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## Guest Editor's Introduction

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## Guest Editor's Introduction

JEANNE L. GILLESPIE

While this issue is a general volume, upon surveying the submissions, the innovative and original perspectives explored by our scholars and poets struck me profoundly. In evaluating potential contributions, the theme of the "Unexpected South" took shape as time and again contributors chose multi-disciplinary lenses and less commonly explored aspects of culture and the arts in the South. Throughout the manuscripts included in this volume, the themes of surveying and mapping diverse cultural heritages, of exploring the voices of those diverse communities as performance, and of using the concept of the US South as a model or space that provoked cultural comparison with which to discuss an understanding of more universal issues emerged. We have divided the issue into three sections that reflect these three themes: "Surveying South," "Performing South," and "Gazing South."

The first section, "Surveying South," is dedicated to mapping and locating many diverse communities and cultures. It opens with Thomas Parrie's dense poetry that is deeply connected to the place and the space of his ancestors. Parrie excavates Toledo Bend near Natchitoches, Louisiana, uncovering his multi-ethnic heritage and how his community has responded to local and external events that have marked their lives, their lands, and their bodies. Parrie wrestles the Native American, the Hispanic, and the English-language aspects of his world with words and images as rich as the Sabine River mud.

In his translation of Traugott Bromme's "The State of Mississippi," anthropologist Richard Bland offers a glimpse of the motivations to leave one's homeland and to journey to a vast and wild unknown. Bromme, a multitalented and incredibly prolific nineteenth-century German social entrepreneur and businessman, traveled extensively throughout the Gulf of Mexico. From his travels, he developed a series of guides in German to

inform German-speaking settlers about possible places to settle. The large numbers of German and Czech families that immigrated to the East Texas and Northern Mexican regions of the Gulf South have left significant cultural impact, including a wonderful tradition of breweries and beer. German families also came up the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio Rivers into the heartland. Bland's translation of Bromme gives us an idea of what might have enticed German settlers to Mississippi.

My article on the *Isleños*—Canary Island immigrants to Texas and South Louisiana—builds on Parrie's explorations of Hispanic cultures in the South and complements Bland's translation of Bromme's attempts to entice German communities to the South. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the Spanish government commissioned and, in some cases, conscripted settlers from their successful colonies to shore up the frontiers with their colonial competitors. My research charts the linguistic traces of cultures in contact in Spanish-language oral compositions performed by the residents of St. Bernard Parish in South Louisiana.

For Lily Kelting, Atlanta's Buford Highway becomes a space for mapping contemporary immigrant experience in the emergence of restaurants reflecting the diverse ethnic heritage of this dynamic metropolis. In contrast, Carrie Helms Tippen traces interior Southern spaces to find a locus of power and voice expressed by African Americans in Faulkner's scripting of performance in the kitchens of elite white families.

This performance of difference and agency is explored in greater detail in the second section, "Performing South." Poet Susan Castillo Street's delightful image of the dancing doll reminds us that we often make the gifts we receive serve our own purposes, and Rebecca Holder's examination of truth as performance in Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* offers a perfect example of this. Historian Hayden Noel McDaniel investigates the events of Mississippi's Freedom Summer from the perspective of the children who participated, presenting an unexpected insight with which to analyze the "performance" of community action during this difficult time in Mississippi. Literary scholar W. Lawrence Hogue digs into one of the most powerful performance venues in the contemporary South—televangelism—in the study of Darcey Steinke's *Jesus Saves*, which leads to some unexpected conclusions.

Mélanie Grué's interview with writer Dorothy Allison captures a powerful and provocative voice from Appalachia. Allison's words and work carve a profound and moving literary space from the destitution and devastation of this region's communities. Like the *Isleños* and the Toledo Bend communities, these voices are not those traditionally studied as Southern, but their heritages and their lives have been part of South for generations.

The final section, “Gazing South,” examines the gaze of others on Southern ways and cultures. Stella Nesanovich offers a contemplative gaze over a colonial Louisiana cemetery, remembering the French priests who toiled in these lands and their American Indian and European immigrant parishioners. Brazilian scholar Plínio de Góes uses the model of the confederated South to examine Carmelite participation in Brazil’s nineteenth-century revolt led by “Brother Mug,” while French literary scholar Benjamin Hoffmann traces the political and social justice themes in the nineteenth-century novel *The Saint Ybars Plantation* to real and imagined constructions of plantation society in the Gulf South. Art historian Alison Fields delves into the roots and rituals of the New Orleans Mardi Gras Indians to the gaze of African American neighborhood groups on Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show. This fascinating multi-disciplinary analysis offers insight into a powerful example of how culture groups adopt aspects from other cultures that become intrinsic to their own.

Finally, the poetry of Richard Weaver’s “Journeys” offers a meditation on the Gulf South from his perspective away from home along the Atlantic seaboard. Weaver’s work is inherently connected to the artistic inspiration provided by Gulf Coast artist Walter Anderson, and we have the privilege of including several previously unpublished images from Anderson’s sketchbook to accompany Weaver’s text. We hope that this exploration of the Unexpected South provides meaningful insight into the many diverse voices that flourish in the South as well as the many external scholars and artists who take inspiration from the South.

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