-aided self-sufficiency common earlier in the century, the deep cultural attachment to neighbors and kin and the spirit of mutual cooperation that had flourished a few decades earlier were no longer possible.³⁰

The uneasiness that common white farmers felt over the deterioration of their communities and customs was exacerbated by mounting racial tensions. Like the urban middle classes who were suspicious of immigrants and other working class strangers on the streets outside their doors, post-Civil War yeoman farmers, most of whom had experienced little close contact with African Americans before emancipation, simultaneously retreated and retaliated.

The wave of lynchings that began during Reconstruction and peaked in the 1890s was worst in

areas like the hill country of north Mississippi where the overall population density was low but the recent influx of African Americans was high. Violence thrived in regions where whites felt invaded by itinerant workers who had no relationship with white employers, no long-standing local ties, nor any support network within an established black community.³¹ Whites who did not adhere to strict rules of social and racial propriety became equally suspect. Paranoia and uncertainty took its toll.

The poisoned well of intolerance did not limit itself to matters of race. In the late nineteenth-century, evangelicalism graduated from the camp meeting to the state house making crimes of activities that had formerly been thought of as sins.³² Reflecting their sentiments as husbands and fathers, lawmakers demonstrated their desire to defend the virtue of women and protect the innocence of children. By 1910, the Mississippi legislature had made it illegal to gamble in private homes, to use profanity in the presence of a woman, and even prohibited citizens from keeping a



Figure 13: Dogtrot enclosed by sidelights and transoms. T. B. Webb House, Rankin County, Mississippi. PHOTO MDAH

stallion or jackass within sight of a church. By building Victorian vernacular houses and adopting the canon of etiquette that they represented, rural whites exhibited their desire to impose some sense of moral and social order on their environment.³³

The bungalow, in theory, represents earthiness, simplicity, and an informal approach to living — the stylistic opposite of Victorian vernacular houses.³⁴ In contrast to the highly specialized rooms of Victorian houses, the wide open living spaces of the bungalow speak of a “studied casualness.”³⁵ In practice, however — at least in the yeoman counties of Mississippi — these two house types were very similar.

In America, the term bungalow usually conjures up images of a relatively small house with a big front porch and a low-hung roof supported by heavy brick posts. Typically, the front door of a bungalow opened directly into a large, airy room which was the family’s main living space as well as a place for entertaining guests. With wood-paneled walls, beamed ceilings, rustic stone fireplaces, and front porches that were

wide and deep, the lure of the cozy bungalow was particularly strong for suburbanites longing for a return to rural simplicity. For the owners of Mississippi’s traditional vernacular house types and their descendants, bungalows already felt familiar. [Figure 12]

Rather than completely rejecting the ideals embodied in Victorian architecture, bungalows offered Mississippians a more subtle alternative to long-held housing traditions. While many Victorian vernacular homes relied on coal stoves or radiators for their heat, the wood-burning central hearth remained both a practical and symbolic feature of most bungalows. The massive brick columns of a bungalow porch were less welcoming than an open dogtrot but its long, low craftsman-style veranda fit more naturally into the rural landscape than the standoffish Victorian-style gallery. In addition, most bungalows had kitchens that were integrated into the body of the house rather than appended in an ell but, unlike most Victorian vernacular houses, some had at least a partial back porch.

Still, the kinder, gentler bungalow was largely illu-

sion. Like many Victorian vernacular homes, bungalows were often created by remodeling older two-room houses. As with the T. B. Webb House in Rankin County, side lights and transoms surrounding extra-wide front doors disguise the once open breezeways of dogtrot all over the region. [Figure 13] In addition to covering up what was perhaps the most prominent symbol of rural folk culture, the enclosed dogtrot meant that the casual bungalow appearance was only skin deep. Upon entering the front door of a converted dogtrot, one would find not the open living room of the ideal bungalow but one of the most uninviting spaces in domestic architecture—a central hall.

To some white Mississippians, bungalows appealed to the same insecurities about strangers, social mobility, and morality that gave rise to the Victorian vernacular style. Conservative patriotic organizations like the Daughters of the Confederacy were among the first to promote architecture as a way of honoring cultural ancestors and preserving white Anglo-Saxon Protestant cultural traditions.³⁶ They found allies within the Arts and Crafts movement of the 1890s-1920s which gave birth to the bungalow craze. Proponents of Arts and Crafts aimed to combat the homogenizing effects of industrialization by encouraging Americans to revere traditional forms of craftsmanship. Nativists and white supremacists seized upon Craftsman rhetoric to disparage the products of immigrant cultural influences, such as Catholic church inspired Gothic architecture, in favor of what they viewed as "100 percent Americanism." The bungalow style was both indigenous and appealed to Mississippians' deeply-rooted sensibilities about what a proper house should be.

Of all the vernacular houses surveyed for this study that were built before 1880, two mimicked Victorian tastes and none appreciably resembled bungalows. Between 1880 and 1910, a third of the new vernacular houses built in Mississippi's yeoman counties copied either Victorian or bungalow styles. An additional 14 percent of yeoman families remodeled their older homes to adhere to one of these new trends. The combined influences of Victorian vernacular and Bungalow houses were challenging the claim of the once ubiquitous dogtrot to dominance over the rural Mississippi landscape.

Despite all the changes to and around them, front porches remained a prominent part of Mississippians' vision of home. Today, the front porch is enjoying a

renaissance as both a cultural symbol and a functional living space. To an increasing number of American house designers and new home-buyers, the neighborliness that front porches represent is once again a desirable attribute. Whether the rediscovery of porches by modern developers will help to revive real openness and community-mindedness among twenty-first-century Americans remains to be judged by historians of a future generation. What is clear is that over the course of the nineteenth century, Mississippi's porches played a role in building and then redefining relationships between families and communities, labor and leisure, genders and generations. MF

SUSAN DITTO received her Ph.D. in History at the University of Mississippi.

ENDNOTES

1. Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 280.
2. Los Angeles architect Michael Woodley, quoted in Bradley Inman, "Meet You On the Porch: Television Ruined Icon," *Inman News Features* (December 23, 1996), 1.
3. Frederick Law Olmsted, *Journey Through Texas* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860).
4. Jackson, 280.
5. Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), 101; Warren R. Hofstra, "Private Dwellings, Public Ways, and the Landscape of Early Rural Capitalism in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley," in Elizabeth Collins Cromley and Carter L. Hudgins, eds., *Gender, Class, and Shelter: Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, V* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 219; Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650-1750* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1984), 61-65.
6. Andrea Niles and Davida Rochlin, "Architecture in Georgia: The Evolution of the Porch," Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, Pamphlet Series, Number 3 (1979), 1; William Ferris, "The Dogtrot: A Mythic Image in Southern Culture," *Southern Quarterly* 25: (Fall 1986) 72-85.
7. Arnold J. Aho, *Neo-Dogtrot Mississippi: A Low-Cost Passive Solar House for Rural Mississippi* (State University, Mississippi: Mississippi State University, 1981), 16.
8. Steven D. Smith, et. al., *Ethnoarchaeology of the Bay Springs Farmsteads: A Study of Rural American Settlement*, (Nashville: U. S. Army Corps of Engineers), 104.
9. Daniel R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern*

States (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 57-58.

10. Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia: 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 304-5; Michael Ann Williams, *Homeplace: The Social Use and Meaning of the Folk Dwelling in Southwestern North Carolina* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 93-96; Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), 120-21.
11. Williams, 103.
12. Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 74.
13. Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1983), 112; Clifford Clark, *The American Family Home: 1800-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 40-46.
14. Ted Ownby, *American Dreams in Mississippi: Consumers, Poverty, & Culture, 1830-1998* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 7-32; See also Sally McMurry, *Families & Farmhouses in 19th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 148-56; Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 107-113; Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 70-77.
15. Chancery Court Minutes, Lafayette County, 1836-39; Inventory Records of Estates, Monroe County, 1858-61; Inventories & Appraisements, Rankin County, 1854-58, 1863-65, 1865-72.
16. "Inventory Records of Estates, Monroe County, 1870-74, 1884-90, 1890-97; "Accounts & Reports of Probate," Rankin County, 1872-94.
17. Smith, et. al., 51.
18. Jack Elliott, interview with Mabel Sowell, March 8, 1990, MDAH; Nannie Jackson, *Vinegar Pie and Chicken Bread: A Woman's Diary of Life in the Rural South, 1890-1891* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1982).
19. Will Campbell, *Brother to a Dragonfly* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1988), 18.
20. Eighth Census of the United States (1860), Population.
21. Twelfth Census of the United States (1900), Agriculture and Population.
22. In an interview with researchers for the Historic American Buildings Survey, Laster Short said of a house in the Bay Springs community of Tishomingo County, "The only thing I know of that they added to it, there was a little porch back there, they boxed that in." Smith, et. al., 145.
23. Smith, et. al., 121-22.
24. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Goodwives: Image and Reality in*

the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750 (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 95; John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 17.

25. Laura F. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 149-151; McCurry, 78-83.
26. Hubka, 77.
27. Reverend Charles Galloway, *Galloway Papers* (Mississippi Department of Archives and History).
28. Clifford Clark, 40-42; Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 147-52.
29. Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 182.
30. Christopher Clark, "Household Economy, Market Exchange, and the Rise of Capitalism," *Journal of American Social History* 13 (1979): 174-75.
31. Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 156-57; See also Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); and Gerald David Jaynes, *Branches Without Roots: Genesis of the Black Working Class in the American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
32. Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 169.
33. Edwards, 136.
34. Wright, 158-176; Clifford Clark, 170-192; Candace M. Volz, "The Modern Look of the Early-Twentieth-Century House: A Mirror of Changing Lifestyles," in Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth, eds., *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 25-48; and Catherine C. Grier, "The Decline of the Memory Palace: The Parlor after 1890," in Foy and Schlereth, 64-66.
35. Wright, 167.
36. Lizabeth A. Cohen, "Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes, 1885-1915," in Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, eds., *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 263-264; Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

NOTE: All photos courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS.

"I can sit right here, thinks a thousand miles away"¹

REVEALING THE BLUES IN THE SPACE OF

Jukejoints

by Jennifer Nardone

*Jukejoint architecture and decoration help express and sustain the sense of community
vital in places that serve as homes of the blues.*

In a 1934 essay entitled "Characteristics of Negro Expression," Zora Neale Hurston declared jukejoints "the most important space in America, musically speaking, for in its smelly, shoddy confines has been born the secular music know as blues."² The study of blues as a musical and cultural phenomenon has been well documented, but the physical spaces of the blues remain somewhat more elusive. While photographic documentation, such as Marion Post-Wolcott's WPA photos taken inside jukejoints during the great depression, and more recently Mississippi photographer Birney Imes' book simply titled, *Jukejoint*, continues to preserve the image of these spaces, placing jukejoints within the large cultural landscape of the Deep South and blues culture remains complex. Despite the outward appearance of "shoddy confines", as Hurston observed, jukejoints prove a richly manifold place for investigation and interpretation.

Historian Dell Upton has claimed that vernacular spaces require consideration of both the seen and unseen principles involved in creating the space, not simply studying the floor plan. According to Upton:

A fruitful approach to landscape would be

to start from its claim that it is a complete record of evidence and to inquire why that claim is effective – while demonstrating how much the scene demands that we do not see. By picking apart the seen and unseen, we can begin to get at the variety of human experience in a way that shatters the landscape's pretenses. This conjunction of seen and unseen, then, draws our attention to the experience of landscape as well as its initial creation. It emphasizes the relative roles of vision and the intangible in the interpretation of landscape.³

In many senses, jukejoints offer this duality of seen and unseen principles working in tandem; what appear as simple spaces on the surface become much more complex when considered within the context of the music and the overall cultural landscape.

While jukejoints speckle the entire southern landscape, the Mississippi Delta claims a particularly high number of these establishments. The frequency of jukejoints derives from the strong influence of blues culture in general within the Mississippi Delta, considered the birthplace of blues by most music historians. It is no

accident that the Delta was also considered one of the most violently oppressive cultures for African Americans during Jim Crow segregation, when blues music began developing into a distinct format and sound. Historians of the blues have long established the indelible connection between the oppression and violence of being black in the South with the voice and message heard in blues. LeRoi Jones called blues a "functional music," a way to exercise frustration at the oppression fused with their daily lives.⁴ Blues may have a definitive rhythm and scale, but the emotional investment felt in the lyrics and the personal delivery of the musician truly defines the blues.

The music derived from secular work songs heard in the fields, first by black slaves and subsequently black sharecroppers. Lawrence Levine observed that:

Work songs, and black secular songs in general, were characteristically marked by a realistic depiction of the workers' situation. In this way too they provided relief by underlining the truth that the individual worker did not suffer an individual fate. His problems were shared and understood by his fellows to whom he could be frank, and with whom he could communicate in detail.⁵

In essence, blues addressed the very ordinary occurrences of day-to-day life for African Americans living in the Delta—topics from the weather to sex to good cooking. The contrast between the oppressive reality of this day-to-day life and the sense of freedom and often-rebellious rage heard in the music transforms the blues into an extra-ordinary experience. By no means is blues simply a black expression of anger, but rather a method for functioning with this reality, as Jones described.

The political and social circumstances of Jim Crow segregation frame the beginning and rise of blues music and consequently are a significant factor in reading the buildings and landscape of the Delta. Jukejoints offer

the most direct connection between the music and the landscape. Upton's premise that as historians we consider both the seen and unseen becomes essential when investigating jukes. Although jukejoints from the segregation period are rare, if not totally extinct today, contemporary jukejoints continue to operate and function analogously. An investigation of late twentieth-century jukejoints requires evoking the principles of blues and thus how earlier jukes functioned and fit within the overall cultural landscape. The official dismantling of segregation had little effect on the ways patrons and proprietors envision and utilize these spaces.

In the summer of 1997, I traveled to the Mississippi Delta as part of my master's thesis research. All the images and information concerning the jukejoints in this article were gathered during that period and on a second visit in February 1998. The ephemeral nature of these spaces deems that some of this information might have changed since then, yet it still offers a useful

basis for considering how the buildings draw from blues and, ultimately, work to define and redefine the cultural landscape.

Junior Kimbrough's jukejoint, located in Holly Springs, Mississippi, demonstrates these connections between the space and the music. Although Junior's is not in the Delta, Kimbrough was born and raised there and operated his juke similarly to those found in the Delta. In fact, Kimbrough ran many jukejoints while he lived in the Delta, including some out of his house.⁶ Several years prior to his death in February 1998, Junior's two sons Kinny and David assumed the duties of operating the juke, although Junior remained a looming presence, and most will always think of the juke as Junior's.

The building housing Junior's served several functions prior to the jukejoint, established in the early 1980s.⁷ The floor plan [Figure 1] illustrates how the core of the building has been divided over the years, creating

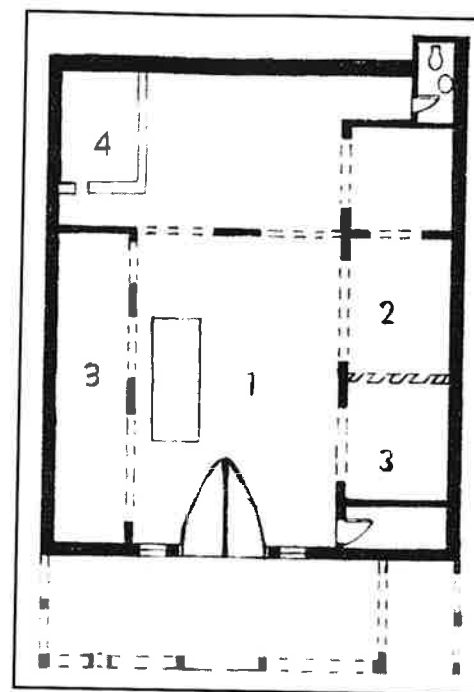
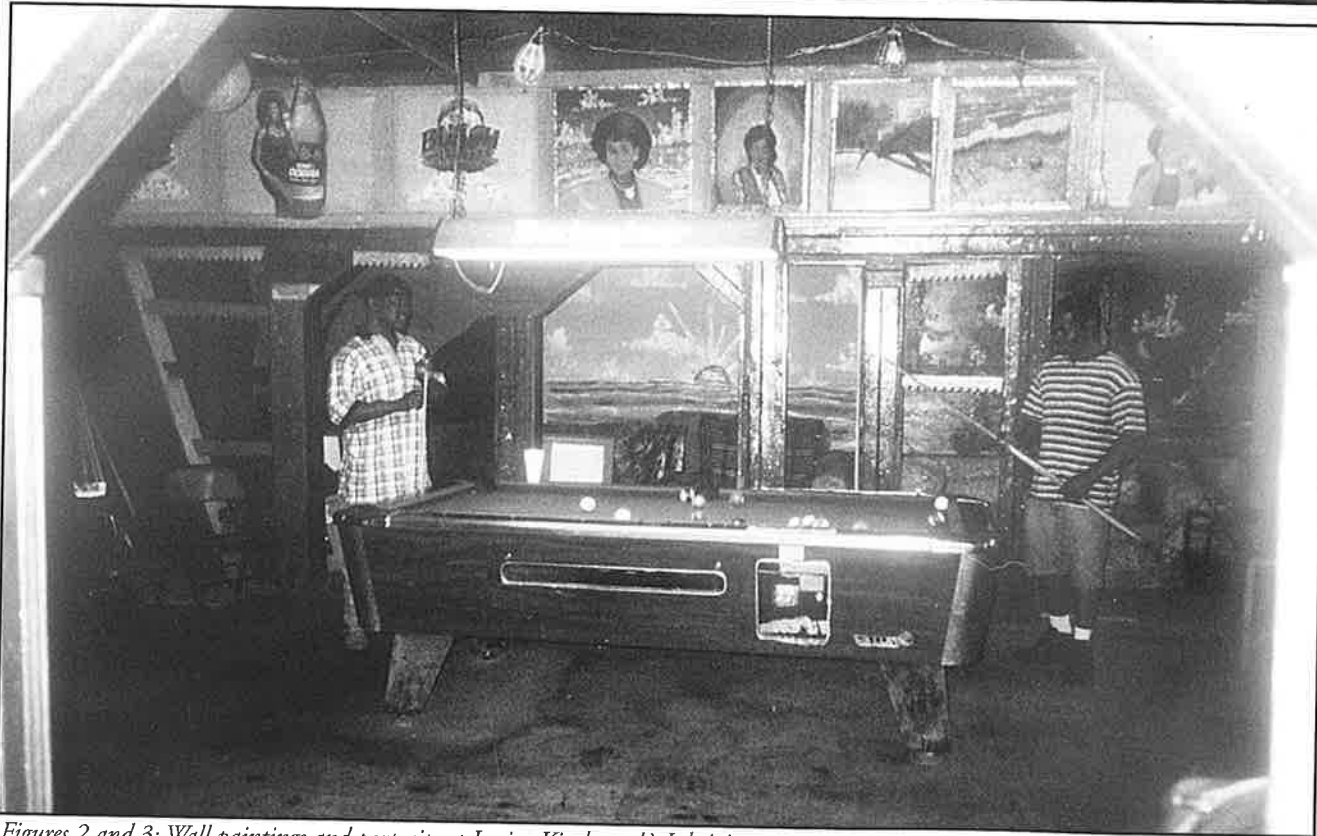


Figure 1: Floor plan of Junior Kimbrough's Jukejoint, Holly Springs, MS. Key to drawing: 1=main space framed by portraits; 2=stage area; 3=seating areas; 4=bar. ILLUSTRATION BY AUTHOR



Figures 2 and 3: Wall paintings and portraits at Junior Kimbrough's Jukejoint. PHOTOS BY AUTHOR

unusual elements for the jukejoint such as partial walls around the stage area. Jukejoints are never really built, however, so no template exists for comparative analysis, and ultimately, the foot plan of a jukejoint only offers an initial and surface consideration of the space. Glaringly absent within the formal floor plan of Junior's are the wall paintings that truly define this space.

