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## Book Review - Give My Poor Heart Ease: Voices of the Mississippi Blues

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## Off the SHELF

**Give My Poor Heart Ease: Voices of the Mississippi Blues** by William Ferris (University of North Carolina Press, 2016: ISBN 9781469628875, \$28.00)

Folklorist and author William Ferris is the former chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Along with Judy Peiser, he co-founded the Center for Southern Folklore in Memphis, Tennessee; he was the founding director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi and is the co-editor of *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Ferris grew up on a farm in rural Mississippi surrounded by African American culture.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Ferris spent much of his time touring Mississippi, documenting stories and collecting recordings, photographs, and film from a wide range of African Americans as they talked about the musical traditions that shaped the state. After many years, Ferris has selected a cross-section of the stories, photographs, and recordings he collected and published them in *Give My Poor Heart Ease: Voices of the Mississippi Blues*.

The book is broken down into sections that each relate to a place, with a brief introduction to that place and why Ferris decided to collect there. He includes interviews relating firsthand, dramatic, and engaging narratives about African

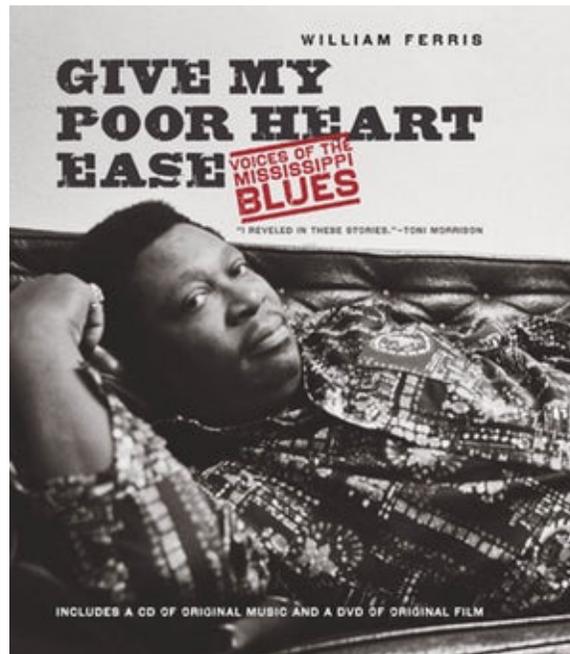
American life and blues music across the state of Mississippi.

The book includes stories from musical legends such as B. B. King and Willie Dixon but more importantly covers artists whose names one may never have come across. Through the eloquent recollections of some of the lesser known artists, the reader is introduced to the rich history of the Mississippi blues. Artist Louis Dotson recounts growing up in a rural community and working in a box factory and sawmill. He also talks about some of his instruments, including the bottle, the harmonica, and the one-strand.

Beyond documenting stories from musicians, Ferris also includes several chapters about his

travels, including a trip he took to a prison camp to collect work chants, a visit to a church to explore sacred tradition, and a wonderful visit to a radio station. In one section, Ferris covers the tradition of the house party, where musicians and the audience participate in a “call and response” exchange.

Ferris also includes lyrics, transcripts of conversations, and—in this version of the publication—a CD of many of the actual interviews and songs included in the book. *Give My Poor Heart Ease* is an entertaining and educational read and collects some very important stories that cannot be found anywhere else. Highly recommended for



libraries that have music collections, Southern history collections, or collections on collecting folk culture.

*Tim Daniels is Manager of Technical and Electronic Services and Assistant Professor at University of North Georgia*