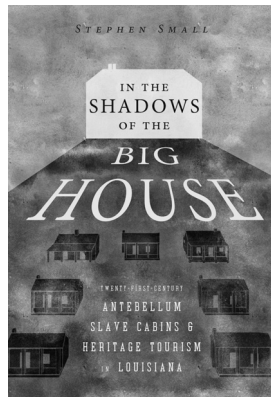


Reviews

In the Shadows of the Big House: Twenty-First-Century Antebellum Slave Cabins & Heritage Tourism in Louisiana. By Stephen Small. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2023. Pp. vii + 254, preface, acknowledgments, introduction, conclusion, epilogue, afterword, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$30.00, paperback)

This volume provides a critical overview of heritage tourism at three different properties with cabin structures associated with antebellum slavery in a single northwest Louisiana parish. The author assesses the extent to which the cabins were incorporated into presentations at the sites as well as the presence or absence of Black voices and Black visions of slavery. Further, Small critically examines gender in site interpretation, not only the presentation of myriad voices on the ground but also their participation in the planning and implementation of site presentation at each of the three locations. For each of the three plantation sites, the author poses and answers multiple questions, a sample of which include: what discussions took place when the sites were being established, who was involved in these dis-



cussions, and which suggestions were implemented and why? He assesses the degree to which Black communities and in particular Black females were among those involved in the process. Small concludes each examination by discussing the consequences and outcomes of the planning and implementation of historic interpretation at each of the three locations.

The author discusses interpretation and presentation of antebellum slavery in a single Louisiana parish—Natchitoches—as a microcosm of all such properties across the eastern United States. While the book was completed and published in the 2020s, the time under examination spans between 2007 and 2011 with an epilogue that discusses developments since 2011. During the first two years, Small visited 35 plantation heritage sites in nine different US states and found the three in Natchitoches to be particularly worthy of concentrated study and discussion given the high number of surviving cabins, a rich set of primary source historical data, and variable attributes between the three sites that were useful for contrast. The Oakland and Magnolia plantations, for instance, were both managed by the National Park Service (NPS), which made available promotional literature and web sites for the slave cabins as well as staff and volunteers who could answer questions about the cabins as well as the enslaved people who lived in them. The Melrose Plantation, owned and operated by a nonprofit association, made cabins accessible to visitors but placed greater emphasis on their use during the 1920s and 1930s as living spaces for white writers. Small found that there was typically no information on the enslaved persons who lived in the cabins during the antebellum period nor

the Black workers who occupied the same structures as free persons of color after emancipation.

Due to the unique colonial history of Louisiana, the master/enslaver class, as Small puts it throughout the volume, became rather multi-ethnic compared to those in other states. A group of people with mixed African and European origin emerged as a relatively powerful group with an identity separate from those considered simply Black. This small group, called *gens de couleur libres* (free people of color), blended aspects of French, Spanish, African, and Native American cultures and were accepted by whites to a far greater degree in Louisiana than elsewhere in the United States. One of these families, the Metoyers, grew to become the largest legally free family of color who owned enslaved persons in the country. They owned the Melrose Plantation, which makes its contrast with the Oakland and Magnolia plantations above even more relevant. Small effectively uses the Metoyer family and other “mixed-race” master/enslavers in this volume to analyze the historical representations of elite whites in public exhibits. He calls the fractured ethnic identity of white Europeans with Spanish, French, and Anglo ancestry the Natchitoches twist, and demonstrates a tendency during the antebellum period among Louisiana elites to place less emphasis on ethnic differences than whites who held power elsewhere in the American South.

The only significant drawback felt by this reviewer is that the 32 other plantation heritage sites visited by Small in 2007 and 2008 were not also subjected to the same rigorous analysis and unveiling of the process (or lack thereof) that went into collaborating with descendant communities and other valid stakeholders when developing interpretation at historical sites. Given that the past decade has seen greater numbers of heritage professionals and researchers putting col-

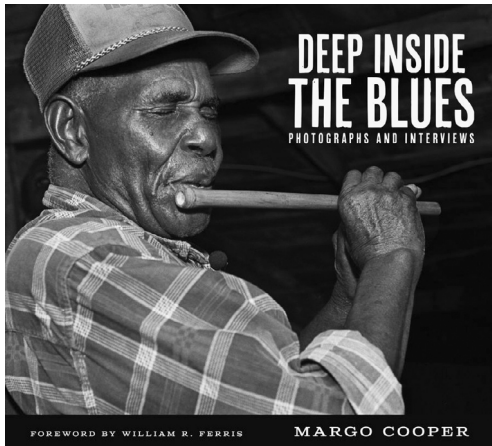
laboration with stakeholders on the table more than ever before, more concrete examples of this process done right are desperately needed for those who do not know where to begin. Criticism of presentations where this process has not yet been implemented are also incredibly useful insofar as they show how much improved interpretation and presentation can be with real human voices whose lives in the present are impacted by what is told about their ancestors’ lives in the past. This process should be valued both by those with a stake in the history as well as those primarily interested in the positive financial effects that such collaboration has the potential to bring to their areas. Delta professionals working on both sides of the Mississippi River arguably have the most to gain from absorbing Small’s volume given the great number of tourism properties with ties to antebellum slavery in the region.