Every interior wall at Junior's, except within the bar area, contains colorful paintings ranging from landscape scenes to portraiture [Figure 2]. The main frame walls hold floor-to-ceiling paintings of scenes and places—a house, a forest, a sunset, mountains and palms trees. On the interior rafters surrounding the pool table area, a series of portraits depicting famous African Americans are shown, although most bear little resemblance to the real person [Figure 3]. The paintings were done by a local patron at Junior's request, shortly after he moved his juke into the building.⁸ Details such as the tablecloths and vase of plastic flowers found on every table at Junior's also merit mentioning as ways the proprietors (and most likely patrons as well) transform this interior space into something more than an old store building.

On one level, simply adding elements such as paintings within a space reveals a sense of care on the part of the proprietor. These might be shoddy confines as Hurston described, but they hold definite meaning for the people who frequent the juke. On another level, the addition of these enormous paintings redefines the interior space into both an audio and visual experience. While not all jukejoints continue to have live blues regularly, relying instead on jukeboxes and disc jockeys, Junior's almost always offers live music. In a sense, the paintings offer a method of escapism, much like the blues itself. Standing in the sections marked three and five in Figure 1 means literally standing in a painting, surrounded by disparate scenes such as a palm tree on one side and a forest on the other. Although this may seem coincidental at first glance, consider Upton's suggestion that we uncover the unseen elements shaping the visible environment.

Blues historian Paul Garon described the escapism in blues music as a way of establishing another realm or otherworldliness where both the audience and the narrator play out fantasies, ranging from sexual fulfillment to reaping revenge on an oppressive white boss. Garon wrote:

Our elucidation of the blues as "primitive" is neither gratuitous nor demeaning; for we see

in the blues a suggestion of humanities original vitality and pride. Our conception of primitive merges with our conception of non-alienation. What we seek in the blues is a glimmer of freedom; and it is there, in every song.

This freedom must be viewed dialectically, however. While it is indeed the freedom implicit in the creative process, and as such, a potentially common property, and while one of the blues' most intriguing facets is its closeness to the instinctual sources, the blues singers are also victims of all the repressive conditions that contribute to the degradations of everyday life. In their songs, then, we see not only an especially eloquent demand for freedom, but once again owing to the level on which the blues operates, a particularly vivid depiction of humanity's repressed state.⁹

The jukejoint serves as this other realm, and the process of displacement Garon mentions can be read in the wall paintings at Junior's. They literally frame the music and the community gathered inside the juke.

Garon touched on a fundamental element of blues culture: non-alienation. Jukejoints operate very differently from traditional public spaces where anonymity lies in the discretion of the individual patron. Anonymity does not exist within a jukejoint. In fact, without the sense of community the jukejoint doesn't really exist. Although blues music may focus on the individual experience, it functions as a thread into the larger, communal experience. As Levine wrote, blues (and music in general) underlines the notion that the individual person does not suffer an individual fate.

This principle of the music translates into the space as well. Poor Monkey's Lounge, located in Merigold, Mississippi, demonstrates the importance of the communal experience within the jukejoint. Monkey, whose real name is Willie Seaberry, began running his jukejoint shortly after moving to Hiter Farm in the early 1950s where he still works and lives today. Initially, he lived in a separate residence and ran his juke with his brother out of an old sharecropper shack located on the farm. In 1963, however, Monkey made an interesting choice concerning his residence and his jukejoint. He moved into his juke, primarily so people could find him more easily. During the early years of his juke, the space became the primary definition of Monkey. It seemed logical then, that the juke literally become his home.

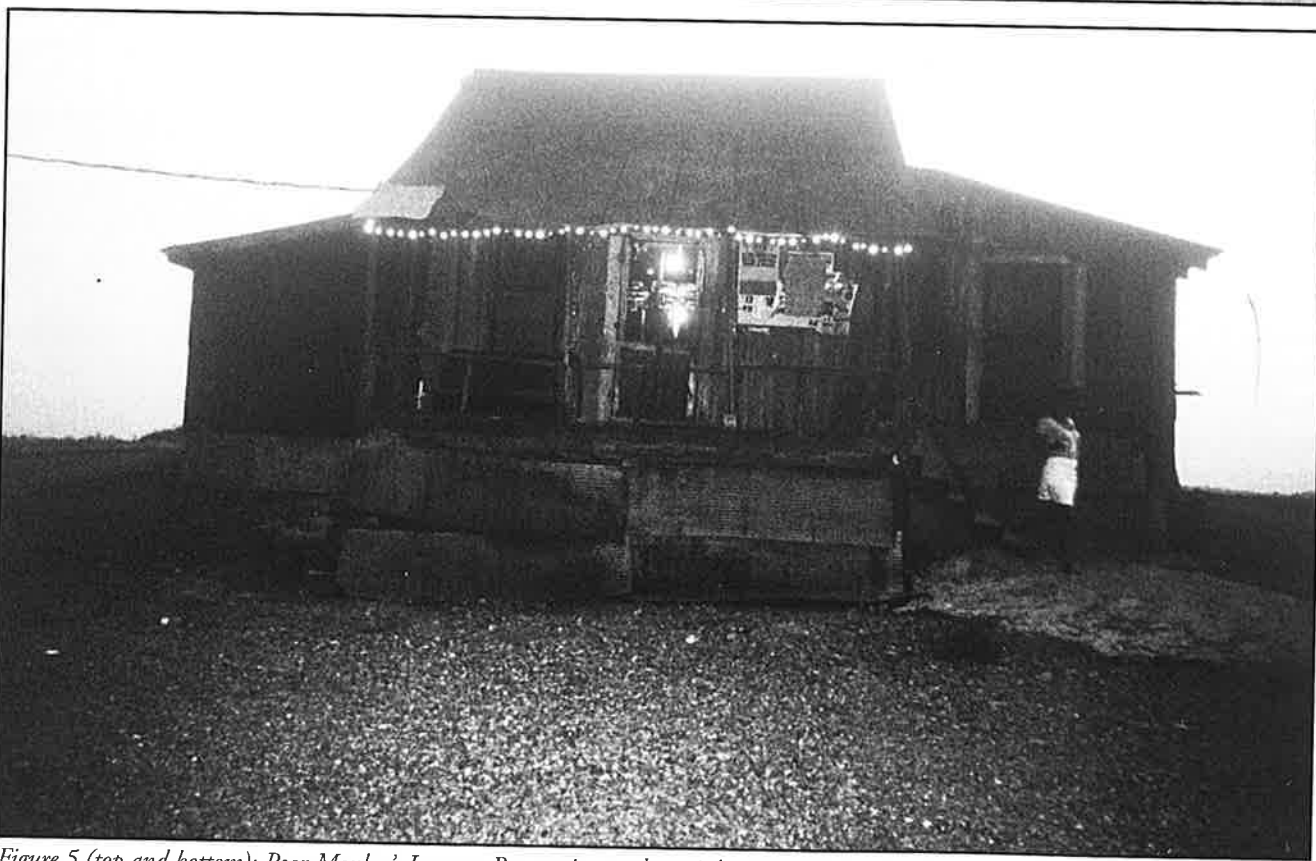
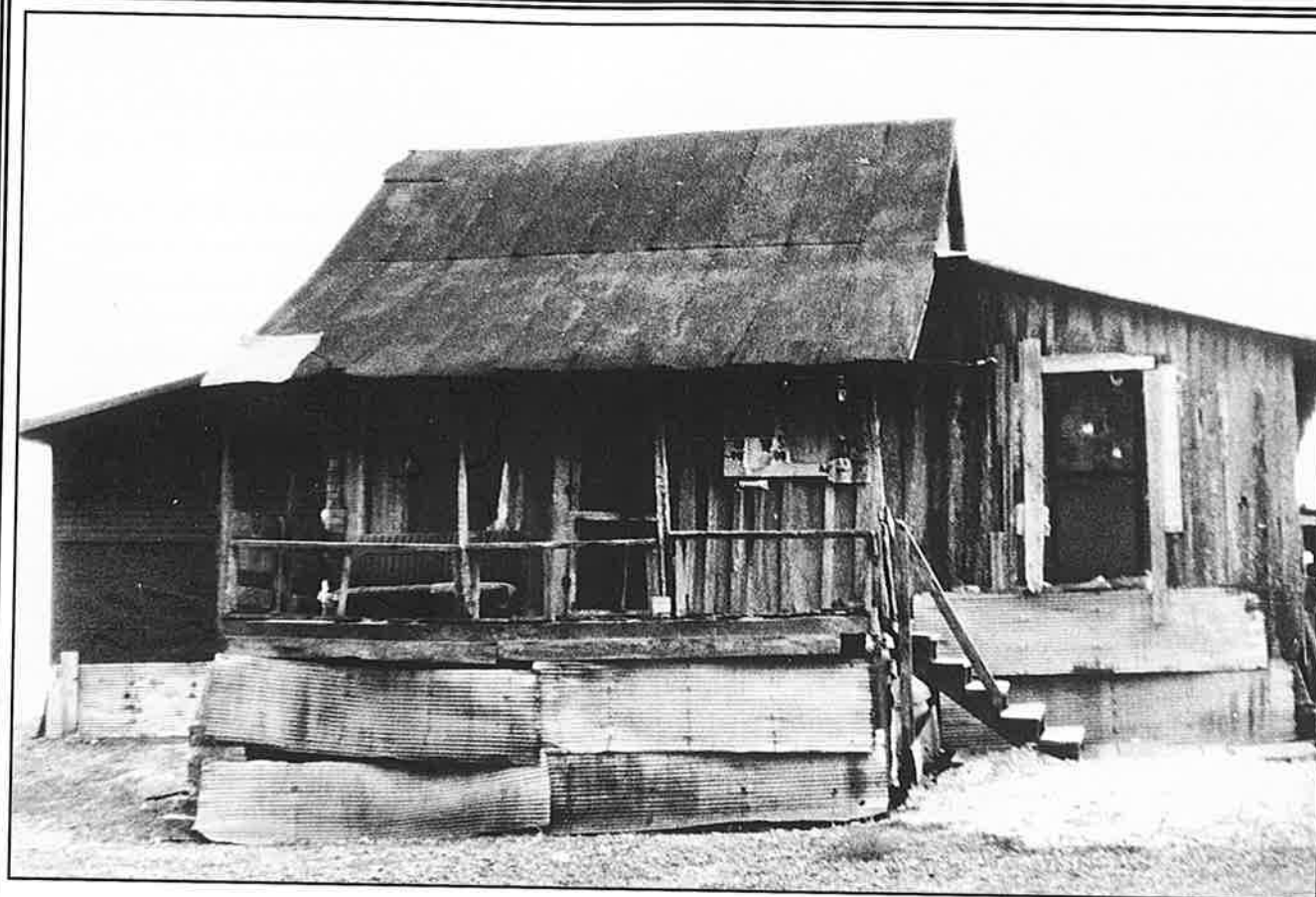


Figure 5 (top and bottom): Poor Monkey's Lounge. Bottom image shows jukejoint with the 'open' sign turned on. PHOTOS BY AUTHOR

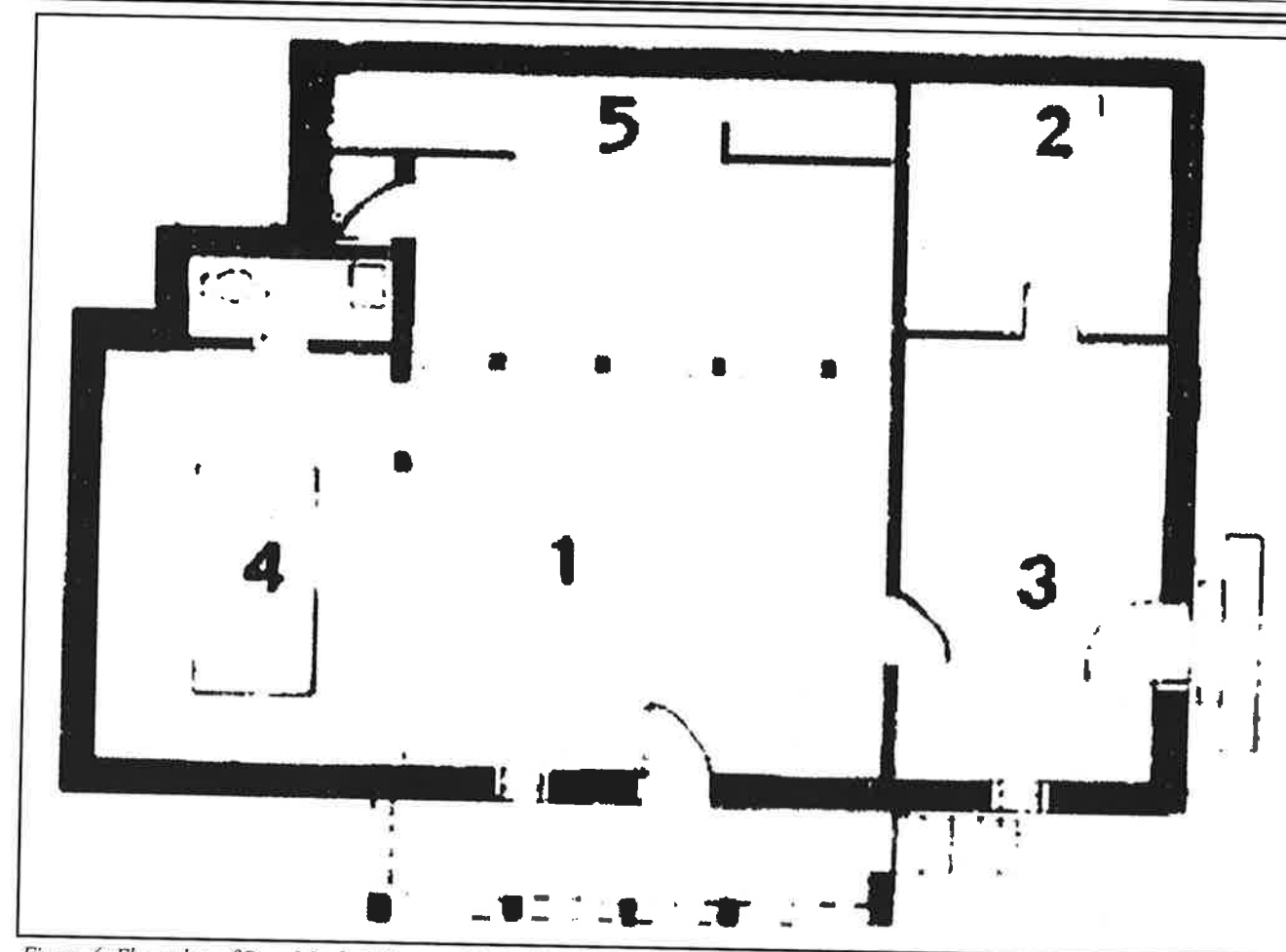


Figure 4: Floor plan of Poor Monkey's Lounge, Merigold, Mississippi. Key to drawing: 1=original house and main space of jukejoint; 2=Monkey's bedroom; 3=kitchen/bar area; 4=pool table; 5=DJ/band area. ILLUSTRATION BY AUTHOR

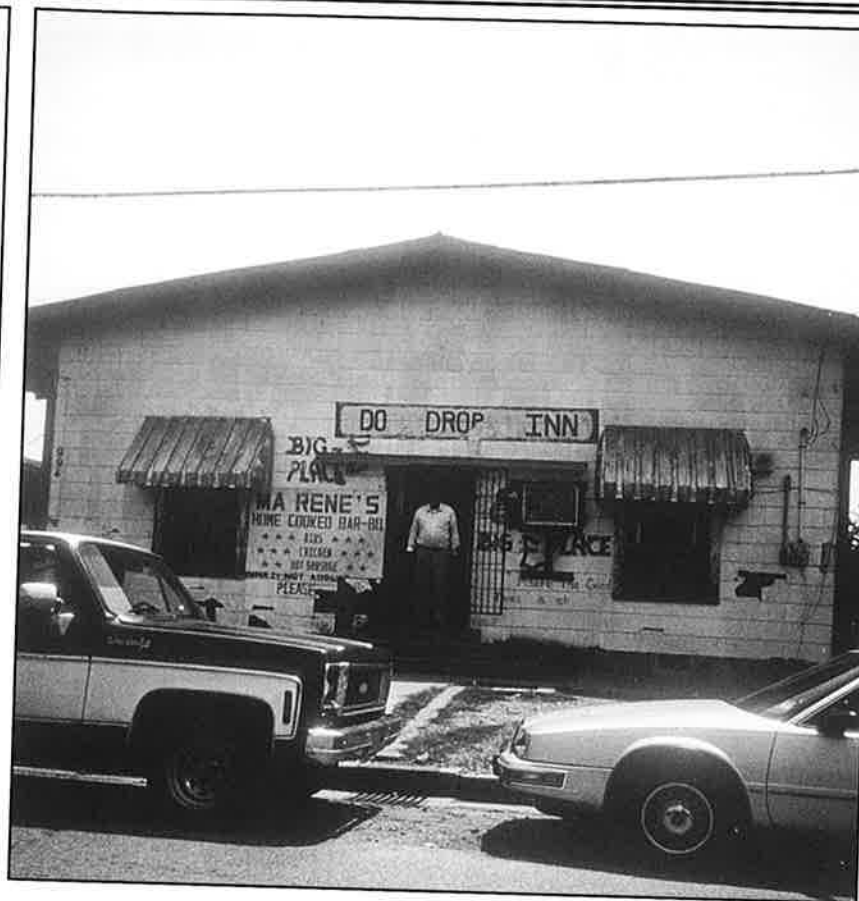
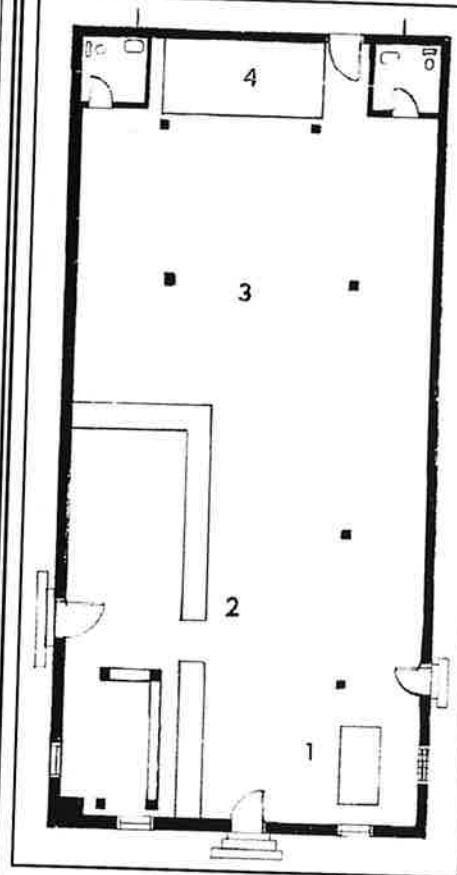
This fusion of the seen and unseen at Monkey's highlights the importance of the connection between the people and the spaces of a jukejoint.

Like Junior's, Monkey's juke usually only runs one night a week. Despite the relatively short period of time the building serves as a jukejoint, Monkey still felt it served as a better home than his actual house. Although the building contains some traditional domestic spaces, it is not a home now, but rather a jukejoint with a full-time occupant [Figure 4]. Interestingly, the smallest space in the building is the only totally private space—Monkey's bedroom. The rest of the house serves as public space, even when the patrons are no longer present [Figure 5].

Monitoring the accessibility inside the jukejoint serves as one of the primary methods for creating the communal sense inside. At Monkey's, as at Junior's, someone stands at the front door, greeting every person who enters. A nominal fee is charged, usually no more than two dollars, so the money is not the primary reason

for situating a door greeter. Rather, the acknowledgment given each patron upon entering becomes key. Most jukes operate almost like small social clubs, where the majority of people know each other. Newcomers are required to join in this dynamic and greeting people at the door becomes a way of ensuring this community within the jukejoint.

