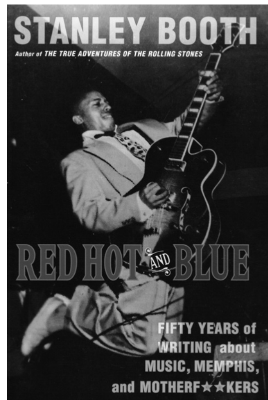
Reviews

***Red Hot and Blue: Fifty Years of Writing about Music, Memphis, and Motherfuckers.* By Stanley Booth. (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2019. Pp. 394, $19.99, paperback)**

Longtime Memphis resident Wayne Booth is best known for *The True Adventures of the Rolling Stones*, his widely praised first-person account of the band up to the early 1970s. *Red Hot and Blue* collects writings from the 1960s into the twenty-first century that focus on blues musicians, primarily, though some pieces are more associated with jazz, soul, R&B, and country, and music is not central in others. Their subjects range widely, including Ma Rainey, Blind Willie McTell, the Mar-Keys (members of whom formed Booker T and the MGs), Mose Allison, James Brown, and the Memphis color photographer William Eggleston. In one piece, Booth is present in the Stax studio where Otis Redding and guitarist Steve Cropper are composing the chart-topping "(Sittin' On) The Dock of the Bay," only days before the former would die in a plane crash. A piece on Memphis studios includes miniature portraits of Chips Moman, Dan Penn, and Booth's close friend Jim Dickinson, who quips that the latter-day music business is "self-devouring." A short piece concerns singer Gram Parsons, who, like Booth, was born in Waycross, Georgia, a place that, according to Booth, shares with nearby towns "two curses: hard work and Jesus." Seemingly out of step with his conventional roots, Parsons was (like Booth) a close friend of Keith Richards, and in his Flying Burrito Brothers days wore a Nudie suit decorated with marijuana plants. The subject of a brief elegy included is Mar-Keys guitarist Charles Freeman III, who, like Parsons (dead of an overdose at twenty-six), was another young rock and roll casualty. According to his therapist, Freeman was "a Mozart of self-destruction."



Memphis—or Memphis as it was—is prominent throughout the book. More than one piece discusses the twenty-minute Civil War Battle of Memphis, the Memphis Massacre of 1866 in which forty-four black people were killed and churches, schools, and houses were burned, the yellow fever that ravaged the city on three occasions in the nineteenth century, and the Crump political machine in the early twentieth century. Since the history of the city is, largely, the history of African Americans in the city, race is also at the center of the collection. Booth's point of view is based in an understanding of and sympathy for the hardships and sufferings of generations of southern black people and black Memphians in particular. Included is a Booth script commissioned by fellow-Memphian Cybill Shepherd that begins with images of Beale Street. It shifts quickly to the Atlantic Ocean and a ship sailing to North America filled with frightened, captive West Africans who—in a clever turn—wonder if they will be cooked and eaten by the white natives. Collectively, the book affirms the kinship

of black and white people, to the point that skin color practically vanishes. At a Georgia restaurant with black musician friends, Booth talks about the food of his youth, which included "a big old pot of speckled butterbeans," seasoned meat with fat, cornbread, and the like. To another musician at the table, saxophonist Fred Ford observes that for years Booth has been "Passin'." Booth writes, "I've never had a greater compliment." His identifications with African Americans perhaps risk the appearance of self-aggrandizement, but a long-time resident of an all-black section of Memphis, Booth's good will is clear.

Booth veers to crankiness regarding non-Memphians who presume to understand the music native to the region by way of a casual visit. Especially in the introductory piece, Booth is an old cuss on his porch with a pellet rifle repelling youngsters from his lawn as he takes shots at music writers not from the region—Memphians term them "blues pukes"—who work under the delusion that "they can vicariously absorb some essence that will permit them to interpret the mysteries of the blues." A more open view may concede that one (even a writer from, say, California or Japan) *is* capable of, at least, understanding, appreciating, and sympathizing with the blues and bluesmen in humility well enough to become something of a fan and appreciator, if not critic. Booth's point of view is in the right place, and he never wavers from his love for the city, as when he quotes Sun Records producer Sam Phillips at the first Rock and Roll Hall of Fame banquet in Cleveland in 1986: "Cleveland ain't ever gonna be Memphis."