-Matthew P. Rooney



Deep Inside the Blues: Photographs and Interviews. By Margo Cooper, foreword by William R. Ferris. American Made Music Series. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2023. Pp. xxxii + 349, foreword, preface, notes, acknowledgments, index, 168 photographs, \$45.00, hardback)

Deep Inside the Blues immerses readers in Margo Cooper’s documentation of the lives of relatively contemporary blues musicians. She is an excellent interviewer and acclaimed photog-



rapher who offers striking images, vibrant verbal descriptions, and engaging narratives of blues players who have deep roots in the Delta and Mississippi Hill Country. She began photographing blues players and singers as a professional photographer in the 1990s, publishing in major blues magazines and journals. These experiences led to her writing about the music from her home base in New England.

Sparked by an earlier interest in blues, this new volume reflects over two decades of her engagement in blues scenes, primarily in the state of Mississippi. She presents edited interviews from over 30 blues artists or promoters, keeping her own commentary to in-text italicized comments and expository footnotes. The interview texts are interanimated by scores of black and white photographs that depict images of the musicians interviewed as well as pictures of musicians and other individuals who are connected to the content in the book's four sections. The content is relevant to a variety of fields ranging from folklore and ethnomusicology to social history and literary studies. Her editorial approach creates a sense that the contributors are speaking for themselves, and it provides an excellent resource for those interested in the musicians' biographies and the wider social and cultural contexts for blues music.

Writing this book review is challenging. I have heard many of these musicians perform live in concerts, blues clubs, juke joints, and festivals in the Delta. The content is so rich in so many of the written profiles that I am hesitant to single out only a few of these artists. Rather, it may be more useful to provide some relevant themes that readers can look for in the interviews. In this respect, it is striking how there are unified elements of social history present in the recollections of these musicians. Their rural roots depict lived experiences rather than the more stereotypical imagination of blues aficionados and promoters. They are contemporary musicians, but their experiences are not far removed from the lives of the first-generation blues musicians born in the late nineteenth century. Their first-person accounts of farm life, migration to St. Louis, Chicago, California, and other regions provide a lived history that enhances our understanding of larger historical and cultural patterns.

There are also direct accounts of race relations, including episodes of abhorrent violence that are often suppressed in earlier oral histories of blues musicians. Readers will also appreciate the blues musicians' skills as storytellers. Their non-narrative descriptions display a vibrant and poetic eloquence. Many of them directly acknowledge Cooper's presence as an interviewer, and this element of reflexive fieldwork and writing contributes to the book's content—and how the raconteurs craft their narratives. Numerous researchers have amassed a wealth of scholarship on storytelling and the blues, and their writing often asserts how the interview, itself, is a verbal performance. Acknowledging this reflexive element of interviewing will add to our understanding of what Cooper is presenting.

Other major themes center around the aesthetic, emotional, and personal reflections on the value of the music. In these respects, Cooper

offers us primary source materials that provide excellent resources for further studies. The musicians' rich descriptions of the appeal of blues performance yield direct illustrations of often arcane ideas such as the tension between individual and communal aesthetics, playing techniques, the wide range of blues styles, emergence qualities of performance, and the centrality of deep listening within blues performances. Astute readers will also discover that the musicians, themselves, often include direct discussion of in-vogue terms relevant to studies of flow in creative expression, entrainment in cognitive science, and aspects of the social foundations of emotional and aesthetic experiences. What academic writers ascertain in their scholarly discourse is often vibrantly expressed in the musicians' verbal art.

Editing and compiling information from interviews necessarily involves subjective choices. It is a process akin to making photographs and then choosing which images will be placed into a publication. If readers keep in mind that Cooper's vision reflects her own interests and knowledge of the blues, the subjective elements of documentary work should enhance our understanding of the book. By its nature, publishing excerpts from interviews and choosing which photographs to print limit a more comprehensive representation of a topic. In this respect, it is intriguing how the musicians often note that the 1960s and '70s blues revival either enhanced or initiated their careers and more to this point, how this era shaped Margo Cooper's own interests in the music. Notably the *blues from the Delta* trope is often directly articulated in the text and it underlies some guiding assumptions in Cooper's own documentation.

On one hand, we do gain in-depth discussion and illustrations of blues in Mississippi. However, there are observational biases and highly selective views about blues that need to be con-

sidered. Musicians do mention influences from outside of the region, and it would take a great deal of inference to discover the clear presence of Piedmont blues and pre-blues music, often termed *reels* or *reals* on Delta and Hill Country music. This presence is largely glossed over. The Delta emphasis also tends to influence the short schriff provided to other instruments—namely banjos, fiddles, and mandolins—that clearly are foundational to blues music's origins. The book contains excellent information on the fife and drum music associated with the Hill Country, but Delta blues remains at the center of the music, an assertion that is highly problematic in recent scholarship on blue origins.