The fusion of home and juke seen at Monkey's only exaggerates the importance of monitoring accessibility inside the space. Entering Monkey's becomes a process of interactions, often beginning long before stepping over the threshold. As with most jukejoints, Monkey's has no formal sign designating it public space. This anonymity of the building underscores the principle of non-anonymity among the patrons once inside. Under segregation, these were tactics necessary for survival, and today this opposing principle of an anonymous building lacking the same for its patrons has become a defining principle of the juke. People who belong there will already know how to get inside, no formal sign is need-



Top left: Figure 6: Floor plan of the Do Drop Inn, Shelby, Mississippi. Key to drawing: 1=pool table, 2=kitchen/bar area, 3=main area with wall paintings, 4=stage. Bottom: Figure 7: Do Drop Inn wall painting and the real scene it's based on (photo top right with Proprietor Big E standing in the doorway. ILLUSTRATION AND PHOTOS BY AUTHOR

ed. The idea of the space far outweighs what we see on the outside. Like Junior's wall paintings, a transformation occurs simply because those involved with the space deem it so. In this tradition, Monkey signals the switch from house to jukejoint by lighting a single string of Christmas lights across his porch. Of course, this sign can only hold meaning for those who already understand it.

The elusive boundaries established at Monkey's are not unusual in jukejoints. Like blues music, imagination plays a large role in establishing the meaning of the space. Architectural historian Henry Glassie once wrote, "it is not how a house is built, but how a house is *thought*" that truly defines the space.¹⁰ Investigating Monkey's reveals a completely different way of thinking about domestic and public space, a function of larger cultural principles shared by the people who create and use the space. In many ways, the paintings at Junior's redefine the space as well, by attempting to create another world for the patrons, much like the blues itself. The wordplay and innuendo heard in blues translates into the spatial principles of redefinition through gesture or elusive signals still found in the jukejoints. Assuring that the group gathered within the juke will participate in this redefinition accordingly becomes essential. In both the space and the music of blues, the group plays a primary role. Levine concluded that "by no means was blues meant to be repeated in a frozen form...blues remained communal property and were vehicles for individual and group expression. No single person 'owned' a blues song."¹¹ In other words, as disjointed and shoddy jukejoints and the music created within might initially appear, in fact, they offer a space where the individual becomes communal and the slightest gesture offers a way of escaping the common for the fantastic.

The Do Drop Inn located in Shelby, Mississippi offers another example of creating another realm within the walls of the jukejoint. Ernest Walker, who goes by the name Big E, runs the Do Drop in an old lumberyard. Like most jukejoint proprietors, he holds a day job, working for the city of Shelby. Unlike Junior's and Monkey's, the Do Drop has very little definition within the building, and offers a much larger interior space [Figure 6]. Because of this increased space, more patrons tend to frequent the Do Drop; however, close proximity of the heavy traffic areas, such as the pool table and kitchen, to the front door means the same close monitoring of those entering the juke occurs here as at other

jukes. Big E never strays far from this main area, since he serves as bartender and part time chef. In addition, the regulars at the Do Drop, most of whom have been frequenting Big E's jukes for over twenty years, stay close to the pool table and thus often serve as a buffer for the front door. To walk through the front door of the Do Drop, patrons must work their way through this somewhat elite group of patrons who feel that indelible tie to the jukejoint.

The walls at the Do Drop offer another example of transformation within the jukejoint. Like Junior's, the walls at Big E's are covered with enormous paintings, although these scenes are much less fantastic than Junior's. Still, the attempt to create another realm within this space clearly played a part in the paintings. Consider the main painting at the Do Drop, depicting the jukejoint with Big E's truck parked in front of it, floating in a fantasy world of clouds, water and palms, capped off with a promise that this is "where the good times are" [Figure 6]. Interestingly, Junior's also had palm trees in its paintings, a motif often intended to evoke paradise or fantasy locales. Although Big E's paintings are more realistic than Junior's, the sheer size of some of the scenes adds a sense of surrealism reminiscent of Junior's. Among enormous champagne glasses clinking together and a life-size Playboy bunny sign, the patrons at the Do Drop drink, dance and listen to blues, in a sense mimicking the larger-than-life paintings surrounding them.

The incongruities found in a scene like the Do Drop floating in a fantasy world only reinforce the notion that how patrons and proprietors envision the jukejoint amounts to much more than what we might see on the surface. Garon's discussion of surrealism in the blues clarifies the spatial juxtapositions we see in all these jukejoints. Garon described the surrealism within the music as an attempt by both the audience and the patrons to articulate subconscious desires by creating an unreal or fantastic image in real time and space.¹³ The displacement experienced within jukejoints is part of the defining element, whether it is the blurring of public and private realms at Monkey's or the visual references to entering a separate sphere at Junior's and the Do Drop. Blues historian Paul Oliver has called blues music a "rich storehouse of the fantastic production" for those who participated in the creative process. Arguably, the creative processes for the spaces function quite similarly. When Hurston referred to the juke as shoddy confines, she described these buildings correctly on a certain level;

yet something happens within jukejoints that requires participation and imagination, two elements missing from most traditional buildings. Ultimately, these are covert, or as Upton described, "unseen" principles at work in the establishment of jukejoints. While these covert definitions most likely began as reactionary methods of creating safe space under the system of segregation, they have now become a method of creation with or without a political or social system that served as the initial impetus.

Much of the specific sense of place felt within the jukejoint derives from the closeness felt by the crowd, proprietor and musicians. Jukejoints offer almost no anonymity, even at the larger spaces such as the Do Drop Inn where greeting and recognizing the patrons continue to play important roles in establishing the juke for the night. Much of the responsibility for this sense of space falls on the proprietor, who often blends with the jukejoint itself as at Monkey's Lounge. This principle directly relates to the blues song, known for bridging the personal narrative and the audience. The transcendence in the music comes from this connection between the individual and the communal; within the jukejoint, this connection can be seen in a slightly different form.

Smitty's Red Top Lounge, located in Clarksdale, Mississippi embodies this close connection between the proprietor and the patrons literally. The original Smitty began running this jukejoint in the late 1940s, and it has become somewhat of a Clarksdale landmark since then. The first Smitty died in the 1960s, and several successive owners and proprietors have run the jukejoint since then. James Alford began running Smitty's in 1994, when he made a decision reminiscent of Monkey's decision to move into his jukejoint.¹⁴ Alford assumed the name of Smitty, as all of the previous proprietors have also done. On one level, this illustrates the indelible connection between the physical space and its most significant element—Smitty. To rephrase Glassie, how people think about the building ultimately establishes the meaning within the walls, beginning with Alford and his decision to assume the name of Smitty.

Smitty's also offers another interpretation of the importance of the community in establishing the space within a jukejoint. The definition of Smitty's rests on the people who use the space, and like the space itself, the character of Smitty becomes communal property. "Smitty" belongs to Smitty's; it is part of the juke's community, not the individual. While Smitty's might not

have design elements that distinguish it as a significant building, the definitive components are found in the essence of the blues—the story and the people. As Levine pointed out, no one person owned a blues song, and at the Red Top Lounge, no one person—not even the owner—owns "Smitty's."

In simplest terms, people gather at jukejoints to dance, drink and hear blues. The covert nature of the juke originally derived from the real threat of random violence facing the African American community in the Delta, yet this is not to say that illicit activities at jukes did not also warrant a certain amount of protection. These two elements created an interesting process of definition, relying primarily on the principles of the unseen within the space, much in keeping with the mythical and oral tradition found in the blues. Despite the absence of earlier circumstances, which deemed anonymity within the landscape, these principles continue to define a major characteristic of these buildings. Once inside the jukejoint, however, the opposite is true; anonymity of the individuals gives way to a more collective emphasis. The lure of danger continues to feed the mystique surrounding blues, and as we've seen in the jukejoints, the mystique defines the spaces as well.

To consider the dialectic of anonymity and intimacy only as a protective device of illegal activity misses the larger story of jukejoints, however. They are complicated buildings, not because they offer historians a new example of African American architecture, but because they hold a key story in the evolution of the Mississippi Delta's cultural landscape. Jukejoints are not extraordinary buildings, and often the decisions and devices used by proprietors and patrons seem like simple common sense, unworthy of rigorous academic investigation. The Mississippi Delta, however, is an extraordinary landscape a place considered even today as a third world country on America's own soil. A place literally built on the residuals of slavery and the foundation of segregation, and a place that continues to be one of the densest African American populations with the smallest accumulation of wealth in the United States. From a spatial standpoint, the Delta remains a highly specialized landscape even if the original intentions have since changed. Initially, segregation dictated the look and layout of the Delta towns, but ultimately, the definitions roped around the African American community broke down under a process of redefinition which remains part of how the community continues to build today. Jukejoints are an impor-

tant piece of this redefinition, not because of the physical layout, but because of their continued importance within communities. Within the physical landscape of the Delta, which still bears the marks of segregation, the community has constantly renegotiated the spaces. Jukejoints are one site where this negotiation occurs in both tangible and non-visible ways.

The most important element of any jukejoint comes through the shared experience and sense of belonging within a group transcending the individual experience. Jukejoints are interactive spaces, between people and people, people and spaces, spaces and music, music and dancing, public and private and individual and communal, constantly moving and blurring the lines between the tangible and the ephemeral. What occurs in the space relies heavily on how people see themselves within the space, much like Glassie's definition of the true meaning of any space. In many cases this principle has been reduced to the lowest common denominator—a detail as simple as the palm tree next to Big E.'s in his wall drawing or the significance of the name "Smitty" at the Red Top Lounge.

The same principles apply to the landscape of segregation and the residuals remaining today. Using these approaches to the Mississippi Delta landscape turns up a fertile underscoring landscape to what appears on the surface. Jukejoints are one element that bridge these dual, or as Garon stated, "dialectic" landscapes, dependent on unseen and in many ways, metaphorical elements of within the community. Jukejoints are essential pieces of the landscape because they fuse the physical and the metaphorical into altogether different interpretations of this cultural environment. The blues offered a variety of spaces for performers and listeners: on one level blues serves as an oral archive of stories and myths. The music also offers a kind of metaphorical space for expression of pain and frustration. And, as we see in the jukejoints, the principles of blues are not limited to the music, but literally translate into the spaces of jukejoints. MF

JENNIFER NARDONE received her MA in Architecture from the University of California at Berkeley.

END NOTES

1. From the Memphis Jug Band's "Beale Street Mess Around."
2. Zora Neale Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression," in *The Sanctified Church: The Folklore Writings of*

Zora Neale Hurston (Berkeley: Turtle Island Foundation, 1981), 62-63.

3. Dell Upton, "Seen, Unseen and the Scene," in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, eds. Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 176.

4. LeRoi Jones, *Blues People: The Negro Expression in White America and the Music that Developed From It* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1963), 29 and 59.

5. Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 214.

6. From an informal interview with Junior's son, Kinny Kimbrough, June 1997.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Paul Garon, *Blues and the Poetic Spirit* (San Francisco: City Lights Press, 1975), 83-84.

10. Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1968), 21.

11. Levine, 228-229.

12. From informal interviews with patrons at the Do Drop, June 1997.

13. Garon, 46-47.

14. From an informal interview with James Alford, June 1997.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alford, James, proprietor of Smitty's Red Top Lounge, Clarksdale, MS, interviewed by author, June 1997.

Garon, Paul, *Blues and the Poetic Spirit* (San Francisco: City Lights Press, 1975).

Glassie, Henry, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1968).

Hurston, Zora Neale, "Characteristics of Negro Expression," in *The Sanctified Church: The Folklore Writings of Zora Neale Hurston* (Berkeley: Turtle Island Press, 1981).

Jones, LeRoi, *Blues People: The Negro Expression in White America and the Music that Developed From It* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1963).

Kimbrough, Kinny, proprietor of Junior Kimbrough's Jukejoint, Holly Springs, MS, interviewed by author, June 1997.

Levine, Lawrence, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

Seaberry, Willie, proprietor of Poor Monkey's Lounge, Merigold, MS, interviewed by author, June 1997.

Upton, Dell, "Seen, Unseen and the Scene," in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, eds. Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

Walker, Ernest, proprietor of the Do Drop Inn, Shelby, MS, interviewed by author, June 1997.

PECULIAR INSTITUTIONS

Mammy's Cupboard and the Natchez Pilgrimage

by Lori Robbins

*Juxtaposing two distinctive features of Natchez architecture helps us understand
the meanings Mammy's Cupboard has conveyed
since it was built in 1939.*

Tell any non-Mississippian that there is a restaurant called Mammy's Cupboard along Highway 61 in Natchez, where lunch is served inside a giant Mammy's hoopskirt, and they will gasp in disbelief and demand to see proof. As I sat within the confines of Mammy's skirt waiting for my five-dollar lunch platter, I could hardly believe it myself. My companion and I sat uneasily across from one another, sipping our jelly jars of blueberry lemonade, each of us avoiding the other's eyes and finding it difficult to make conversation. The place was packed with white, middle-aged Natchezians, all of whom seemed perfectly comfortable eating lunch inside an enormous stereotype of a black woman, and all of whom could identify us as "not from around here." A grandmotherly woman at the next table nodded at us, smiling and gesturing at our lemonades. "That's wonderful isn't it," she said, "but you be sure to leave some room for dessert. I love the lemon meringue, but everything they make is good." It was the apotheosis of graceful Southern hospitality, acknowledging our otherness and welcoming us into some invisible inner circle all at once. The woman knew we were there for the Pilgrimage, and she was offering us what she considered the very best of her hometown.

Natchez entrepreneur Henry Gaudé designed and built Mammy's Cupboard in 1939 in response to his wife's desire to open a Highway 61 café that would cater to the "pilgrims" (that is, tourists participating in the

then-new Natchez Pilgrimage tour of antebellum homes) in "true, traditional antebellum style."¹ With brilliant intuition and insight, he turned to the Southern icon of the Mammy, the "mudsill" gender identity for black slave women that simultaneously justified slavery, neutralized African American women's dangerous sexuality, and served as the foundation for (and a mirror image of) that other icon of Southern womanhood, the plantation belle. As a "low" tourist attraction complementing the "high" attraction of the Pilgrimage, Mammy's Cupboard simultaneously supports and exposes the ideological mission of the Pilgrimage, which is twofold: first, to rescue the ideology of the antebellum South in an evangelical attempt to teach and convert "outsiders/tourists" while reinforcing civic and regional pride for white Southerners; second, to recuperate the antebellum image of elite white Southern womanhood, restoring these women's power, beauty, grace, and status, if only for a few weeks each year.

Pilgrimage founder Katherine Grafton Miller used to say that "Natchez is a fairy story." With these words, she presented an image of beautiful Southern gardens and architecture springing up along the riverside at the stroke of midnight, through some wondrous and magical process. Of course, this seemingly ingenuous statement belies the true origin of antebellum Natchez's beauty: the surplus production of thousands of enslaved men, women and children, not to mention

the exploitation of Native Americans and working class whites. Contemporary Natchez tour guides continue in Miller's tradition, seldom if ever using the word "slave" unless a tourist brings up the subject. (When they are forced to discuss the issue, they often explain that "most slaves lived on plantations across the river," thus distancing the peculiar institution from its product). Ten miles outside of town, however, the 28-foot-tall icon that is Mammy's Cupboard still stands, simultaneously an uncomfortable reminder of past crimes and a peculiar justification for them.

Some might say that Gaudé's giant Mammy says more about the individual who built it than the community in which it stands. However, when we consider the Natchez Pilgrimage and Mammy's Cupboard as elements of a dominant ideological apparatus, Gaudé's individual role in the creation of Mammy's Cupboard seems insignificant. The ideology of the Natchez Pilgrimage produced a set of roles and rituals which by necessity repressed and distorted the role of African American slaves in antebellum Natchez society. So extreme was this repression, and so severe were the anxieties surrounding it, that the hated African American

"other" was bound to manifest itself somehow, predictably on the periphery of the Pilgrimage scene. The fact that the "other" manifested itself as a giant, happy mammy inside of whom one could eat a meal may not have been inevitable, but it is hardly surprising. Both business people, psychiatrists, and cultural critics would agree that in building Mammy's Cupboard, Gaudé simply responded to "a need" in his community.

HOW "MAMMY" WAS BORN

The cultural need that Henry Gaudé answered in 1939 had existed for more than a hundred years, and when he built his Mammy, he was building on the

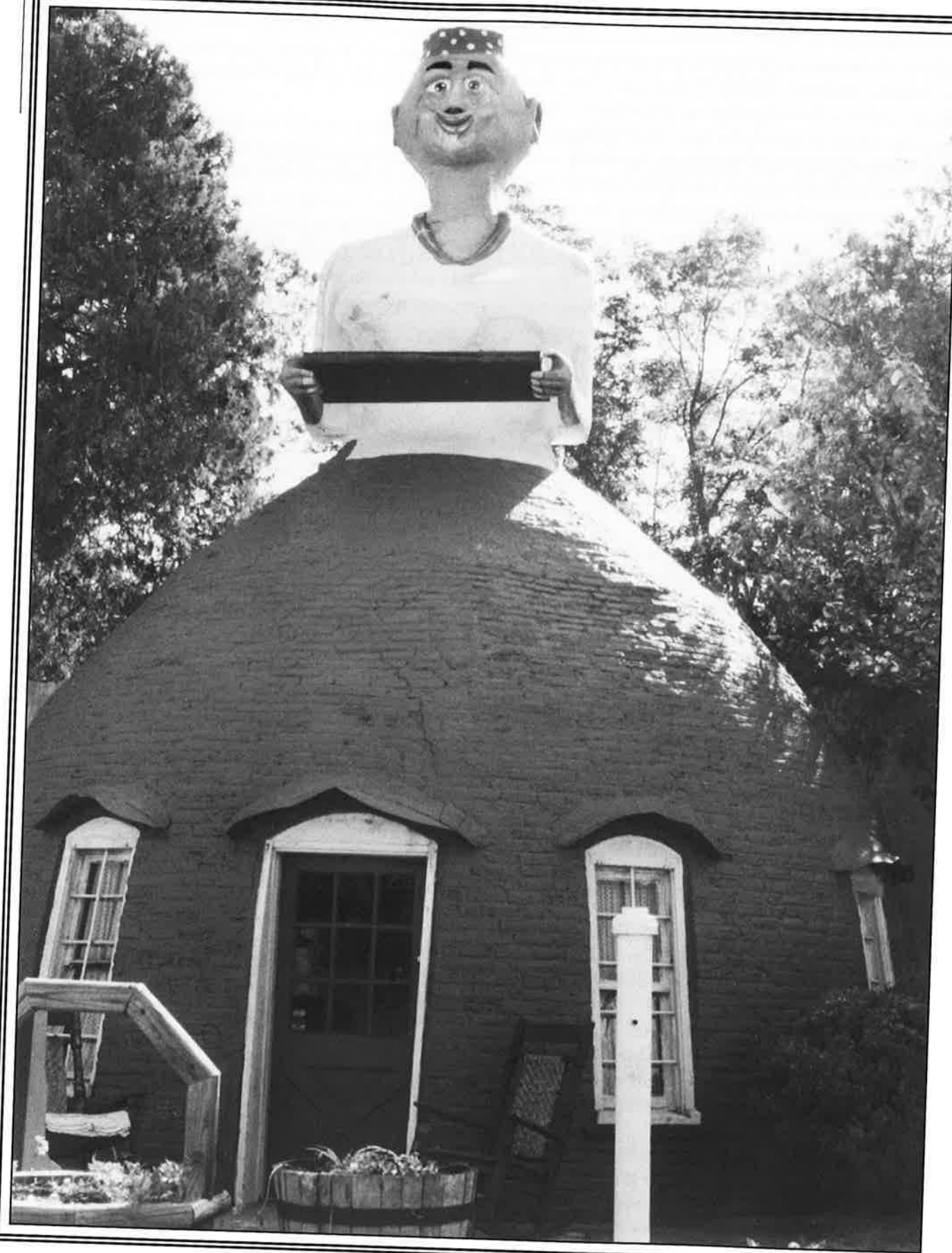
work of many generations of artists, writers, historians and promoters. To identify the nature of the need, we need to consider its origin: the antebellum plantation household.