The collection is partly concerned with defining the blues, which Booth associates, of course, with suffering, hardship, and oppression. "No bluesman was born rich and I've never known one who died rich," he writes. B.B. King may have become a millionaire, but early on even he and his wife Martha had to watch helplessly as a department store worker repossessed their house draperies for nonpayment. "There is no money in poetry," Booth writes, "but then there is no poetry in money either." As a term, the blues, short for "blue devils," traces to the late eighteenth century, though proto-blues music would not arrive until the 1890s. Other information on the genre is valuable, such as a reference to James Bland, the first significant black writer of popular songs, who died in poverty in 1911, and the open tuning of the Hawaiian guitar, stylish in the early twentieth century, as a direct influence on early bluesmen. The brief essay "Why They Call It the Blues" sums up much about the relevance of the blues and black music in general, and it quotes co-founder of Atlantic Records Ahmet Ertegan: "Black music is the most popular music of all time and has been since it got started good, about 1921."

The blues, however, is more than a music genre, and Booth is also concerned with showing what the blues is *not*. He writes of attending a show at which electric guitarist Johnny Winter played one blues lick after another but never the blues. Winter, he writes, could play rings around Furry Lewis, but the blues were Furry's life. One of the book's recurring figures, Lewis told Booth he was his "brother." In "Furry's Blues," Booth accompanies Lewis on his rounds as a Memphis street cleaner, a city job he had held since 1923. When he died in 1981, Booth found it difficult to believe he was gone, though his funeral was publicized, crowded, and filled with "speeches by people who never knew him, who couldn't have found his house with a police escort."

Another central figure, perhaps predictably, is Elvis Presley, though Booth is a pioneer in this regard; collected here is the first "serious" piece on him, published by *Esquire* in 1967. Overall

sympathetic toward Elvis, Booth provides a glimpse of the tremendous pressures he faced in the mid-1960s, when many saw him as a "young god." Booth writes of one day waiting inside Graceland with friends, family, and hangers-on for "old El to wake up . . . and turn them on with his presence." Like many, Booth casts a cold eye toward Colonel Parker. As far as I can tell, Parker is the book's only example of the last word in the book's subtitle, and this indirectly, by way of Dewey Phillips: "That Parker is a shrewd moo-foo, man." Some readers may be surprised to learn that Parker was an "illegal immigrant" from Holland who appealed less to Elvis than his beloved mother Gladys.

Booth gained access to Elvis by way of Dewey Phillips, another recurring figure in the book, which is both titled after Phillips's pioneering radio show and is dedicated to Phillips, who died in 1968. Like many, including Booth, Phillips was upset by Elvis's performance on the Steve Allen show, on which he was compelled to sing "Hound Dog" to a basset hound. "Where's your guitar?" Phillips asked Elvis the next time he saw him. Booth's piece appears to have "stung" Elvis, and Booth writes that this is what he intended. Perhaps it was such lines of thinking that led Elvis to his TV "comeback" special in December of 1968. The final piece centers on Phillips, among the first to realize that Elvis was a rock and roll artist and not, as initially marketed, a "hillbilly" one. His radio show *Red, Hot and Blue* played "That's All Right, Mama" and introduced the nineteen-year-old singer to Memphis and, eventually, beyond. Phillips proved to be unreliable, was fired from his Memphis show, and moved briefly to a Little Rock station from which he was also fired. Booth displays Phillips's sense of humor as he, having fallen out with Elvis and Parker, showed Elvis fanatics how to climb over the Graceland fence; "I always get in this way," he told them. Without Elvis's approval, Phillips visited a Memphis car dealership, where he claimed that the singer told him to pick out a car for himself. In California at the invitation of Elvis, Phillips met actor Yul Brynner and said to him, "You're a lil short feller, ain't you?"