Cooper's own interests, assumptions and positionality are also evident in other ways. Understandably, she does not give us the list of questions that she asked, but readers can infer a number of the stock questions based on her conversational partners' responses. It is clear that she formulated good questions to spark the good conversations, but one might question what was left out of the dialogue as the accounts were shaped by what were likely highly standardized initial queries. This fieldwork dynamic clearly illustrates that realism is one style out of many. These processes also demonstrate intersubjective elements of researching and publishing ethnographies and oral histories.

The idea that realism involves fictional and subjective elements is directly illustrated in the black and white images. Cooper is an excellent photographer. Rather than just printing only photos from festivals and clubs, she offers a wider context for musicians' lives. When she portrays them in their neighborhoods and homes, Cooper demonstrates that she took the time to develop relationships with the musicians. Her prose furthermore reveals the close connections that she made with many of the artists. The pic-

tures show that she has spent extended periods of time in Mississippi. This is evident, for example, in how she includes childhood photos of Othar Tuner's daughter, Shardé Thomas, in sections on the Rise Star Fife and Drum band. She is depicted as a child playing drums, but as we turn a few pages, we see her as a grown woman playing her fife.

Cooper also has a wonderful ability to depict the decisive moment. One of the best of these representations shows Cedric Burnside's love of drumming. The image vividly depicts his joy in performance. Other portraits are poignant illustrations of major contributors to the past two decades of Mississippi's blues scenes. One of the last photographs is an especially fitting tribute to the direct contributions of one of its key supporters. She depicts Clarksdale's Red Paden in 2018 outside of his juke joint where he is waving to Cooper and passersby. Paden ran the club for years, helped to promote the music in the region, and made major contributions to the music. He became known locally as the *juke joint king*, and he is now venerated within the social memory of the blues after his passing at the end of December in 2023.

~Gregory Hansen



***White Terror Black Trauma: Resistance Poems about Black History.* by Philip C. Kolin. (Chicago: Third World Press, 2023. Pp. 74, introduction, headnotes. Paperback, \$19.95)**



The Book that Screams: Don't Forget

The cover of *White Terror, Black Trauma* lures the reader into the core of the book, with landmarks from Black History and iconic Black figures forever etched in the minds of most Black readers. A prolific poet, critic, and editor, author Philip C. Kolin is the Distinguished Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Southern Mississippi and Editor Emeritus of *The Southern Quarterly*. In Kolin's usual style the poems in this collection are lessons in history, culture, and human failure. The powerful introduction by Haki R. Madhubuti leaves no doubt about the serious nature of the work.

The poems march from page to page as a drumbeat of historical trauma starting with the 1619 enslaved Africans arriving in Jamestown, Virginia:

The sorrow of color bondage
shipped from the old world to the new.

The poet continues with such notable entries as "Denmark Vesey," "The Middle Passage to Hell," and "Plantation Names," which closes with the anguished line, "When we lost our names, we lost our homeland twice." Later the reader is reminded of the Black Codes, another system of slavery after the Civil War.

Several of the poems about the struggle of Black Americans embrace the rights of women

to vote, as in these lines from Kolin’s powerful poem, “Ain’t I A Woman”:

Across the centuries her adopted name
Gave women a geography to selfdom.

He continues his personal commitment to the struggles of women in the poem “Triple Lynched”:

Inscribe Mary Turner’s name in the Book of
martyrs

And enroll her son among the Holy Innocents,

While this collection is a testament to Black men who fought and died for the cause, it is also a tribute to the mothers and daughters of the movement and those who were and still are punished for being Black and female in America. This is evident in such poems as “The Three Ladies Blues,” “Rosa’s Emancipation Proclamation,” “She Works Hard for the Money,” and “The Lady in the Harbor.” Kolin also continues with his devotion to rivers from previous work. Consider lines from his poem, “America’s Largest Black Morgue”:

America’s largest Black Morgue,
is the river bottom.

There is so much history in this collection that it might be placed in the history section of the public library instead of the poetry section. Although the book is a testament about the ordeals of Black Americans it is also full of compassion and tenderness that holds the poems together in a unified long lament for all who have lived this traumatic life and yet survived despite the suffering and the loss of so many to the great enemy, HATE. Men who hate, women who thought it fine to use their hate as an excuse for their own sins even though it meant the death of a young Black boy. The lamentations in this collection march across time and space to remind the reader of lines from popular American songs that Kolin repeats between stanzas in “Voting

Rites in America.” Those lines sum up the call for an end to white terror and Black trauma:

Land where my fathers died
Stand beside her and guide her
My Country tis of thee,
Through the night with the light from above
O beautiful for spacious skies
Sweet land of liberty
Let freedom ring!

-Malaika Favorite