While elite men in antebellum Southern society relied upon their wives as the bulwarks of class and caste, elite white women depended on the racially engendered labors of black women to maintain their socially constructed plantation mistress personas. As slave women's roles in the plantation gradually evolved to include not only field work, but also domestic management, cooking, and the care of planter children, their indispensibility to the functioning of the household—and by extension,

the entire slave system—became an issue of increasing discomfort and anxiety for elite whites. Kathleen Brown writes that elite women, tied as they were to the domestic sphere with only occasional opportunities to venture out in public, were under particular pressure to exist in close, intimate quarters with slaves, "making the performative nature of female identity and hierarchy even more crucial."² Because female domestic slaves often enjoyed enormous power and status within their households and the surrounding community, not to mention advantages of experience and superior knowledge over their putative mistresses, their relations with elite women could be fraught with tension that sometimes erupted in violence on both sides. And behind these common, everyday conflicts, there was the underlying, tacit awareness among elite women that elite men exploited female slaves sexually.³

To address these issues—which, incidentally, began appearing regularly as arguments against slavery in nineteenth century abolitionist propaganda—Southerners created the stereotype/myth of Mammy, the loyal, motherly slave woman who devotes herself to the care





and preservation of her master and his family.⁴ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese asserts that the original Southern image of Mammy "signaled the wish for organic harmony [in master-slave relations] and projected a woman who suckled and reared white masters. The image displaced sexuality into nurture and transformed potential hostility into sustenance and love."⁵ It should be noted that while plantation households often employed slave nurses to care for both young children and the old and infirm, the historical record depicts these nurses as bearing little resemblance to the obese, muscular, desexualized images of Mammy that have become standard after more than 150 years of steady use. Mammy's age, physique, dress, and attitudes were all carefully constructed to create an iconic image of an African American woman whose strength, asexuality, and fundamental innocence rendered her naturally, happily suited to live as domestic chattel. This image served to both comfort anxious whites living within the system of slavery and repudiate abolitionist outsiders fighting to end the system.

One would think that after emancipation, white Southerners would no longer need to promote African American stereotypes such as Mammy; however, beginning in the 1870s the Mammy myth surged back into public consciousness, this time on a national scale. The era of reconstruction was traumatic for whites, no matter which side they supported during the Civil War, and the myth of Mammy proved to be a powerful ideological salve for white Americans' battle-scarred psyches.

As white and black women struggled with issues of dignity, status, and respect in the domestic sphere, Northern political and financial leaders began to agree with their former Confederate rivals that the planter elite should regain hegemony in the South. Jo-Ann Morgan asserts that, in order to rebuild the Union and foster the burgeoning capitalist market system, it would be necessary to reestablish the South's profitable cotton market. Further, the Northern capitalists knew as well as the planters that growing and harvesting cotton required a reliable supply of cheap labor, thus "it was essential that former slaves remain on the plantation."⁶ Almost overnight, a national ideological apparatus sprang up to reconcile the North and South as it celebrated the utopian perfection of the plantation household, with its contented slaves, beautiful white belles, and noble patriarchal masters. The central icon of this campaign, glorified in songs, stories, plays, paintings, and advertisements, was the Mammy who

was pleased and proud to stand by her defeated Mistress and Master, caring for them and their children through the terrors of the war and the hardships of the Reconstruction. These images of contented slave women "absolved everyone of past transgressions and future responsibility toward the freed people," creating an environment in which Black Codes could be established to restrict African Americans' freedoms and restore white elite authority in the South.⁷

"NOW WOMEN TO THE RESCUE!"

ELITE SOUTHERN WOMEN, THE LOST CAUSE, AND THE ORIGIN OF THE NATCHEZ PILGRIMAGE

While northern and southern promoters joined forces to recuperate antebellum racial hierarchies through the myth of Mammy, southern women had their own recuperative agendas to pursue. Faust writes that even after the disappointments and demoralization of war and the early reconstruction period, and despite their anger and frustration with the male-dominated polity that had led them to their downfall,

Elite white women of the South held fast to the traditional hierarchical social and racial order that had defined their importance.... The ideal of male strength and competence that had justified the paternalistic southern world had been proven mythical, and women had discovered little foundation in their own competence or effectiveness for trying to replace male power and authority with their own. In the face of the frightening reality of black emancipation, however, white women came to regard the rehabilitation of patriarchy as a bargain they were compelled to accept.... If white men were once again to run the world, southern ladies would struggle to demonstrate the confidence in male superiority that would convince both themselves and others that such a social order was both natural and desirable.⁸

By the 1880s, elite southern women (along with some women belonging to the South's nascent bourgeoisie) began forming ladies' auxiliaries to the United Confederate Veterans (UCV). In 1894, the auxiliaries united and incorporated under the name United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). According to Melody Kubassek, while the UCV focused on holding reunions in the name of the Lost Cause, the UDC focused its efforts on building memorials to Confederate

soldiers and, significantly "carrying on the fight which southern women had begun during the war."⁹

While diligently raising money from the South's cash-poor citizenry for elaborate memorials to the Confederacy's gallant, fallen men, the leaders of the UDC often stressed the valor of women's war efforts to the denigration of the men they sought to honor. Kubassek quotes a 1912 speech by the president of the Mississippi UDC, Mrs. S.E.F. Rose, in which Rose insists that the heroism of Confederate women "was a moral heroism greater and grander than that of the soldiers who fell in the excitement of battle."¹⁰ As these women bolstered the patriarchal antebellum system in order to salvage their own class identities, they were unwilling or unable to hide their resentment of southern patriarchy and its weaknesses; neither could they hide their pride as they discovered that they had the power and ability to restore the system that had once failed them. Male leaders rushed to congratulate and encourage the Daughters of the Confederacy in their recuperative mission; as F.J.V. LeCand exclaimed in a Memorial Day speech in 1899, "Now women to the rescue!... We were not without her assistance when the fight was on, and they are now rallying to rescue from oblivion the history which may not be preserved."¹¹ More than twenty years before women won the right to vote, southern politicians recognized their crucial role in sustaining the polity's ideological apparatus.

By the mid-1920s, the UDC had erected thousands of memorials across the South, and much of the fervor for "rescuing" Southern ideology through the Lost Cause had receded; this loss of enthusiasm was probably due in part to the rapidly thinning ranks of the generation of Southerners who could remember the Civil War, as Kubassek speculates.¹² It may also be true that as white male order retrenched itself against the pressures of the suffrage movement, elite and middle class women came under increasing pressure to support patriarchal hierarchy and give up their own public endeavors. Alternatively, elite women may have believed that they had finally managed to secure their status through the successful retrenchment of white supremacy and patriarchal authority in the Jim Crow era, and public activity was no longer necessary.¹³

If elite whites did feel that they had reestablished their hegemony once and for all, they were mistaken. When the Depression and the era of Roosevelt overtook them in the early 1930s, southern elites found that their treasured social hierarchy was not built on a solid founda-

tion; their economic security was gone, their privileges as elite whites were open to challenges from working class whites and minorities, and their "planter class" identities eroded as elite women were again forced to find work to supplement their husbands' incomes. As Harnett T. Kane writes of the poverty experienced by the Natchez elite, left with nothing but their formerly grand mansions, "that famous description of a Southern class—'too poor to paint, too proud to whitewash'—hardly gave an adequate assessment of the situation. Whitewash would have cost too much, too."¹⁴

During the twenties and thirties, elite southern women began devoting the time formerly spent with the United Daughters of the Confederacy to a newer association for upper-class women: the garden club, the prototype of which was formed in Athens, Georgia. Instead of building memorials to a Lost Cause ideal of southern masculinity, these women's groups focused on fostering the New South ideal of privileged femininity, the "Cheerful Wife" who devoted herself to uplifting community standards through the creation and maintenance of a beautiful home. In this way, the women privately continued the work they started in a more public sphere with the UDC, for, as Laura Edwards points out, "in the home, organic ties were preserved and hierarchy could still be understood as natural bonds of mutual affection and obligation."¹⁵ In the Garden Clubs of America, elite women glorified their role as the natural guardians of domestic beauty and order; the order they created in their homes and gardens (and tacitly, in the familial patriarchal authority their household role reinforced) extended into the world to sustain the established social hierarchy.

The Natchez Pilgrimage was born of the Natchez Garden Club's 1931 predicament: Natchez had been chosen to host the annual convention of Mississippi Garden Clubs, but none of the Garden Club's threadbare society ladies could actually afford to keep a garden, and the Club would have nothing to show its guests.¹⁶ The club's president, Katherine Grafton Miller, a descendant of an old Natchez family whom Kane describes as a "brunette young matron with something of the pent-up energy of a buzz-bomb," proposed an idea that would salvage the women's dignity.¹⁷ Arranging to take Club delegates on a tour of a few members' antebellum mansions, she opened the meeting with a speech in which, as she later reminisced, "I asked them to look at Natchez houses, to visualize the Southern grandeur of a bygone era, and to

dream with us that some day our houses and gardens would be restored to their former beauty."¹⁸

The success of this first house tour inspired Miller to believe that she had found another opportunity for women to come "to the rescue" of the South. She pushed relentlessly for the Garden Club to organize a longer, more elaborate home tour in the spring of 1932, which would be open to the public for an admission fee. This tour, which Miller called a "Pilgrimage," would raise money to fulfill the dream of restoring Natchez to its former "grandeur"; in other words, the elite families who opened their homes to the public would be given a portion of the proceeds from the event, which they would then presumably use to improve and restore their homes in the interest of attracting more business next year.

Despite the intense skepticism of the town's civic leaders and many of the Garden Club members, Miller remembered, "I got out of a sick bed and urged the home owners to wear a hoop-skirt costume and to cooperate with the week-long plan. They all agreed to do so... March, 1932 was during the depths of the depression, yet people came from every direction, including thirty-seven states."¹⁹ Historian Jack E. Davis estimates from Club documents that the 1932 Pilgrimage brought \$50,000 into the local economy over six days, and Natchez quickly adopted the town motto "Where the Old South Still Lives" to promote their new annual event.²⁰ The Natchez Pilgrimage quickly expanded to last a full month, a Confederate Pageant was added, and it became a regularly covered event in popular national magazines and even movie newsreels; Katherine Grafton Miller turned her stewardship role into a career and traveled throughout the year giving promotional speeches.²¹ Ironically, the populists' Good Roads Movement had laid the groundwork for a system of highways that the elite women could now employ to attract visitors to an event that retrenched their status while earning cash with which to restore their dilapidated mansions. In an era of concern for the South's starving population of rural blacks and whites, the elite had found a way to distract outsiders from the troubles at hand and refocus the nation's attention on the past glories and romances of the planter class.

The Natchez Garden Club's success with the Pilgrimage inspired (and sometimes, literally dictated) a massive ideological shift within their community. As Davis writes, "the hoary southern mansions provided the concentric medium through which the past was

recaptured and from which a mythical history was spawned," a "Shintoistic" history that emphasized the pride and honor of the Pilgrimage hostesses' planter ancestry.²² Just as antebellum planters designed their homes to conceal domestic labor, relegating kitchens and workrooms to outbuildings to preserve the illusion that the owner's wealth made labor and production unnecessary, the narratives and historical presentations of Natchez hostesses passed over unpleasant incidents of the war and the brutality of slavery to concentrate on the beauty and leisure of the planters' lives.²³ Natchez, a town that had once been known for its strong community of freed people, its early development of an African American bourgeoisie, and a distinctly mercantile white population, recast itself as the very heart of the southern white aristocracy, and new public and commercial buildings paid tribute to the aristocratic planter style in their architecture.²⁴ Davis notes that the passion to control the content and character of Natchez history was so great among Pilgrimage organizers that they "persuaded city aldermen to institute an ordinance requiring the licensing of all tour guides"; to become licensed, prospective guides had to take and pass an exam written by club members, thereby proving that they embraced the appropriate "Lost Cause" pro-planter ideologies.²⁵

The "Pilgrimage" ideological stamp is strikingly illustrated in Harnett T. Kane's history, *Natchez on the Mississippi*, which was written in 1947 with the assistance and cooperation of Katherine Miller and other Garden Club members. Significantly, Kane's history of Natchez portrays elite white women as political and social actors on a scale and extent that would remain unmatched in works of Southern history for nearly forty years. On the other hand, Kane's masterful use of the passive voice excises every trace of slaves' involvement in building the gracious planter homes he discusses in excruciating detail; his narrative consistently informs us that pools *were* dug, stately columns *were* erected, and gardens *were* laid out. When he cannot avoid using the active voice, Kane elects to write merely that "the architect" built the mansion he is describing.

As the creators of the Pilgrimage soon realized, it would be impossible to fully recoup antebellum planters' social status or recreate the mystique of the hoop-skirted plantation belle without some form of cooperation from Natchez's African American community. Acknowledging that merely dressing in hoop-skirts and standing before a Grecian columned veranda would not fully recuperate what they had lost during the war, the

Pilgrimage's upper-class white female founders "persuaded their Negro helpers to wear bandannas or livery and escort the 'pilgrims' in and out" and recruited African Americans to sing ethnic spirituals and pose as happy slaves in the annual Confederate Pageant. Of course, black women interested participating in the Pilgrimage were strictly prohibited from joining the Garden Club and its associated Pilgrimage Garden Club.²⁶

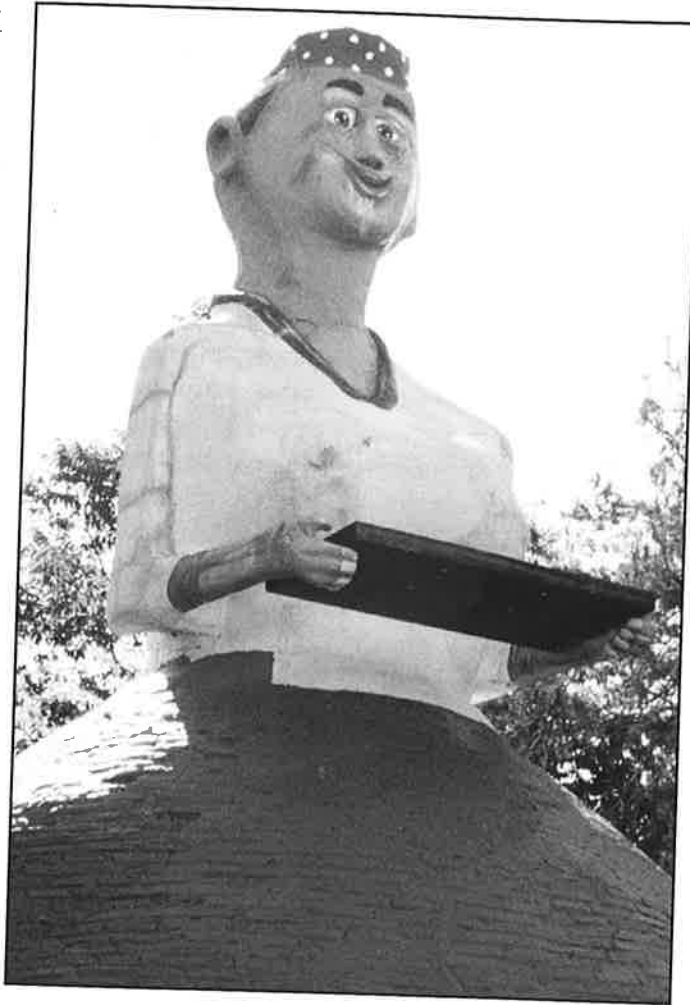
Like the Mammy stereotype that remained ubiquitous in popular culture throughout the thirties and forties, black Natchezians' cooperation in the public rituals of the Pilgrimage indicated African Americans' consent to the "natural" racial hierarchy, and their participation was highly publicized by the media and applauded by visitors.²⁷ According to Davis, a 1952 Garden Club newsletter article about the Pageant's black gospel segment asserted that "a cherished testimonial to masters and slaves is the fact that the spirituals though born in slavery contain no note of bitterness. They voice the cardinal virtues of patience, forbearance, love, faith, and hope."²⁸ By reading between the lines of this statement, it is possible to detect a slight hint that by 1952, members of Natchez's black community were expressing "bitterness" about the roles they were required to play in the Pilgrimage and its pageant, and the Pilgrimage hostesses were growing anxious about their increasing lack of cooperation. This cooperation by local blacks was probably always uneasy and ultimately short-lived; Davis notes that by the era of the civil rights movement, African American Natchezians refused to pose as slaves during mansion tours and in the Confederate pageant.²⁹ Today, many Natchez blacks participate in the Pilgrimage as city employees, but do so dressed in casual street clothes and sporting

stone-faced expressions that suggest the ambivalence they feel toward the event.

MAMMY'S CUPBOARD

AND DOMINANT PILGRIMAGE IDEOLOGY

Built just seven years after the first public Pilgrimage, Mammy's Cupboard was both a part of the movement to recreate Natchez in the image of its newly imagined past, and a reaction to the community's ideological shift and the anxieties related to it. For nearly sixty years, it has been a fetish or totem for the community of Natchez, an empty signifier that they have endowed with any number of meanings as the world around it changed.



Karal Marling observes that ancient colossal figures such as the Colossus of Rhodes were markers that "separated Greek from barbarian, civilization from the terrors of the wine-dark sea."³⁰ Like the gigantic, bespectacled eyes that watch over the wasteland dividing Manhattan from Long Island in *The Great Gatsby*, a colossus "symbolically identifie[s] a temporal boundary, a gateway affording access

to memory and to the enchanted realm of the historical imagination."³¹ The Natchez Mammy's original role, then, was to attract tourists by presenting a fantastic, yet recognizable icon that expressed a familiar and comforting ideology. It is safe to say that many of the Pilgrimage's visitors "from thirty-seven states" had never lived or traveled in areas with a high population of African Americans, yet they had undoubtedly been exposed to political rhetoric and cultural material that labeled members of that ethnicity as lusty, violent, and barely civilized; entering a region in which 40 percent of

the population was black must have been cause for trepidation.³² The Mammy expressed "Southern hospitality" by quelling those fears with a reassuring reminder of the opposing ideology that posed African Americans as simple, amiable people with a natural capacity for caring service. Several years after he built the Mammy, Gaudé added earrings made from horseshoes to her head and placed a serving tray in her outstretched arms; these additions further encouraged the pleasant and reassuring white stereotypes of African Americans as childishly superstitious and eager to see to guests' satisfaction.³³ The mammy's white hair, eyebrows and red head scarf, meanwhile, connoted gentle old-age and modesty. While the meaning of the figure's unnatural coal black color, the large white circles around its eyes, and its bright red mouth (along with the later addition of enormous circles of red rouge on its cheeks) are quite mercifully almost lost to cultural history, they seem to be related to minstrel makeup and the then-popular commercial graphic depiction of the African American as a "coon"; both connotations call to mind notions of black people as, in Kenneth Goings words, "stupid, ridiculous, and even beastlike comic figures" who were both deliriously happy and eager to imitate whites.³⁴ Mammy served Gaudé's business purposes by presenting a non-threatening image to outsiders visiting Natchez, while simultaneously conforming to the planter class ideologies endorsed and purveyed by Pilgrimage hostesses. She was a welcoming signal, and the boundary marker for a new and aggressive ideological terrain.

It is also possible to view the Natchez Mammy as a figure symbolizing the Freudian phenomenon of the return of the repressed—the repressed here being the importance of African American slaves and their labor to the creation and maintenance of antebellum Natchez. As we have discussed, Natchez's white community grew ever more enthusiastic about the Pilgrimage's economic success, and in the late thirties and forties they began rewriting their town's history to credit the planter class (and most particularly, female members of that class) for creating their city's unique beauty and charm. To do this, they repressed what they knew of African Americans' enormous contributions to Natchez's commercial growth, its architecture, food, and gardens. Doing so required a highly conscious effort that produced a great deal of anxiety, as is evident in Pilgrimage organizers' attempts to establish a city code mandating tour guide examinations that effectively ratified their version of history. According to one of Davis's anony-

mous sources, the Garden Club and city were actually forced to abandon the idea of tour guide exams because nearly everyone who took the exam failed; under the influence of the Pilgrimage phenomenon, dominant history had strayed so far from the facts that even the most enthusiastic guides could not follow its ideological twists and turns.³⁵

To better conceal the participation of blacks in the development of Natchez's culture, Pilgrimage ideology projected them into stereotypical images of "the other," rendering them as thoughtless, helpless creatures who had to be led and instructed by intelligent, capable elite whites. It is not difficult, then, to see in Gaudé's construction of a towering mammy figure what Robin Wood calls the "fundamental dualism of all art" produced in a civilization inherently defined and dictated through repression and surplus repression: "the urge to reaffirm and justify that repression, and the urge of rebellion, the desire to subvert, combat, overthrow."³⁶ Gaudé's creation is subversive in that his mammy presents, at the outskirts of Natchez, a towering representation of a group of antebellum Natchezians that twentieth century white Natchezians were trying desperately to conceal and forget: African American slaves. At the same time, the image conciliates its subversion by representing African American slaves as satisfied and cheerful with their life of forced labor, thus reaffirming dominant Pilgrimage ideology and justifying its repression.