"The King Is Dead! Hang the Doctor" is Booth's sympathetic portrait of Elvis's doctor, Dr. George C. Nichopoulos, "Dr. Nick." According to him, Elvis's first major illness was the result of "acupuncture" administered with a mix of Novocain, Demerol, and cortisone. Elvis was not, he said, an addict; his uses were more episodic, though he was a "laxative abuser." Even so, Dr. Nick was not surprised by Elvis's death, which some allege Dr. Nick caused, though this was not the coroner's finding. Perhaps to save face, Dr. Nick was placed on probation for minor issues. (He was, however, later indicted on fourteen counts of prescribing illegally and was delicensed in 1995.) Booth is not, of course, an unquestioning Elvis devotee. He writes, "People obsessed by Elvis tend to be weird, but I never met one yet with a healthy sense of humor."

Another great Memphis musician, jazz pianist Phineas Newborn Jr., is the subject of a standout piece. Newborn lived a hard life, which included a nervous breakdown and a physical beating sustained outside a halfway house. His brother, guitarist Calvin Newborn (whose picture on stage comprises the book's cover), and Phineas Sr. are central in this piece, and we learn that Elvis was a Newborn family friend. According to Fred Ford, with whom Booth accompanied Phineas Jr. to Europe, Newborn lived a troubled life but "never had a moment's lack of faith. He's been hurt by the faithlessness of others, but his faith is steadfast." Here as elsewhere, Booth largely allows his subjects to speak for themselves, often with himself as a character. In this sense, Booth is, as in *The True Adventures*

of the Rolling Stones, less a "reporter" than an immersed participant and practitioner of literary journalism.

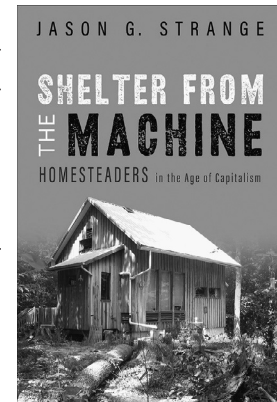
Occasionally this approach can tax the reader's patience—a few of the pieces are arguably longer than one may require, as is the one on bluesman Bobby Rush. Yet even this contains interest and amusement. Early on, intending to appear as a star, Rush says he dressed like Prince Albert of the tobacco can because he had "nothin' else to relate to." In the same piece Booth provides a "Beckettian" image of Howlin' Wolf crawling onto stage carrying a hammer and saw. And, poignantly, many years after Rush's family fled Jackson, Mississippi, due to race problems for Eudora, Arkansas, he made it a special point to return to Jackson.

Stanley Booth is a Mid-South treasure, but there is a good chance that some prospective readers will object to his use of at least one word that some people forbid all white writers to use in any possible context. He came of age in an era when such a prohibition would be laughably narrowminded and itself insulting, and he clearly succeeds in showing how trust and a sense of humanity can be well-earned. Whatever the case, Booth would probably agree that he is among the last of a breed of critics and journalists, and he never apologizes.

–Bryan L. Moore

Shelter From the Machine: Homesteaders in the Age of Capitalism. **By Jason G. Strange. (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, IL, 2020. Pp. xix + 304, contents, acknowledgments, introduction, notes, bibliography, index)**

There's a line in bell hooks's essay "Kentucky is My Fate" in which the revered author explains how she grew up witnessing "two competing cultures of Kentucky" (p. 11). The first, she explains, was "the world of mainstream white supremacist capitalist power" while the second, and far more interesting culture, was "the world of defiant anarchy that championed freedom for everyone" (p. 11). With the devastating recent loss of hooks, scholars of Appalachia can take solace in knowing that Jason G. Strange has taken the call to explore the anarchist, anti-capitalistic culture of Kentucky in his new book *Shelter From the Machine: Homesteaders in the Age of Capitalism*.



