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Book Review: A Punkhouse in the Deep South: The Oral History of 309

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Off the **SHELF**

A Punkhouse in the Deep South: The Oral History of 309 by Aaron Cometbus and Scott Satterwhite (University Press of Florida, 2021: ISBN 9780813068527, \$19.95)

What started as an oral history class assignment at the University of West Florida has become a book of edited interviews by two former residents of a punkhouse in Florida. *A Punkhouse in the Deep South* collects the stories of residents of a dilapidated house near the railroad tracks in Pensacola.

What is a punkhouse? In the book, the authors state it is simply a place where punks live and say it is connected to the idea of communal living movements and squatting. People did pay rent, albeit much lower than for most places, to a landlord. The book has descriptions of punk bands and the scene, but the lives and experiences of the people are the focus rather than the music.

The 309 house is in a downtown neighborhood near train tracks, a Navy base, and the Alabama border. It was built in 1913 and served as a railroad flophouse at one time. Over the years, there could be four to ten people living together, with some paying around \$33 per month for a room or perhaps less for a tiny space somewhere in the house.

Although it was not the first punkhouse in Pensacola, 309 is the longest standing one. Residents mention a variety of reasons for why

they moved into the house, but it mostly came down to cheap rent, saving money for future travel and other plans, a pause in their train trip, or being with friends. Depending on who was living there at the time, the residents were engaged with booking or promoting bands, creating music and painting, participating in protests, vegan cooking, and writing zines.

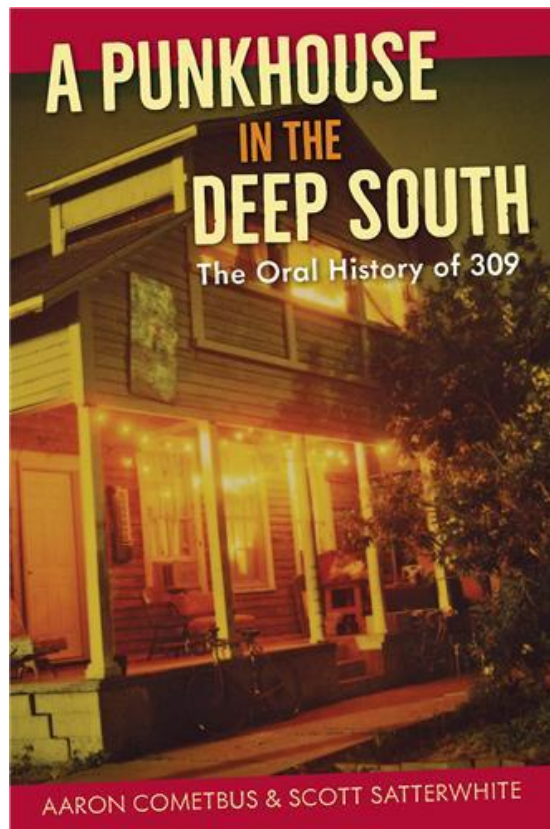


Image courtesy of the publisher

What is fascinating about the book is the way some people's stories refer to other residents and fill in information about what they experienced or what was happening in the house and their lives. A reference to an apartment fire in one interview is later expanded on with a description of how someone escaped and was severely injured. It is interesting to read about former residents describing the issues of ants, rodents, and structural issues, saying

that they now realize it was not a great situation, but it did not bother them too much at the time.

At times, it is hard to know what time period some of the residents are talking about. There are references to war and war protests, but no further description is included. Footnotes do clarify some local references, but the book could use some more footnotes or other ways

to identify the time period. It does include a brief history of Pensacola and the area in its introduction to help provide some context for the significance of this house. Descriptions of how the neighbors viewed the residents and the activities of the house would have helped provide more context, especially with the plans of turning the house into a museum and hosting an artist-in-residence.

This book covers lives and places that typically are not well documented or preserved. It is highly recommended for collections on subcultures and life in the U.S. South.

Chris Sharpe is interim chair of the department of library resources and director of access services at the Kennesaw State University Library System