AMBIVALENT COMPANIONS:

MAMMY'S CUPBOARD AND THE PILGRIMAGE TODAY

In the forty years since the beginning of the civil rights movement, the Pilgrimage and Mammy's Cupboard have struggled to revise their ideological positions in response to American society's heightened consciousness about ethnic inclusion and sensitivity. As one might expect, ideological changes in the "high culture" Pilgrimage's historical content and ritual have been slow and subtle. This slowness is partially due to the fact that Natchez now relies on the Pilgrimage and the tourism it attracts as its primary industry, and people are slow to risk change when money is at stake. According to Davis, by the late eighties the Pilgrimage was responsible for more than \$5 million in annual revenues for local businesses, 1,400 jobs and nearly a million dollars in local tax revenue; as in the very first Pilgrimage, almost all of this income ended up in white Natchezians' pockets.³⁷ In the mid-eighties, after twenty years of boycotting the Pilgrimage pageant (white actors had been performing

slave roles in blackface throughout this period to uphold the event's cherished ideologies of congenial slave life), African Americans began to aggressively campaign for inclusion in the Pilgrimage and an opportunity to correct its "white interpretation of history."³⁸ They finally gained some ground with the establishment of a National Park at the site of Melrose Plantation in 1988; after local activists traveled to Washington to testify before Congress about the need to preserve black historical sites in the area, the National Park Service annexed the house of William Johnson, a well-known free black businessman and diarist of the antebellum period. African Americans finally resumed participation in the annual Pilgrimage pageant in 1990, when a Catholic Church with a majority of African American parishioners sent its choir to sing in a segment entitled "The Southern Road to Freedom."³⁹ However, the inclusion of some African American history on the Natchez scene and in the Pageant did not indicate a willingness to welcome them into the Garden Clubs that still maintain control over the Pilgrimage; according to Davis, by the eighties the Pilgrimage Garden Club offered membership to women of all classes, but it remained 100 percent white as recently as 1994.⁴⁰ And for the most part, the history taught on a Pilgrimage home tour still bears the stamp of Katherine Miller and her associates.

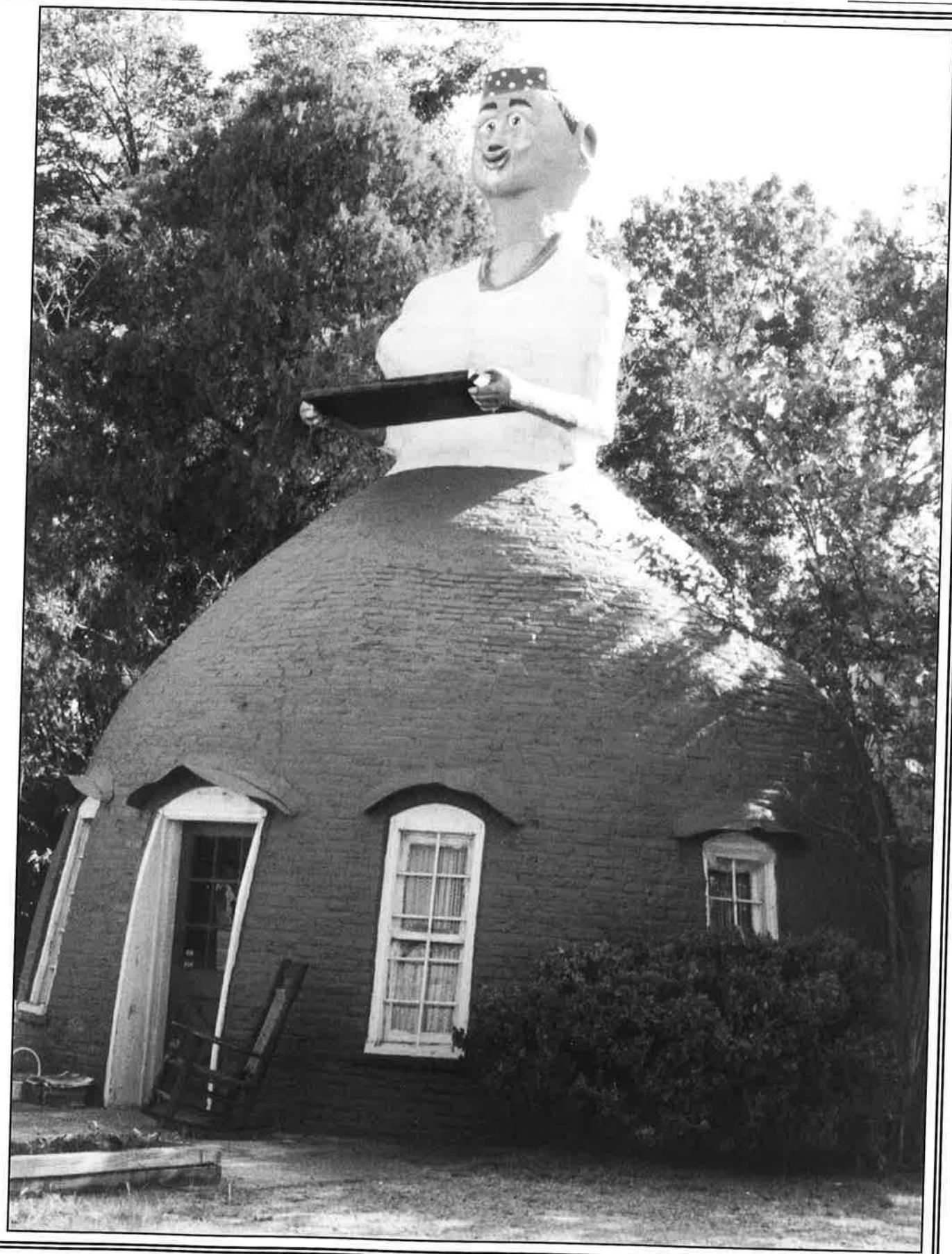
"I apologize for making you look at an ugly ol' man first thing on the tour today, but I promise you'll have nothing but pretty ladies for the rest of the tour," the balding, bow-tied white gentleman in his sixties explained as he met his first group of fall pilgrims on the gracious veranda of Rosalie at the stroke of noon. He briefly explained the history of the house, emphasizing the fact that the war era owners had played host to the General of the occupying Union troops throughout the city's wartime occupation, with soldiers living on one side of the house and their hosts living on the other, "and everybody got along just fine." While reading Kane's history of Natchez a few weeks later, I discovered that in fact, everybody got along just fine until the mistress of the house was discovered to be a Confederate spy, and she was forcibly exiled to "distant localities," where she served as a Confederate nurse until the war was over.⁴¹ Apparently, the Pilgrimage's need for a conciliatory reading of Civil War history has only intensified in the last fifty years.

The elaborately hoop-skirted female guides inside Rosalie were also white, hovering around retirement

age, and proud members of the Natchez chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution, which had inherited the house from its last resident owner many years ago. "Are there any members of the DAR here visiting us today?" one asked the group, which was entirely white save for one small cluster of African American women (apparently four adult daughters traveling with their mother). The crowd was silent; no hands were raised. "Well, you ladies be sure to go home and research your families, because we need you!" Members of this aging organization who, like their cousins of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, were once famous for their exclusivity, are now reduced to promoting membership among crowds of complete strangers.

In the dining room, the guide told stories of the occupying Union forces, who had damaged the room's marble fireplace by roasting meat in it, and of visits by General Grant. A male pilgrim who appeared to be in his late twenties asked if the planter family's slaves had stayed on to take care of the family and troops during the war. "Oh, this was a town house, so there weren't many slaves here. Maybe just one or two to cook and take care of the house; the slaves were mainly on the family's plantations across the river." As if she just remembered, she pointed to a china cabinet against one wall and explained that it was the only piece in the home built by slave craftsmen.

A guest asked where the slaves did the cooking; the guide pointed out the window to a small building a few feet away. "The servants would pass the trays right through this window. We won't be able to show you the kitchen, though, because we've turned that into an office for the curator." The decision spoke volumes about Pilgrimage organizers' selective decisions about what household elements are important enough to be shown and preserved. Just as Rosalie's architect had deliberately hidden the kitchen in an outbuilding to hide the necessity of labor and emphasize the planter's wealth and prestige, the mansion's current custodians excised the kitchen from the historical record, defining it as unimportant to the dominant "history" of the white people who relied upon it for food, but never worked in it. Similarly, the "one or two" slaves who worked in Rosalie must have lived somewhere on the grounds; however, their rooms or cabins were nowhere to be seen. The stories of their lives have been erased by home owners and curators in favor of the stories of the people who owned them.



In the three other mansions I visited on the Pilgrimage tour that day, conditions were nearly identical. Tours emphasized parlors, verandas, dining rooms and bed chambers—the places where elite white women practiced the rituals of hospitality, wealth, and social privilege as dictated by the dominant ideology of their class. Kitchens, work rooms and slave cabins had been modernized, converted, or torn down years ago, and guides avoided speculation about what life might have been like for the inmates of these lost rooms. Consistently, guides deflected such questions with references to slave life, unknown and foreign to the culture of Natchez, actually occurring somewhere “across the river.” Rather than inspiring committed efforts for ethnic inclusion and historical revision, the pressures of the modern sensitivity movement and the activism of Natchez’s African American community have inspired a greater anxiety among Pilgrimage guides to avoid the issue of slavery at all costs lest they say something that might be deemed offensive. The result is a conciliatory, censored version of antebellum history that is perhaps even more skewed in favor of planters than Katherine Miller’s version of 1932.

Meanwhile, the “low culture” Mammy’s Cupboard has struggled not only with ideological issues, but with basic realities of business and economics. The blatant and inherent racist message of its very shape makes it impossible for the building’s owners to follow the Pilgrimage’s strategy of glossing over issues of slavery and race; in this socially conscious, post-civil-rights-movement era, customers are painfully aware that they are making an ideological choice by simply turning off the highway into the Cupboard’s parking lot. Subsequently, Mammy’s Cupboard has drifted in and out of business several times in the last four decades while remaining the property of various members of the Gaudé family, serving as a gas station, convenience store, arts and crafts center, gift shop, and restaurant.⁴² At the height of the civil rights era, the Gaudé family attempted to remove the Mammy’s racist stigma by painting her to resemble an Indian woman instead of a black slave; apparently realizing that doing so merely traded one stereotypical representation for another, they abandoned this idea and returned to the traditional Mammy paint job.⁴³ Again, the business failed, and the building stood vacant for several years in the late eighties and early nineties.

Today’s incarnation of Mammy’s Cupboard represents a conciliatory revision of the Mammy stereotype

that softens its most negative connotations and emphasizes the current interest in the Mammy icon as a popular culture artifact. The figure’s horse shoe earrings have been removed, though the hospitality tray remains in its outstretched arms, and the head scarf also remains. In a decision reminiscent of the recent “ethnicizing” of the iconic Betty Crocker housewife to synthesize facial features typical to women of various ethnic backgrounds, most of the Mammy’s make-up has been removed, her features have been painted realistically, and her skin has been lightened to a shade that could indicate almost any ethnic background. Though, of course, *almost* is the key word here; like the black jockey lawn ornament that liberal-minded homeowners painted white in the sixties and seventies, Mammy’s race is not referenced by the color she is painted, but embedded in her very form, and nearly every inhabitant of the planet earth would “read” the figure as a black woman even if it were painted green. The figure’s social identity is signified by its stance, its clothing, and most significantly, in the bandanna head scarf which is literally fused to its tin head, a permanent fixture that assigns the figure to a role (servant), an era (antebellum South), and a race (black). While the Gaudé family strives to encourage their customers to call the restaurant “The Cupboard” for short, it may be a very long time indeed before Natchezians give up their customary nickname for the restaurant—“Black Mammy.”⁴⁴

At this point in history, I believe that the appropriate question with regard to Mammy’s Cupboard is not “how can we render this figure socially and ideologically benign?” but rather, “should we attempt to transform this figure into anything other than what it was originally meant to be?” Racist or not, besides a few National Park Service projects and a small African American museum, the Mammy is the only extant evidence of slavery and its anti-black ideologies in Natchez today. As is indicated by the anxiety surrounding its appearance, it is a powerfully subversive civic icon that flies in the face of the white, Pilgrimage-focused community’s efforts to conceal and neutralize their ancestors’ crimes. Racism and racial oppression did exist in Natchez; in fact, they still exist, and Mammy’s Cupboard is a primal signifier of this hidden ideology to which we are all subject.

This is not to say that it is (or should be) simple for any person, African American, Euro-American, or otherwise, to cross the threshold of Mammy’s

Cupboard, sit down at a table, and order a piece of pie. But doing so makes one powerfully aware of the ideological currents through which we usually wade without thinking, and that in itself is a positive and challenging experience. MF

LORI ROBBINS received her M.A. in Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi.

ENDNOTES

1. John Baeder, *Gas, Food, Lodging: A Postcard Odyssey through the Great American Roadside* (Minneapolis: Control Data, 1981), 72.
2. Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 199.
3. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).
4. Jo-Ann Morgan, “Mammy the Huckster: Selling the Old South for the New Century,” *American Art* (1995), vol. 9, no. 1, 92-93.
5. Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 202.
6. Morgan, “Mammy the Huckster,” 94.
7. *ibid.*
8. Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 247.
9. Melody Kubassek, “Ask Us Not to Forget: The Lost Cause in Natchez, Mississippi,” *Southern Studies* (1992), vol. 3, no. 3, 157.
10. *ibid.*
11. *ibid.*, 161.
12. *ibid.*, 165.
13. For further discussion of pressures on white southern women in the early twentieth century, see Nancy K. MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
14. Harnett T. Kane, *Natchez on the Mississippi* (New York: W. Morrow, 1947), 335.
15. Laura F. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 142.
16. In some accounts of this legendary first Pilgrimage, the writer will assert that “a blighting freeze” in early spring damaged the ladies’ gardens, thus sparing their dignity somewhat. See Kane, *Natchez*, 336.
17. *ibid.*, 337.
18. Katherine Grafton Miller, *Natchez is a Fairy Story: Reminiscences by the Founder of the Natchez Pilgrimage*, ed., Mrs. Walter Scott and Mrs. Marion Smith (no publishing information, 1974?), Special Collections, University of Mississippi Library, Oxford, MS, 3.
19. *ibid.*, 4.
20. Jack E. Davis, “Deep South Reencountered: The Cultural Basis of Race Relations in Natchez, Mississippi Since 1930,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1994, 185, 182.
21. *ibid.*, 185-186.
22. *ibid.*, 190.
23. For a full analysis of antebellum mansions as material representations of planter ideology, see Brown, *Good Wives*, 260-274.
24. *ibid.*, 193.
25. Davis, “Deep South Reencountered,” 190-191.
26. Kane, *Natchez*, 343; Davis, “Deep South Reencountered,” 220.
27. Davis, “Deep South Reencountered,” 220.
28. *ibid.*, 221.
29. *ibid.*, 220.
30. Karal Ann Marling, *The Colossus of Roads: Myth and Symbol Along the American Highway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 31.
31. Marling, *Colossus*, 33.
32. Davis, “Deep South Reencountered,” 214.
33. Marling, *Colossus*, 77.
34. Kenneth W. Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 47-48.
35. Davis, “Deep South Reencountered,” 190, 191.
36. Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 47.
37. Davis, “Deep South Reencountered,” 412.
38. *ibid.*, 416.
39. *ibid.*, 418.
40. *ibid.*, 212.
41. Kane, *Natchez*, 276.
42. 1997 Mammy’s Cupboard promotional flyer in author’s collection.
43. This anecdote was obtained in conversation with Dr. Charles Reagan Wilson.
44. Marling, *Colossus*, 122.

Unexpected Gifts

Notes on my Mississippi Photographs

by Nils Gore

"...Occasionally photographers discover tears in their eyes for the joy of seeing. I think it is because they've known a miracle. They've been given what they did not earn, and as is the way with unexpected gifts, the surprise carries an emotional blessing."

ROBERT ADAMS¹

Some time back we were visiting college friends in Vermont. Both Vermonters, they had moved to Kansas to attend college, and then moved back home afterwards. I, in contrast, grew up in Kansas, stayed there for school, and motored east the day after graduation, never looking back. During college, I spent an unhealthy dose of my time wallowing in self-pity, sore at the incredible flatness, sameness, dullness of the place. Visiting with Gary and Debbie a few years out of school though, I gathered they had gone to school in a very different place than I: they told stories of exploration and discovery in the country and in small towns outside of Manhattan.² They had vivid memories of mom and pop diners, flea markets, and couldn't say enough about the "incredible" landscape that is Kansas. They had, basically, enjoyed their time in college, in foreign and exotic Kansas.

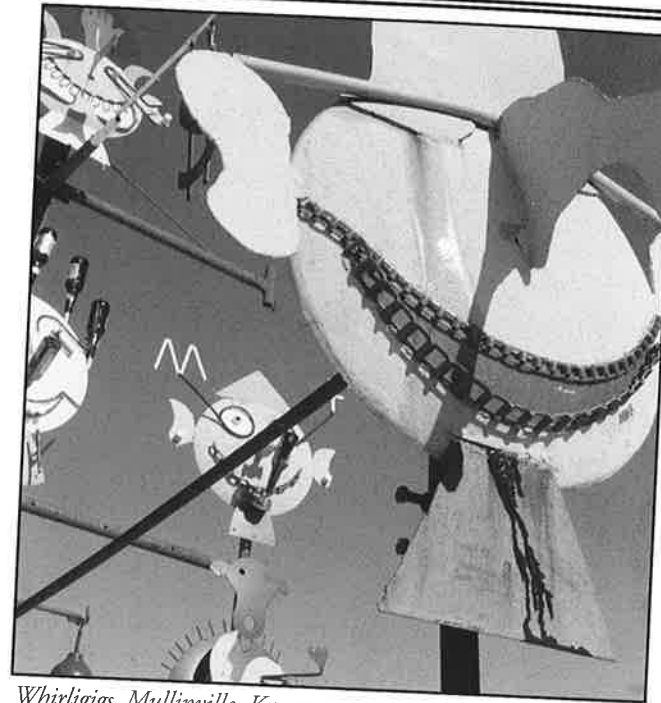
I was stunned. In a flash of recognition that I will always remember, it occurred to me that I probably could have enjoyed it too, if I had had the insight to consider myself a tourist rather than a hostage. It bummed me out. My only shallow consolation was that perhaps I could enjoy Vermont more than they could. A weird thought, but it gave me bitter comfort.

Probably two years later, I was flying home for a springtime visit. The plane descended into the Kansas City airport in the late afternoon light. Three hours earlier I had left a gray and dreary Boston (a city that I

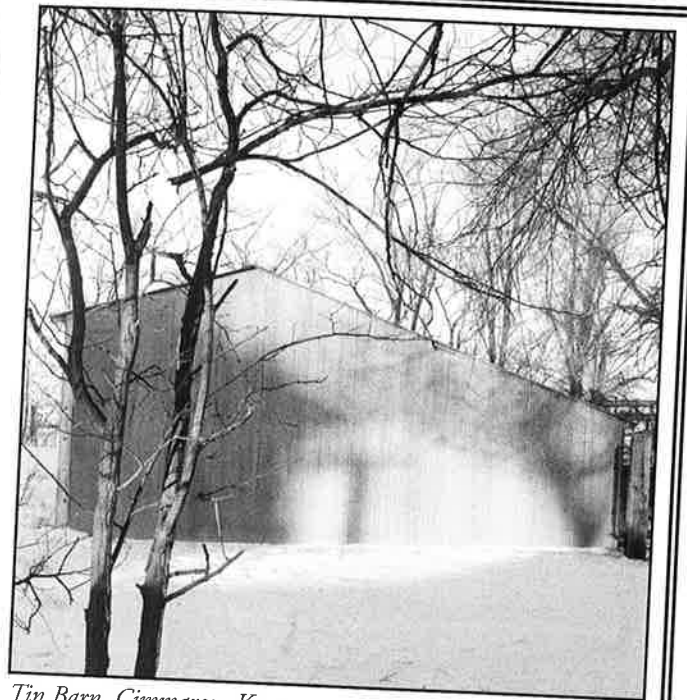
love), city of endless winter, narrow streets, and mean people. But as we landed, I looked across the green, gridded fields and I remember thinking: *I am Home*. "This," I felt, "is so much cooler than the place from where we just came. There is space; the people here are friendly; the air is scented with manure instead of monoxide." It was a strange thing for me to be thinking about the Midwest.