Strange begins his book with a question that countless readers no doubt have about the homesteaders documented in this work: "Why do people live like this?" (p. 6). That is, why would people choose to abandon a world of technological overload, one of constant stress and anxiety, one rife with pollution, and economic inequality to live in the verdant hills of Eastern Kentucky? When the lifestyle is framed as I have just presented it, the obvious retort is "Why would anyone not live like this?" (p. 6). But Strange goes out of his way to avoid romanticizing or sentimentalizing the homesteading life. This avoidance is accomplished through a mixture of his own insights and from the words of a number of homesteading interlocutors who reveal the truth of their sustenance existences.

Over the course of the next two-hundred and fifty or so pages, Strange interviews myriad members of the amorphously defined, but altogether fascinating tribes of "back-to-the-lander[s]" (p. 71) who have chosen to abscond life in more densely populated areas in favor of the freedom, camaraderie, but devilishly difficult lifestyle that accompanies living off the grid. A mix of hippies, luddites, and folks who have lived this lifestyle for generations populate the pages of this book and provide a range of fascinating answers and reflections on their decisions to live "palpably of the earth" (p. 65).

Each chapter of Strange's work devotes equal parts to the narratives of and interviews with homesteaders and the economic and social histories concomitant to the historical and recent upticks in communities deciding to live off of the land. These brief historical overviews, drawn from academic and popular sources alike, provide well-needed, but always accessible commentary, on subjects as wide-ranging as community property ownership, coal mining, and forced relocation due to economic inequalities. Some of these bits of context will be well-known to most readers—an overview of the Great Recession perhaps isn't entirely necessary when we're only a decade removed—but all assist readers in understanding how the ripple effects of economic hardships impact the lives of Bear Lick residents. Most engaging about these histories, however, is when Strange provides his own commentary, reframing commonplace notions with more provocative and compelling ones. Take, for example, when he writes of the Industrial Revolution and explains the common perception that industrial progress "was created by elites . . . like Cornelius Vanderbilt, Andrew Carnegie, and John D. Rockefeller" (p. 62). "But," Strange counters, "it wasn't elites who laid the foundations of the factories, raised the walls and ran the roof beams, set the axles and gears, and pulled the wiring" (p. 62). Such reassessments put a thoroughly refreshing spin on history, one based on equity and workers' rights.

Perhaps the strongest thread running through Stange's book is that of equality. This is true of his descriptions of the homesteaders themselves: "bohemians *and* country folk . . . are back-to-the-landers now. . . . What they are all up to, above all, is searching for ways to resist certain aspects of capitalism modernity" (p. 61). In essence, the community he here surmises is one accommodating of anyone willing to contribute and work. The equality expands further, though, into the very fabric of Strange's compositional strategies, as he deliberately presents his arguments free of academic jargon and esoterica that might prove distracting or create opacity.

Early in his introduction, Strange assures readers that "In this book, I don't eat a banana" (p. xvi). I chose this quotation deliberately (and out of context; it refers specifically to a classroom activity in which Strange chomps a banana before provocatively asking students if he's just engaged in an act of injustice) because it speaks to one of Strange's overarching concerns in the book—to avoid "lawyer mode" (p. xvii). To Strange, the pedantry and opacity inherent to much academic criticism prevent it from doing the one thing it should strive to do—be read. As a result, Strange populates his book with countless humorous asides, throwaway one-liners, and colloquial language. In eschewing esoterica in favor of readability, Strange makes a powerful statement: academic knowledge belongs in that hands of all who want it, not just those with overly specialized degrees.

Part ethnography, part regional history, part memoir, and every bit entertaining, Strange's book will be a welcome addition to the bookshelves of students of Appalachia, environmental

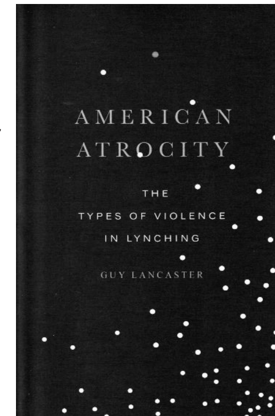
writing, cultural studies, or simply good, compelling writing.