My silly giddiness was quickly stunted with another flash of self-recognition, equally powerful as the one in Vermont: "You, buddy, are plagued by the 'grass is greener' complex." In this case, it was literally true—but I realized I also suffered from the figurative, and much more serious strain. I have told this story to a few people over the years, and I always say that "from that moment on," I resolved to stop being sore about where I happened to be, and that I vowed I would start looking at my world with "hungry eyes."

Real life, at least for me, rarely has those instantaneous flashes I describe. I tend to muddle it through, weeks turning into months and years, my time outside of making a living spent in remarkably unremarkable ways: balancing the checkbook, sorting through junk mail, deciding what to cook for dinner. Perhaps I have fashioned these epiphanies as a colorful way of responding to people when they ask how I like living in Mississippi.³ To give my story force, a punch-line, a moral. Nonetheless, a change has occurred in me over



Whirligigs. Mullinville, Kansas.



Tin Barn. Cimmaron, Kansas.

the years. I do try hard to view my world with hungry eyes, to receive its "unexpected gifts" with gratitude, and furthermore, to record it when I have the time and resources.

These photographs are my record of some of the places visited, of things seen, since I moved to Mississippi in 1993. Most are taken in and around Webster County, in north central Mississippi. Two are from Kansas, taken on trips home.

Mississippi is a strange and fine place. Like most people, I imagine, it occupied a paradoxical slot in my imagination before I had the good fortune to move here. It comes to mind, and automatically brings with it images of stately magnolias and insidious kudzu vines, Southern hospitality and KKK lynchings, magnificent Greek revival mansions and sharecropper shacks. My imagination of Mississippi was fashioned by the magic of mass media, and consisted largely of poverty and illiteracy statistics, where it ranks forty-ninth or fiftieth, in a constant tussle with Alabama and Louisiana, images of *Mississippi Burning*, and the sound of Robert Johnson's wailing Delta blues.

As in most places, the reality is infinitely more complex and interesting. Mississippi is, without exception, the most civil place I have ever lived. Daily business—at the bank, the post office, even the driver's license bureau—is always conducted with a high degree of congeniality. In Boston, I could always expect such encoun-

ters to be tinged with, at minimum, indifference, and more often, outright hostility.⁴ In what, to some, would be "inhumane" circumstances—say, a grubby country gas station in the middle of nowhere—one finds a sincere and fundamental human decency incomparable to none. Relations between the races, as in most places, are not perfect. They are, it seems, from my observations, in a sort of stasis: there is a tolerance, an equilibrium, that, on the surface anyway, projects an image of harmony, although I sense that, under the surface, things are more likely at a low simmer—once again, as in most places in America.

I hope that my photos may reveal, in some small way, some of the complexity found in this place. My way of working is rather un-strategic: I simply try to make myself stop and photograph the most interesting things that catch my eye. Or if I don't have my camera with me, to remember to go back and make a photo someday. I don't attempt to thematize the work, though several themes have emerged on their own.

There are lots of buildings, no doubt because I'm an architect and tend to notice buildings. I'm not sure what I expected when I came here, but there is a rather small range of building types to be found in rural Mississippi: houses, barns, schools, small mercantile buildings and churches are just about it. But within that limited taxonomy, one finds an incredible diversity. And this is where it gets interesting for me. So, you don't just have



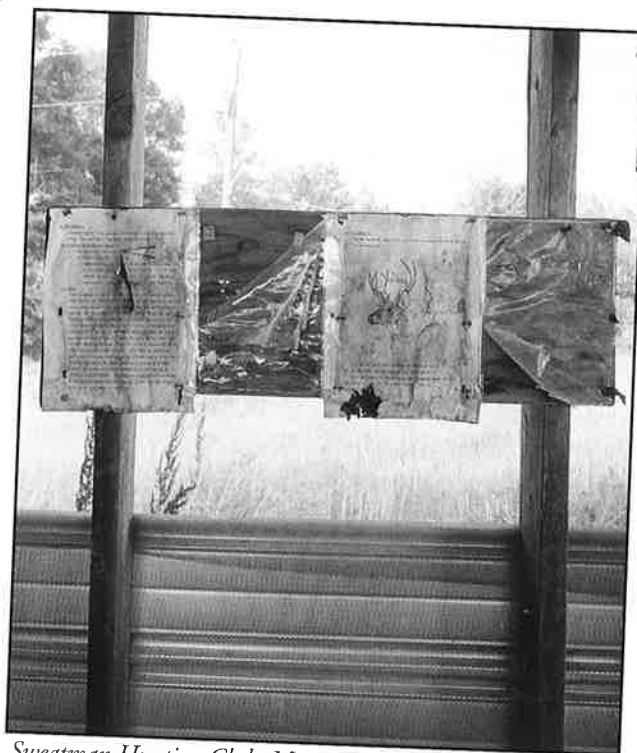
Old Cove Hunting Club. Webster County, Mississippi.



Western Auto Store. Europa, Mississippi.

houses, you have trailer-houses of assorted vintage and hybrid; you have agricultural buildings from ancient cotton gins to modern chicken houses; you have precious country churches built out of the sweat of brows (and not much more). Each is a rarity born of its circumstances: economy, weather, labor, aspirations, chance.

There are lots of what I call rural artifacts. I suppose these artifacts are like miniature buildings in a sense, because they are constructed; some manufactured, the best made by people. I use rural to describe these because I don't recall seeing things like this in any of the cities I'm accustomed to: homemade tombstones, flashing arrow signs, the tools of agriculture. Rural people everywhere have a way of making do. It's what they do. Take a seed, put it in the ground, give it some care and, God willing (or with a little luck, depending



Sweatman Hunting Club. Montgomery County, Mississippi.

on your theological outlook) before you know it you have a bushel more. The same goes for other things: take some tree branches and some old wire: you've got a fence; take some used plywood and some left-over paint: you've got a sign; take a cleared-off quarter-mile ring of dirt and a hopped-up four-banger: you've got Friday night's entertainment. The engines of capitalism appropriate little fuel from this process of squeezing something from nothing. That's the magic of it for me. You get the sense that for some people here there is a free lunch.

The landscape of this part of Mississippi is real special. I am not the first to have noticed this; but I'm hopeful that I've been able to record it in a slightly different way. As I have come to know the landscape here, I consider it to be a landscape in transition, as opposed to a completed landscape. These terms are not absolute



Mount Pleasant MB Church, Montgomery County, Mississippi.



Sign for Philadelphia Baptist Church, Philadelphia, Mississippi.

of course. But when you go to, say, many parts of New England, you get the sense that the landscape is done there. That the landscape has been made, and that it probably won't change a lot in the future. The landscape in Webster county is being made, full-tilt, as I write these words. Trees are being cut and re-planted, shacks are being dozed, highways are being built. Progress is being made, regardless of the consequences. Consequently, it seems like a good many things I have photographed existed for a mere blink in time. A good many of the things I intended to photograph, and never got around to, are gone. It's the nature of life here.

The nature of *nature* here is a comparable story. This is a fertile, fecund place. Without continual human intervention, nature is a resolute antagonist. Kudzu vines, mildew, termites, dirt-daubers, water, and the gumbo clay soil are all set to consume anything built by humans. Coupled with chronic poverty, a by-product of

Mississippi's complex and tragic history of class and racial politics, one finds many of the things made by humans to have a fairly tenuous existence, and hence, engaging subjects.

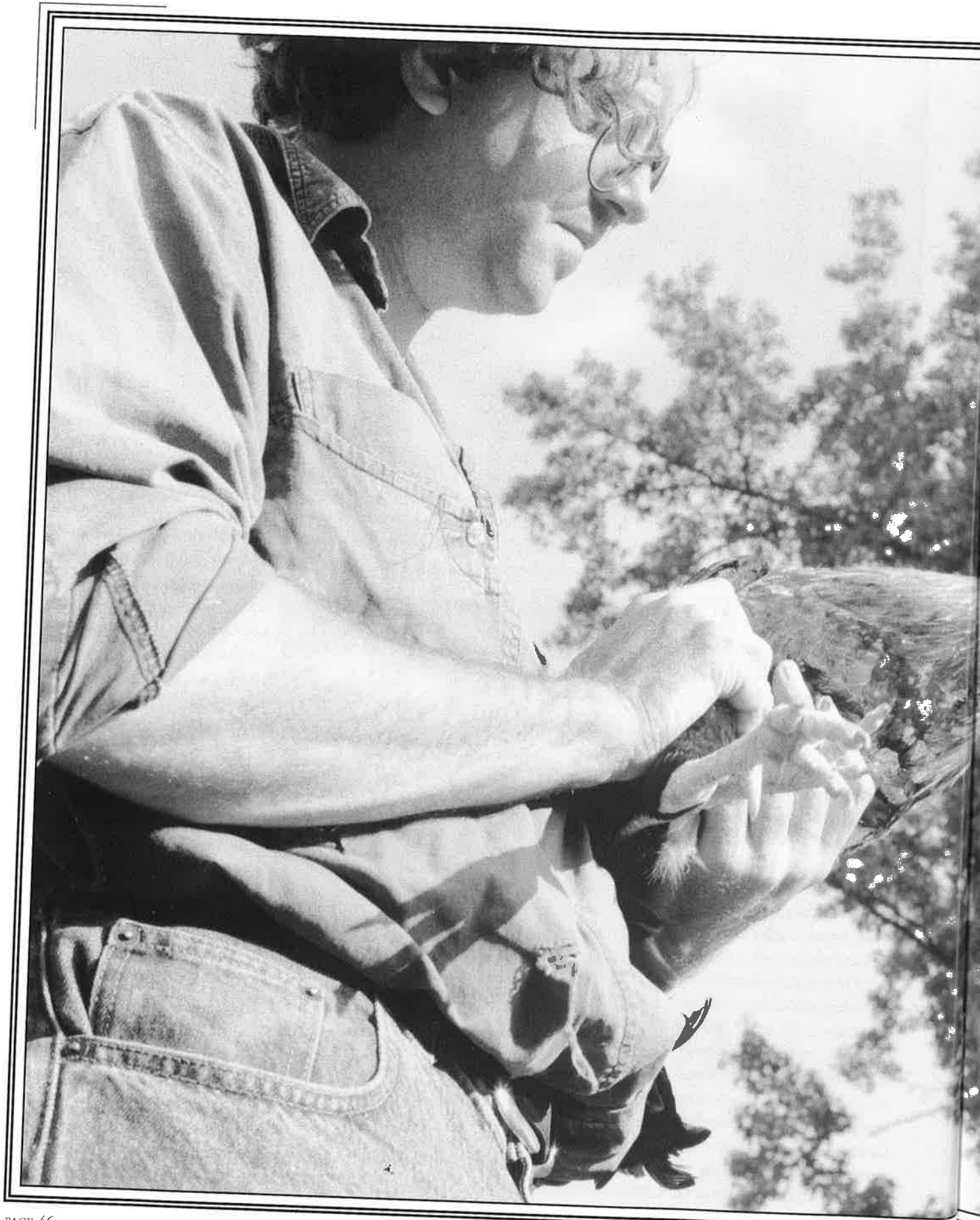
Shannon, my wife, shortly after moving here,

observed that at some level, life here is about death. It's always been the story of agriculture, as the seasons come and go, but in industrialized "modern" farming, the intensity is turned up a few notches. Crop-dusters defoliate the cotton fields in a few loud, short, simple passes, skidders rip out ancient pines in an eye-blink, pigs are slaughtered by the hundreds, chickens by the thousands, and farmers die of cancers catalyzed by the chemicals they pour into the air and soil. Deer hunting has to be the state sport, if one exists. Roadkill is also serious sport here, the losers smashed flat on the pavement (picked at by buzzards), crumpled in body

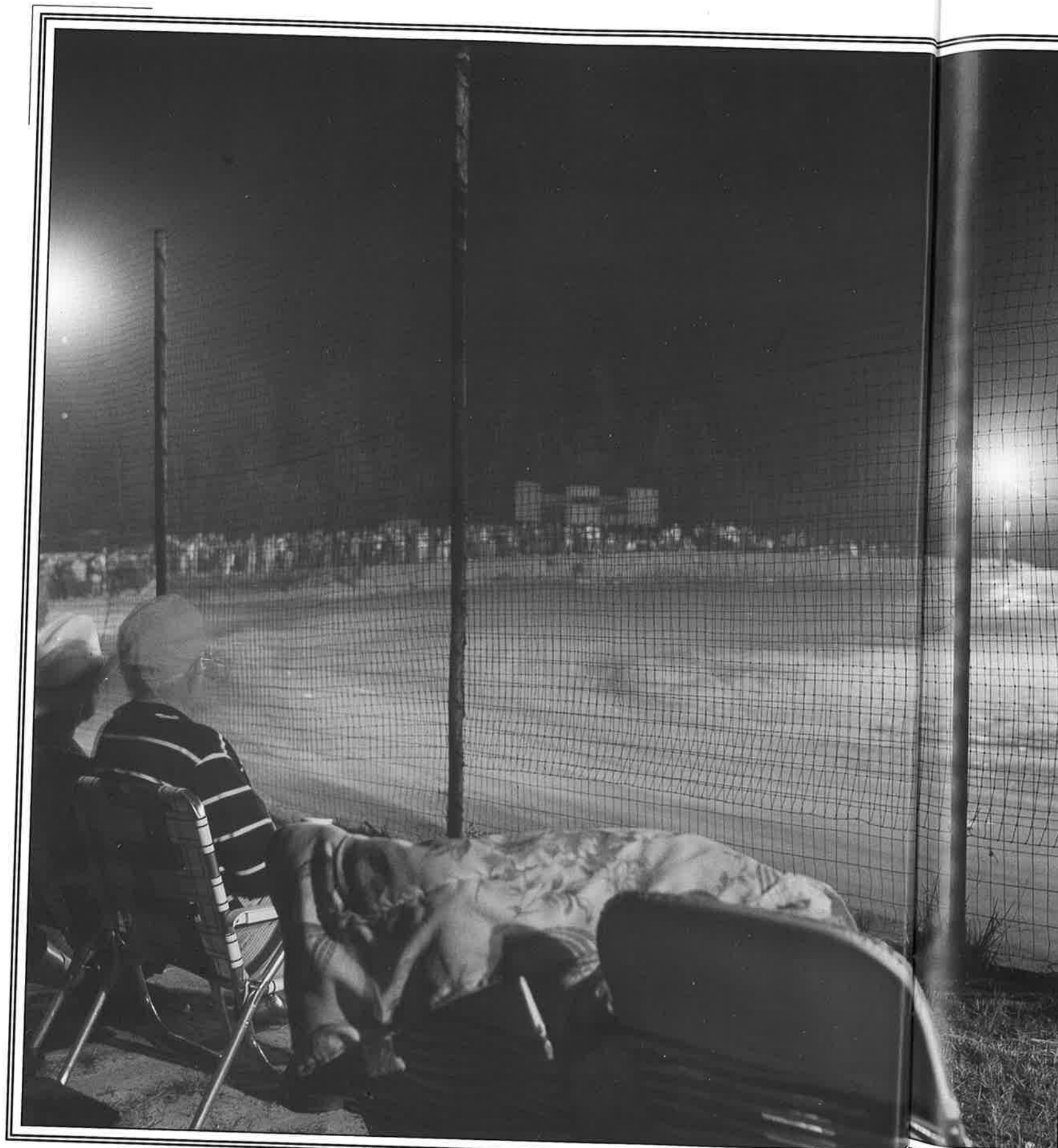
shops, and interred beneath concrete grave markers. The people celebrate death in touching and notable ways.



Concrete tombstones. Macedonia Baptist Church, Webster County, Mississippi.



Opposite: Murph with chicken, Spring Hill, Mississippi. Above: Logging road, Webster County, Mississippi. Below: Gas station, Calhoun City, Mississippi.



Opposite: Dirt Track. Above, left: Snack Bar 2. Above, right: Snack Bar. All photos this spread from Attala County, Mississippi.

Graves get decorated with silk and plastic flowers, styrofoam hearts and little homemade signs. It's the custom among some to maintain the soil hump on graves for some time after burial. I don't have a sense for how long, but I know there are a few in a cemetery not far from my house that have been there at least a year and they still look like they were buried last week.

Though it's tempting to try, and a lot of people would welcome the opportunity, these photos are not trying to preach about ethics. It's springtime here now, and I always get the itch to go exploring in this fine weather. I know I'll see something interesting, and if I'm lucky, or not too lazy, maybe I'll get a photo of it. It's the exploring I'm really interested in; it's witnessing the ingenuity and resourcefulness of Mississippians. My gifts are a lucky by-product, as Robert Adams—a gifted photographer who has written persuasively about the ethics of inhabitation—notes:

"One does not for long wrestle a view camera in the wind and heat and cold just to illustrate a philosophy. The thing that keeps you scrambling over the rocks, risking snakes, and swatting at

the flies is the view. It is only your enjoyment of and commitment to what you see, not to what you rationally understand, that balances the otherwise absurd investment of labor."⁷ MF

NILS GORE teaches in the School of Architecture at Mississippi State University.

ENDNOTES

1. Robert Adams, *Why People Photograph* (New York: Aperture, 1994), 15.
2. Manhattan, Kansas, "The Little Apple."
3. It is a loaded question for many people who ask it, especially the ones who have never been here. My response probably disarms the ones who expect me to affirm their preconceptions.
4. In a very peculiar way, I actually miss some of that. Here, decorum forces me to hold my tongue, when a sharp word is what is really called for, in order to get things moving.
5. Or at any rate, that it frees up some hard-earned money for lunch.
6. "Celebrate" is a strange word to use in this context but I can think of no better one.
7. Adams, *Why People Photograph*, 153.

Reverend H. D. Dennis AND HIS CHURCH IN VICKSBURG

by Chris Thompson, Chad Chisholm,
and Dorothy-Dean Thomas

*A Vicksburg preacher uses his home, bus, and yard
as visually dramatic ways to spread his message.*

Living along North Washington Street, Margaret's Grocery and Market stands out like a hard-nosed preacher at a billiard club. The yard out front is canvassed with about a dozen red and white brick towers topped with plywood signs advertising Bible classes and ominous Gospel verses. It's a hard contrast from the scrap yards, trailers, and nearby juke joints that dot the road.

The place is run by the Rev. H.D. Dennis and his wife Margaret. Stop in for a look, and Dennis will serve up a plate of fire and brimstone while his wife listens quietly and smiles. She would rather talk baseball or complain about Michael Jordan's retirement, but she has grown accustomed to her husband's sermons.

Rev. Dennis begins his sermons right away, each word more poignant than the next. Every once in a while he'll lean close and ask a question about sin, scolding you with eerie, deep blue eyes. His message is clear and parallels the themes he uses in the art and decorations that clutter every inch of the store's interior and spills into the yard outside. "I don't preach what the other places preach. I preach what I know," he smiles. "And I don't throw nothing away."

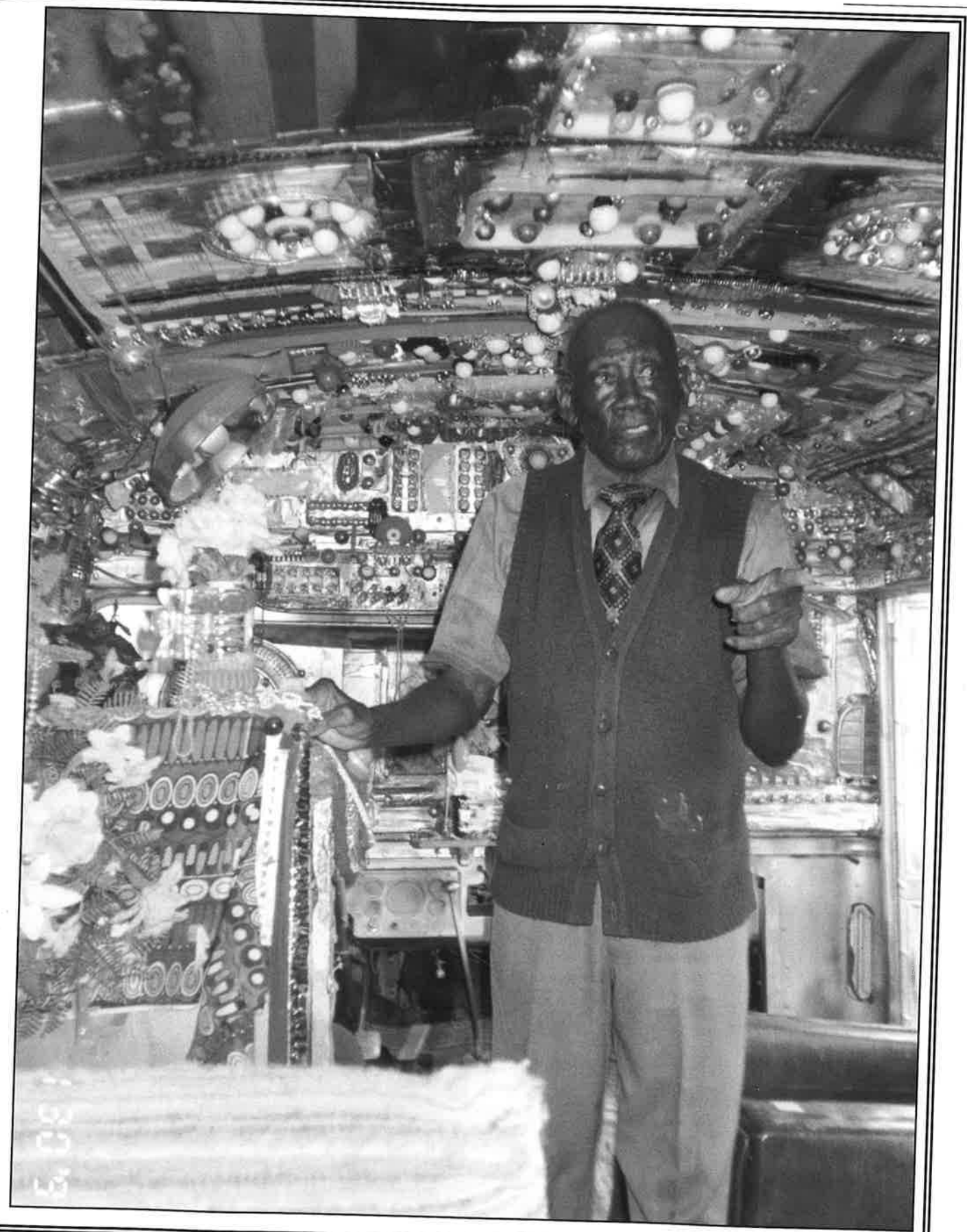
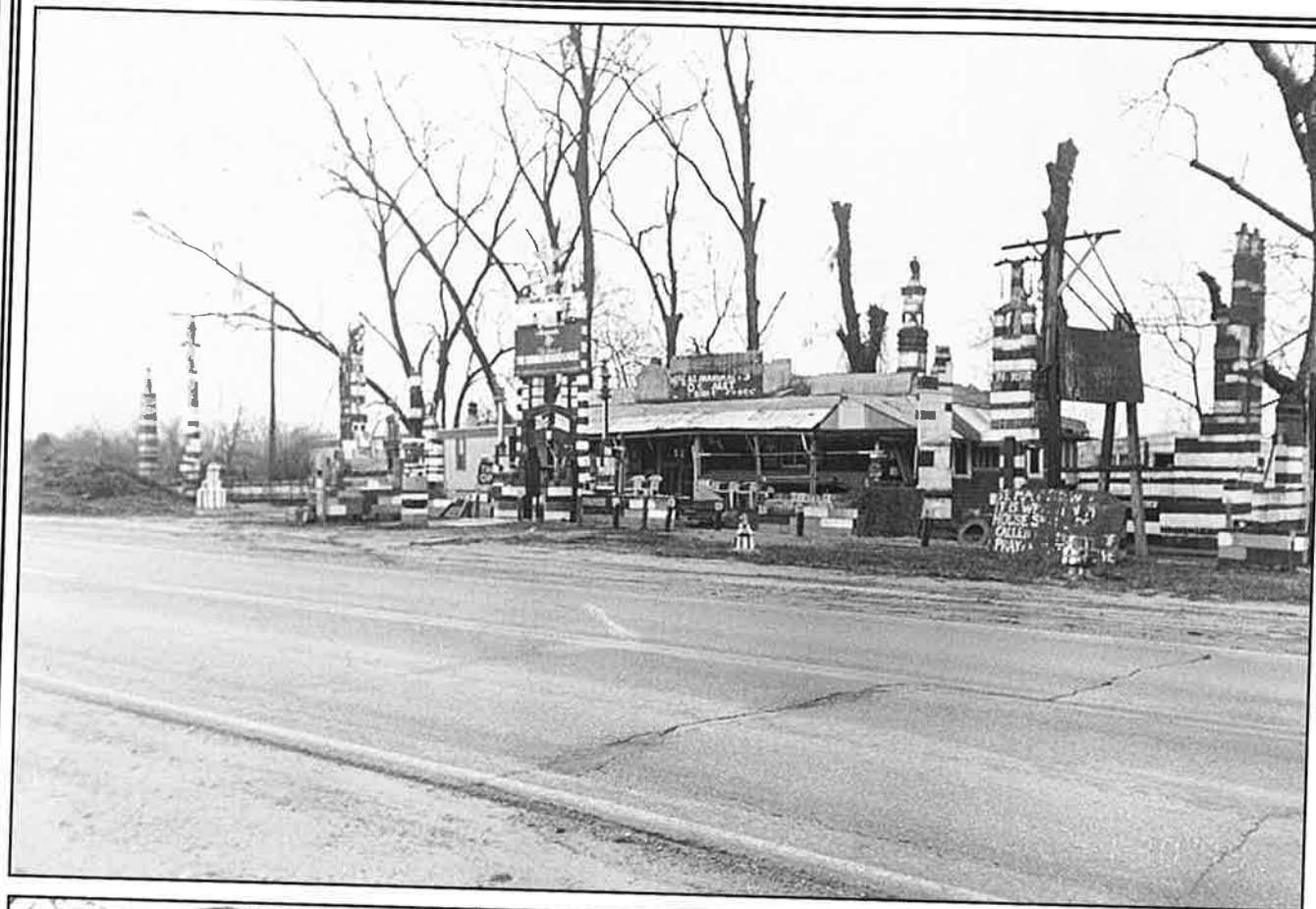
He preaches a sermon whenever the spirit moves

him. He preaches about casinos, sex, marriage, poverty. "Don't go," he shouts about the nearby gambling boats in Vicksburg. "But if you do go and win, don't go back because you're going to lose it." And with a fierce glare in his sharp eyes and sweat on his forehead, he offers a reminder about the dangers of lust.

"Y'all young men don't have no respect for the woman today," he says. "That's because the lady don't have no respect for herself. They walk down the street half naked, and there you go looking, looking at those hips. Sin!" He doesn't shy away from social issues when he takes the pulpit. He preaches against welfare because he says it makes people lazy. He preaches against drugs and the environment that drugs create.

"I'm 82 years old, and I been preaching for over 60 years! Hallelujah!" Dennis shouts. He was born in Rolling Fork in 1916. His father was away from home "sinning" at the time, and his mother died from complications during the birth. He says it was six days before anyone found him. "They broke in the house and found my mother dead," he said. "You could smell it for blocks." At two he survived a tornado, at twelve he escaped from an abusive father, and in World War II he







survived a fierce battle with the Japanese.

In 1979, he returned to Mississippi. He married Margaret Rodgers and began to turn her grocery store into his temple, his shrine to God. Rev. Dennis holds his church services in an old school bus the city of Vicksburg donated to him. Most of the bus, inside and out, has been repainted silver, a shiny reminder of the heaven salvation promises.

Inside, the silver walls and roof of the bus are covered with decorations made from tinsel, egg crates, plastic balls, beads, hair clips and meat packing trays. The floors and seats are covered with strips of rugs and carpet.

The driver's seat and front row of "pews" are missing to allow room for the altar area, which includes special chairs for the preacher and guests and a lectern cov-

ered with bouquets of silk flowers. A large King James Bible lays on top of the lectern, opened to the third chapter of St. Matthew, the story of John the Baptist, another eccentric preacher. Behind the altar area, the windshield is covered with aluminum foil and silver painted tape. A picture of the Last Supper is taped in the center, a colorful reminder of the Savior that saved Dennis from twisters, war, and an abusive father. MP

CHRIS THOMPSON, CHAD CHISHOLM, AND DOROTHY-DEAN THOMAS are students at the University of Mississippi. Photographs are by Chad Chisholm. A different version of this paper appeared in *Daily Mississippian*.

Exodus Revisited

Another Look at the Classic Study of Rural Migration

AN AMERICAN EXODUS:
A RECORD OF
HUMAN EROSION.

Photographs by Dorothea Lange.
Text by Paul Schuster Taylor.
New York: Reynal & Hitchcock,
1939.

Paul Schuster Taylor and Dorothea Lange started the fieldwork that would result in *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* in 1936. At the time, there was no long-standing American tradition of documentary for them to draw on or situate their work within. Despite this lack of precedent (or perhaps in part because of it), 1936 was a banner year for collaborative attempts at a new American genre: the documentary book, in which words and photographs would appear together, supposedly in equal partnership. Today, the best-remembered of these writer-photographer collaborations are *You Have Seen Their Faces* by Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White (1937), *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* by James Agee and Walker Evans (1941), and *An American Exodus* (1939). The gaps between publication dates notwithstanding, the fieldwork for all of these projects was conducted primarily, or in part, during 1936. All

dealt primarily, or in major part, with life in the rural South, and all tried to say something true, meaningful, and of interest to a general audience about the terrible conditions under which millions of rural Americans were living their lives in the mid-1930s.

You Have Seen Their Faces, the first of the three to appear, was by far the most commercially successful. Critics praised it as new in form and revolutionary in content, and it enjoyed a brief stay near the top of 1937's best-seller lists. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, though largely ignored when published in 1941, has since become revered as a transcendent work of American literary and photographic art. Of the three, however, *An American Exodus* seems the most accomplished as social documentary, i.e., at exploring the lives of a specific group of people and locating those people within the social and economic context of their time.

An American Exodus fits rather neatly between the other two books, not only chronologically, but also by steering a middle course and thus avoiding their excesses. It lacks the cloying, self-serving sentimentality that helped make *You Have Seen Their Faces* a best seller. Nor does it display the kind of idiosyncratic

brilliance that elevated *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* to the realm of high art. Seemingly the least sophisticated of the three, *An American Exodus* is certainly the most straight-forward. Resting on what Taylor termed "a tripod of photographs, captions, and text" (p.6), it defines a social problem, describes the ramifications of that problem without exaggeration or pretense, and challenges the American status quo—all levels of government, large landowners and/or corporate farms profiting from the recent "industrialization" of agriculture, and individual American citizens—to change their attitudes toward the nation's rural poor and help reverse the downward trajectory of their lives.

Starting in the deep south, *An American Exodus* moves from east to west in six "chapters," each consisting of captioned photographs and a short essay by Taylor. In "Old South" and "Plantation Under the Machine," we learn about sharecropping, tenancy, and the plantation system of cotton agriculture, as well as the devastating impact of mechanization on the economic and social structure of the region. In "Midcontinent," we encounter failed, dislocated cotton farmers in Oklahoma and north Texas, many

of them dazed by the bleak futures they and their families face. Then we move to "Plains" and a series of treeless, able-flat landscapes, in which abandoned farmhouses provide the only vertical lines, where fields are plowed right up to the houses' doorsteps, their inhabitants gone, having been "tractored out." In "Dust Bowl," we see once productive farms knee deep in dust from farms further west, their own eroded topsoil having blown far to the east. We end up in the "Last West," where we see rural people from throughout the nation trying to piece their lives back together again in California. By this time (and place), most of these families have no realistic prospect of making a home for themselves on the land. They live in temporary camps, most of them squalid, and have to pull up stakes every few weeks according to a schedule dictated by whatever crop—mechanically planted, scientifically maintained, often corporately owned—requires a temporary infusion of human labor.

Lange's photographs are clearly the strongest of the documentary tripod's legs. She may at times monumentalize her subjects, but rarely do her photographs descend into sentimentality. She also seems to have her photographic ego well in hand: she allows her pictures to act as evidence when necessary and, occasionally, as illustrations for Taylor's theorizing. Most of her images, though, go well beyond having to function as proof. The best simply shine, infused with a life of their own no words or theories can enlarge upon: an elderly ex-slave couple in Georgia; cotton-choppers marching into the field, hoes over their shoulders, in the Mississippi Delta; a woman resting

in the shade of a roadside billboard in sun-beaten west Texas; any of several grizzled old farmers in worn overalls and beat-up hats; any of many strong country women—mothers, mother-to-be, grandmothers. All of these people and many more stare out of the pages of *An American Exodus* and demand that their lives be considered, taken at face value, respected. We feel what we think Lange felt. In these and other photographs—her best—she and her camera have momentarily attained transparency.

The photographs' captions are more ordinary, though they, too, vary widely in tone and content. Sometimes they provide factual information about the content of the photograph, often in as few words as possible. At other times they quote from sources as diverse as academic works of rural sociology, folk songs, government farm reports, newspaper advertisements, and corporate justifications for increased agricultural efficiency through mechanization. Clearly criticizing *You Have Seen Their Faces*, in which Erskine Caldwell admitted fabricating the quotes that appeared alongside the photographs, Taylor makes a point of telling us that when the captions in *An American Exodus* appear in quotation marks they are the words of the person depicted, "not what we think might be their unspoken thoughts" (p.6). In their variety of source, tone, and content the book's captions complement the photographs well, neither dominating nor distracting from the visual images. The two lean easily on each other, both supplementing and supporting.

With the possible exception of the essay that accompanies the final

chapter on dispossessed migrants in California, Taylor's text seems the weakest leg of the documentary tripod. Too often, his writing seems mechanical. His essays provide factual material and something of a historical narrative for the facts to fit within, but rarely do they go beyond summing up what the photographs and their captions have already shown us. Occasionally, his writing seems shallow, as in "Plantation Under the Machine," where he waxes sentimental over the passage of the old-time plantation system of cotton agriculture in the Mississippi Delta. Most of the time, though, Taylor tends to tell us what Lange has already convinced us of, and his writing thus seems a bit anticlimactic, sometimes even superfluous.

Lange and Taylor did not pretend to have solutions for the problems they described. They understood that America was in the midst of a vast social and economic transformation that would inevitably harm those of its citizens least equipped to deal with change. At the same time, though, they hoped that *An American Exodus* would stir enough interest to encourage the kinds of intervention that might blunt the worst of the suffering: more flexible regulations regarding eligibility for relief, federal aid to states to provide services to migrants, more stringent regulations on living conditions in the camps, funds to establish cooperative dairies, gardens, and poultry enterprises at the more permanent migrant camps.

None of these measures came to pass, though, at least not in the short run. With the outbreak of war in Europe in the fall of 1939, just weeks before publication of *An*

American Exodus, America turned its attention and energies elsewhere. The time for contemplating the nation's internal problems had passed, and the window of opportunity for the new genre of social documentary slammed shut. The next round of writer-photographer collaborations—*Say, Is This the U.S.A?* (1941), a second effort by Caldwell and Bourke-White, is a prime example—would celebrate America's folksy strengths and ignore anything even mildly problematic. American publishers jumped on this bandwagon without hesitation: within months, they were churning out photographic books that looked like the social documentaries of the thirties—in that they all rested on the documentary tripod of photographs, cap-

tions, and text—but which turned a collective blind eye to any hint of social or economic injustice on the domestic front. This new “heart-beat-of-America” sub-genre, the mutant offspring of the social documentary books of the 1930s, quickly degenerated into happy-face propaganda for a long list of moral virtues inherent in “the American way of life,” each a good reason why America would prevail in any upcoming global conflict.

Had world events unfolded differently, *An American Exodus* might seem less exceptional today. Other social documentary projects, taking the work of Taylor and Lange as their starting point, might have emerged during the 1940s. They might have been more sophisticated than *An American Exodus*; they

might have blended the visual and the verbal more subtly; they might have suggested workable solutions to various problems; they might well have eclipsed the original in terms of power and impact. As things turned out, though, the inquiring impulse behind the social documentary books of the mid-1930s was nipped in the bud by World War II, leaving *An American Exodus* as little more than the best example of a once-ascendant voice in American arts, letters, and social thinking that was never allowed to reach maturity.

DAVID WHARTON is Assistant Professor of Southern Studies and Director of Documentary Studies at the University of Mississippi.

Reviews of Recent Books

LIGHT OF THE SPIRIT: PORTRAITS OF SOUTHERN OUTSIDER ARTISTS.

Karekin Goekjian and Robert Peacock. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998.

Light of the Spirit is an art book about artists who seem to defy concrete categorization. They are Southern, self-taught, some might say visionary, artists who use the bits and pieces of the refuse of everyday life to create their own vision of the world. Some of these artists are religious in the traditional sense; all are religious about their work. Karekin Goekjian and Robert Peacock's collaborative exploration of this Southern art form is insightful and creative, offering a unique view of the artists who are outside the main-

stream, yet are increasingly finding themselves in the public eye.

Goekjian artfully photographs twenty-one Southern male artists, including four Mississippians: Sulton Rogers, Earl Simmons, A.J. Mohammed, and Burgess Delaney. Each artist is shown in his home environment, surrounded by examples of his work. While this might seem a good introduction to regional “folk” artists, Goekjian and Peacock's project is better viewed as artistic interpretation rather than scholarly documentation. While *Light of the Spirit* opens with two insightful essays regarding Goekjian's art photography and the traditions and nomenclature surrounding Southern self-taught artists, the portraits of artists and art are often disturbing. Most

of the photographs are imbued with mysticism and a dark spirituality that might not have been intended for a cement sculpture of a cow, and might not be characteristic of its maker. A reader who is relatively unversed in this unique style of Southern art might easily read dark mystery where there is none. However, Goekjian's effort to portray each artist in his home environment is one that many art scholars neglect. He has brought the techniques of fieldwork into the realm of art photography and is successful in the creation of an artistic body of work. It is unfortunate that this approach heightens the notion that these folk artists are oddities. The neglect of female artists in the work is also a disappointment.

Light of the Spirit is a work of art with elements of field documentation. For Mississippians interested in artistic portrayals of several of the state's most prominent male self-taught artists, this book is a welcome—and especially creative—addition. For those interested in discovering the realities of life for folk artists, male and female, there are many more scholarly works available.

MELISSA MCGUIRE received her M.A. in Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi and now works for the Yoknapatawpha Arts Council.

WEARY FEET, RESTED SOULS: A GUIDED HISTORY OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT.

Townsend Davis.

New York: W.W. Norton, 1997.

Visitors to Mississippi need three items for a road trip through the Magnolia State: the most recent state road map, a cooler of ice-cold beverages, and Townsend Davis's *Weary Feet, Rested Souls*. The book is essential if travelers want to know the history of Mississippi over the last fifty years and the places that have drawn journalists, historians, politicians, and civil rights organizers to the state. Along with a guided tour through the movement in Mississippi, the book also provides well-deserved trails through Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Tennessee. The volume is organized by state, with a map and discussion of crucial events in each local movement's role in the struggle.