–Jim Coby

American Atrocity: The Types of Violence in Lynching. **By Guy Lancaster. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2021. Pp. v+193, contents, introduction, notes, acknowledgments, index. $19.95, paper)**

The editor of the online *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, Guy Lancaster, has emerged in the past decade as the leading authority on racist violence in Arkansas through his publication of *Racial Cleansing in Arkansas, 1883-1924* and *Bullets and Fire*. In his recent *American Atrocity*, he links the history of anti-Black mob violence in Arkansas to an analysis of theoretical works on the meanings of violence drawn from academic fields like history, philosophy, literary theory, and cognitive science to wring new understandings about, as he subtitles it, the types of violence that comprised the essentially subjective category of lynching. Building on the critical lynching scholarship of Christopher Waldrep, Amy Louise Wood, and Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, Lancaster writes that "the word *lynching* itself cannot be considered a discrete practice but, instead, covers multiple forms of violence" (p. 3).

In a departure from much of the historiography, Lancaster engages with works by scholars like Johan Galtung, Slavoj Žižek, Fritz Breithaupt, Kate Manne, Alan Page Fiske, Tage Shakti Rai, and René Girard. Throughout, he contextualizes the always shifting and temporally and spatially particular nature of words like *lynching*, *murder*, *massacre*, and *execution* in order to "elucidate the manner in which lynching was unique by exploring the various forms of violence manifest in it" (p. 8). Lancaster makes some astute interventions. Arguing that most definitions of lynching have emphasized the "communal nature" (p. 17) of the violence, he argues, following the sociologists James Hawdon and John Ryan, that the term *collective violence* "falls somewhat short of the reality of lynching, which should be better understood as a form of *group* violence." The term *group* is preferable to the term *collective* because group violence is a broader concept, incorporating "'violence *committed by collectives or groups* as well as violence *committed against groups*'" (p. 18). Elsewhere, Lancaster observes the tendency in discussing atrocity to conclude, in the words of one proponent of this view, "that evil is the absence of empathy, 'a genuine incapacity to feel with their fellow men.'" Using the brutal lynching of Henry Lowery by an Arkansas mob in 1921, and the detailed description of the acts of the mob, Lancaster concludes that the lynching of Lowery, and other Black victims, "stemmed not so much from dehumanization but, rather, [from] a recognition of the humanity of the victim—and a desire to destroy that humanity." In other words, he asks, "What if empathy was not the missing ingredient in these social relationships but, instead, the most dangerous?" (p. 78). Particularly interesting is Lancaster's marriage of two things that many readers will view as inherently contradictory—the



ugly peculiarities of Jim Crow Arkansas and high intellectual theory. While this marriage does not always work (see below), it is a useful and rewarding exercise nevertheless.

The experimental nature of *American Atrocity* is one of its selling points, but it may also be its weakness. Early in the book, Lancaster laments that, despite the voluminous scholarship that has been done "on the subject of lynching, we nonetheless lack the same attempt at a unifying body of theory that one can find in other interdisciplinary fields" (p. 6). However, while Lancaster incorporates a wide range of new scholars, methodologies, and theoretical constructs, he does not follow through on the next step: showing *how* this new "unifying body of theory" can be used to challenge, affirm, and reconfigure some of the scholarly tenets of the historiography on mob violence. For instance, one of the most oft-recited (and least queried) doctrines of the historical scholarship on lynching over the past thirty years (and an insight from the magisterial work of W. Fitzhugh Brundage in *Lynching in the New South* [1993]) is the notion that there were four types of lynch mobs: private mobs, terrorist mobs, posses, and mass mobs. By focusing on the discourse and the behavior of lynchers, and drawing on his new cast of scholarly voices, Lancaster was in a position to overhaul, or at least complicate, this deeply held assumption, and to show the contradictions and overlaps between these so-called types. Had he emphasized in the latter stretches of the book the revelatory insights for the historiography of his theoretical contentions (or conversely, the revelatory insights for the theory of his historiographical findings), his book would have become more immediately instructive to other historians. In sum, this is a thoughtful and sometimes brilliant work that should enjoy a broad readership among specialists in Arkansas history, in lynching studies, and in violence studies more generally.

~ Brent M. S. Campney