Mississippi receives the most detailed treatment in the book because of its legacy of maintaining the most brutal enforcement of racial codes. According to Davis, almost every county in Mississippi is an eligible site for civil rights era commemoration. Traveling down the road where over thirty years ago three civil rights workers in Neshoba County were murdered by hostile

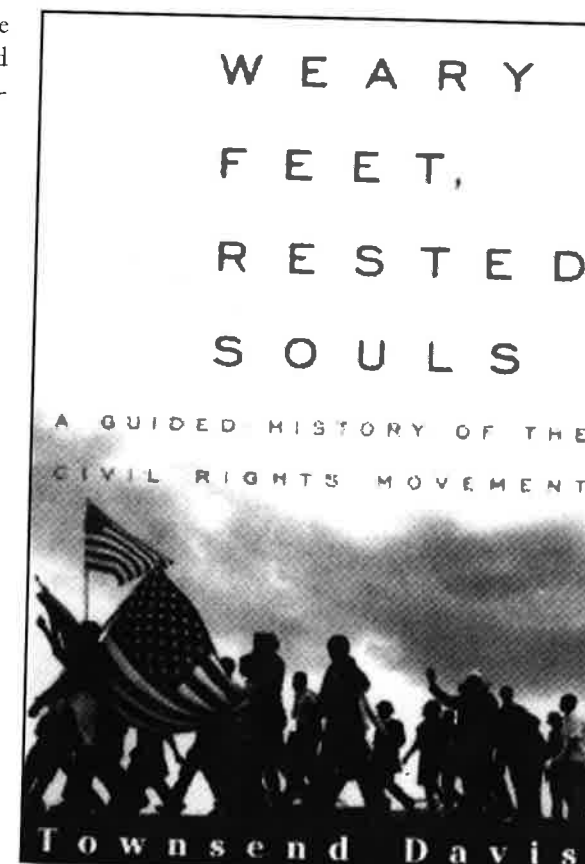
coalitions and universal suffrage rights. Davis focuses on the physical environment as a living representation of struggles fought at lunch counters, churches, courthouses, country stores, barbershops, drug stores, county roads, and state highways.

Davis brings the gruesome image of Emmett Till's body to life as he directs readers to Mississippi, where drivers can view Bryant's Grocery and Meat Market, the infamous

site of Till's flirtatious gesture to an unamused white woman. Visitors can lay their hands on Fannie Lou Hamer's grave site and see where she first organized her efforts in an old sharecropper's pavilion. The images of Bob Moses's leadership in the first mass voting drive in McComb become more clear as one drives by the site of the freedom house, several participating churches, and the courthouse. In Jackson, the reader is directed to the Hinds County Detention Center where the Freedom Riders were arrested in 1961, the county courthouse where Byron de la Beckwith was recently convicted of murdering Medgar Evers, and the site of Woolworth's on East Capitol Street, where protesters conducted a 1963 sit-

in. In Oxford, Davis has readers visit the University Lyceum, where James Meredith's attempt to enter Ole Miss was met with protest from several thousand whites. Greenwood and Philadelphia are also prominent on his inventory of places to visit.

Weary Feet follows the typical civil rights chronology: *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 to the Lorraine Motel in 1968. Davis includes both civil rights homiletics



whites, readers gather a visual sense of the displacement in time and memory that has accompanied the most recent recollections of the civil rights movement. In his gallant study of the movement in Mississippi, *Local People* (1994), John Dittmer lays the historical framework of local movements. Davis, however, focuses on the intersection of space, memory, and miles as the historical process moved from Jim Crow to biracial

and homespun folk culture about the mythical movement in this fine, but limited attempt at dotting the passageways of the movement. All Southerners and anyone interested in civil rights monuments could benefit by placing this book alongside the road map and cooler when planning their next trip through the South.

FARRELL EVANS works for the *Oxford American*.

AMERICAN VOUDOU: JOURNEY INTO A HIDDEN WORLD.

Rod Davis.

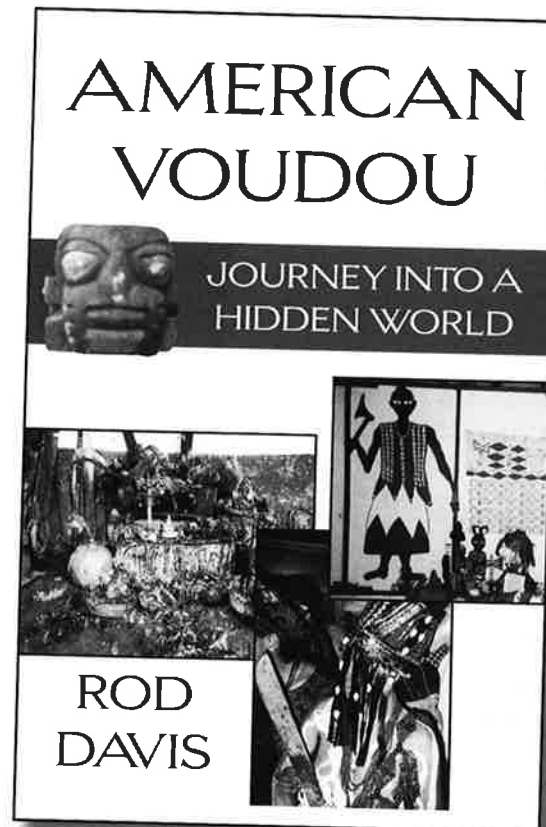
Denton, TX:

University of North Texas Press,
1998.

In *American Voodoo: Journey into a Hidden World*, Rod Davis would like you to pack your bags lightly and explore the remnants of the last hoodoo man as he crisscrosses the back roads of America in search of elusive flashes of spirits. This engaging, well written travelog by a middle-aged white man bares no new discoveries for scholars of the subject. Davis does, however, pull and reshape some old theories, which can be found in the book's second appendix. Throughout the book one finds real faces and places where ordinary folks from Mississippi to Miami are practicing one form or another of African cosmology.

Davis's stated purpose was to find out what happened to Voodoo. To pursue that mission, he illustrates what Voodoo looks like in American society and aptly terms it the Voodoo renaissance. His approach was not a methodology

rooted in academics, but it was steeped in the traditions he sought out. Guided by an intuitive force (or was it Elaba?) to which he offers sacrifices from time to time, Davis argues that Voodoo is alive and can be found in Brooklyn Brownstones, Oyotunji Village, workshops for tour guides, and the back roads of small Southern towns. As he puts it, "Voodoo is everywhere."



To his credit, Davis has not tapped on the doors of every Voodoo wannabe offering "spiritual guidance" that can be found so easily doing business from the French Quarter to the Internet. In fact, he is diligent in avoiding the all too often accepted notions of what Voodoo is. For example, he chose to use the Creole spelling from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Louisiana as a way of avoiding the images most associated with America's greatest

scapegoat for all things strange and evil. Unlike Melville Herskovits, who wrote an essay entitled "What is Voodoo?" Davis is more concerned with what has *happened* to Voodoo in the United States.

Some readers who are more versed in the subject may find troublesome Davis's generic use of the word Voodoo to describe other similar but distinct constructs of African cosmology. It is true that Voodoo, Santeria, Candomble, Macumbe, Obeah, Southern Hoodoo, Shango Baptist and Yoruba Orisha worship belong to the same *house* just as Catholics and Protestants belong to Christianity, but differ in that those who partake of one or the other distinguish crucial details, just like Baptists and Methodists. And like Baptists and Methodists, they all have distinctive histories. I would therefore caution the reader not to misunderstand the broad concepts of "Voodoo" for the specifics of the various religions discussed in *American Voodoo*.

Davis's work is best when viewed for its political dimensions, which illuminate the ways Christianity has worked to undermine Voodoo. The journey of Voodoo in America is a window in Voodoo's resilience in spite of Christian opposition.

PHOENIX SAVAGE is a graduate student at the University of Mississippi.

THE OXYGEN MAN.

Steve Yarbrough.

Denver: MacMurray and Beck, 1999.

In his 1941 autobiography, *Lanterns on the Levee*, William Alexander Percy wrote that "the basic fiber, the cloth of the Delta popula-

tion—as of the whole South—is built of three dissimilar threads and only three": the gentry, the poor whites, and the Negroes. While this was not, perhaps, true of the South as a whole, it may have been for the Mississippi Delta, and, if Steve Yarbrough's *The Oxygen Man* is any indication, may still be.

The title character, Ned Rose, is poor white trash to the bone. The son of a wandering father and a promiscuous mother, Ned makes his living working for his upper-class high school buddy, Mack Bell, checking the oxygen levels in Mack's catfish ponds and existing, as an ungenerous but not unobservant black co-worker tells him, as "an empty blank" for Mack to fill in. But trouble is afoot; Mack's black labor force is in revolt, and Ned is forced to decide where his loyalties and, ultimately, his identity reside.

The situation is ripe for a Movie-of-the-Week-style redemption, and Yarbrough does not wholly avoid the pitfalls. Mostly, however, he does. Despite a somewhat weak conclusion and a collection of black characters that seem rather flatly heroic, *The Oxygen Man* is a sensitively written, thematically complex novel; it is, moreover, a good read.

While the novel's primary action is set in 1996, several long flashback sections take place in the early 1970s when Ned and his sister Daze were students at the local white-only private high school. Both Roses have fleeting opportunities to enter the upper class world denied them by birth—Ned through his prowess at football, Daze through a relationship with the son of the town banker. But in both cases, fate intervenes, and the siblings repress to a state of eerie passivity.

Among the novel's many virtues is its nuanced presentation of social class. Catfish farming appears as an updated and slightly smellier version of the cotton plantations that preceded it, and the concomitant social relationships survive largely intact. The rich really are different from Daze and Ned, although Mack Bell and his cohort live out their allotted roles no less passively than do their poorer



neighbors. Both groups are, as Daze realizes, "convicted at birth" (177). A prominent strand of determinism runs throughout the novel—references to appetites, bodily functions, big things eating little things are common—and except for a few somewhat heavy-handed instances (one involving a laboratory experiment with rats!), the novel's naturalistic dimension emerges, well, naturally.

Yarbrough is a psychological minimalist and a good one; charac-

ters' minds are always inert or reactive, never imaginative or creative. Ned is but one example of those who "had a hole they could never fill because the hole was them and they were the hold, the sum of their natures null" (104). A variety of compensatory strategies result: Ned lashes out in inarticulate violence; his father paints houses because he wants to "put a bright face on things" (186); his mother fills her emptiness with sex and (later) food. Nothing works.

The confluence of naturalism and poor whites places *The Oxygen Man* in the tradition of Erskine Caldwell, Harry Crews, and Larry Brown, and like those writers, Yarbrough is a sensualist. He describes a thick, almost viscous world; the reader smells and feels it as much as he sees it. But more than that, Yarbrough brilliantly captures the confusion and despair caused by confronting an unbeatable, inscrutable set of circumstances, and he does so without resorting to caricature. At the conclusion of the novel, however, Yarbrough takes the advice of Daze's English teacher "to quit worrying about the transitions and make a big leap, to jump from A to B and stop looking

for a bridge" (73). Both Daze and Ned transcend fate in a way that I am not convinced remains true to the novel's social and psychological premises. Redemption is, I suppose, always an aesthetic risk, and in any event, the ending in no way undermines what is, taken as a whole, a virtuoso performance.

SCOTT ROMINE teaches English at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Have you missed an issue of Mississippi Folklife

The following issues are still available:

Vol. 31, No. 1: Folklife and the Civil Rights Movement

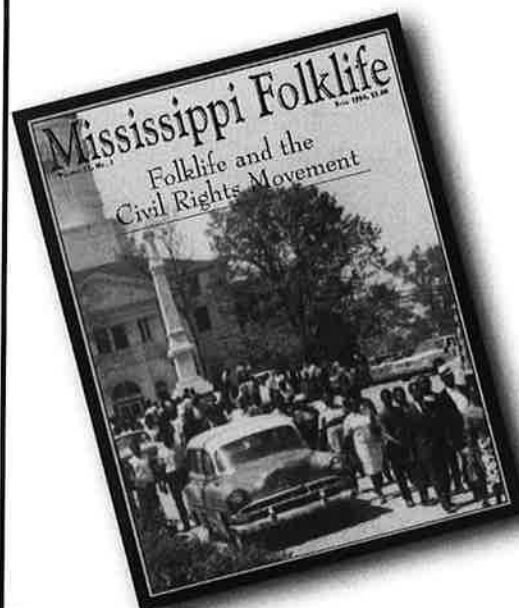
Vol. 30, Nos. 1 & 2: Piney Woods Folklife

Vol. 29, No. 2: Mississippi Foodways

Vol. 29, No. 1: Tula Dog Trots and Rapping in the Delta

Vol. 28, No. 2: Biloxi Seafood Industry and Delta Mule Racing

Vol. 28, No. 1: Foxhunting, James Ivy, and Children's Songs



Become a subscriber to this twice-yearly publication for only \$10.00.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

TELEPHONE _____

METHOD OF PAYMENT: ☐ CHECK ENCLOSED ☐ PLEASE CHARGE MY CREDIT CARD (PLEASE CIRCLE MASTERCARD OR VISA)

SIGNATURE _____ ACT# _____ EXP _____

Send to **Mississippi Folklife**
301 Hill Hall • University of Mississippi • University, MS 38655

Mississippi Folklife is a publication from the
Center for the Study of Southern Culture
THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

This issue of

Mississippi Folklife

is supported by a grant from

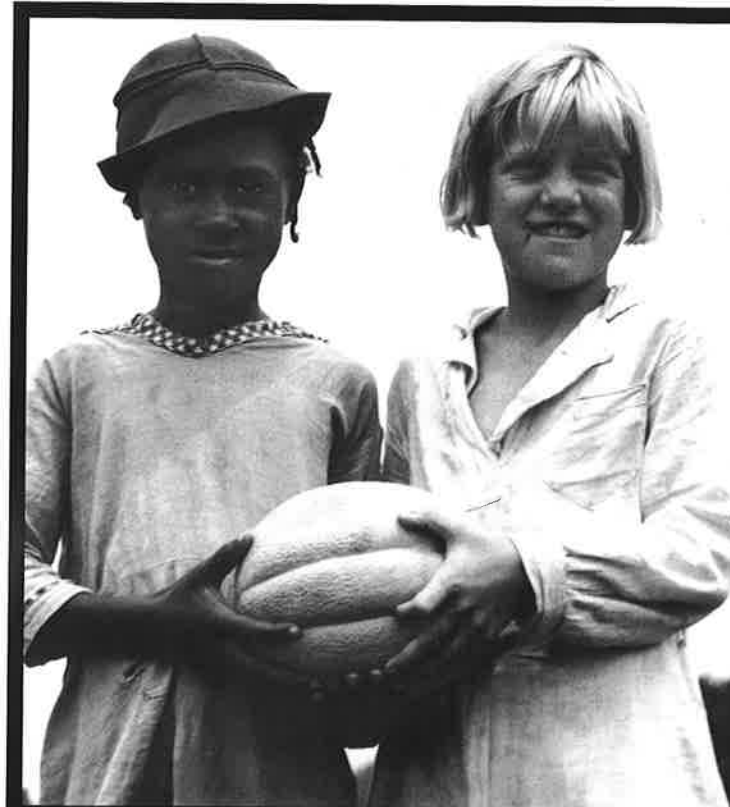


239 North Lamar Street, Suite 207 • Jackson, MS 39201

662.359.6030 • Fax 662.359.6008

800.582.2233

(TDD) Mississippi Relay Service



Southern Foodways Alliance

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOUTHERN CULTURE
THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Announcing the Third Annual
Southern Foodways Symposium

OCTOBER 20-22, 2000

Travelin' On
Southern Foodways En Route

for details contact
John T. Edge at 662.915.599
or via email at johnt@dixie-net.com

CELEBRATE FOOD • PROMOTE THE AMERICAN SOUTH
PRESERVE TRADITION • NURTURE CULTURE • HONOR DIVERSITY

Parting Hand

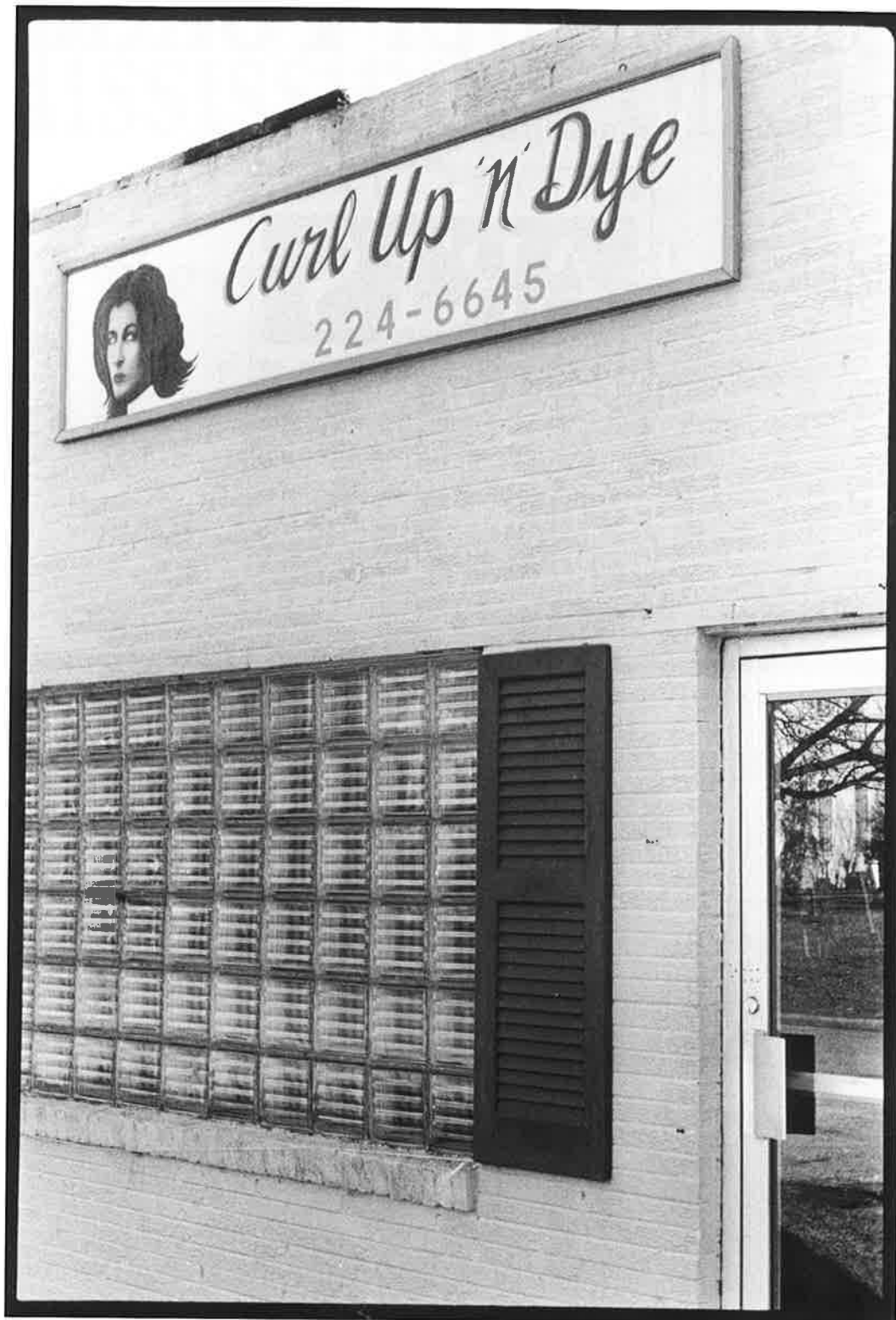


PHOTO SALLY MONROE

From the back porch to the pulpit...

Mississippi Folklife, formerly the *Mississippi Folklore Register*, publishes articles, photographic essays and reviews about the diversity of folklife and culture in Mississippi and adjoining regions. To subscribe and join the Mississippi Folklore Society, please fill out this form and mail it to the address below.

Annual membership rate (*includes two issues per year*)

\$10.00 - U.S.

\$15.00 - Canada

\$20.00 - International

\$100.00 - Lifetime membership

Payment Options

☐ Bill Me

☐ Payment enclosed

☐ Please charge my Visa or Mastercard (*please circle one*)

Credit card no. _____ Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

☐ **YES!** I would like a subscription and membership for _____ year(s).

Cost: _____

Send to:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

☐ Please send me more information about the Center for the Study of Southern Culture

**Mississippi
Folklife**

SUBSCRIPTION DEPARTMENT
301 Hill Hall
The University of Mississippi
University, MS 38677



Center for the Study of Southern Culture
THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI
University, MS 38677
<http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/south>



Non-Profit Org
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 6