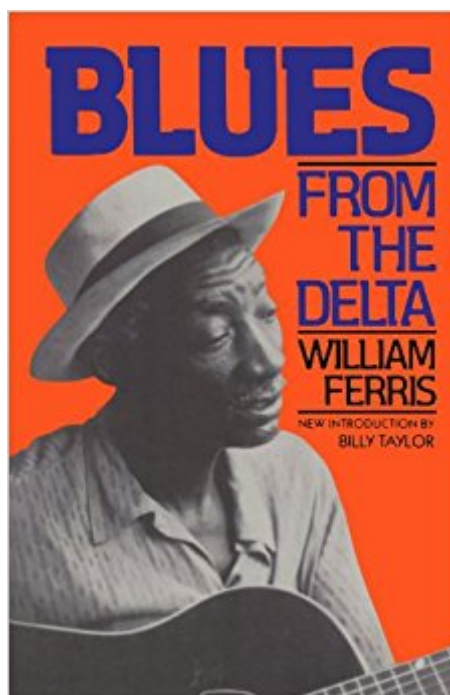


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# Blues From The Delta



## Synopsis

William Ferris, director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, has written a book as deep as the blues: rich in conversation, reference, history, and firsthand experience with blues musicians and the culture that informs the music. The poetry, games, house parties, religious and secular traditions of black life in the Delta are explored in living prose that is also a work of immense scholarship.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

William Ferris is Joel R. Williamson Eminent Professor of History and senior associate director of the Center for the Study of the American South at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A former chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Ferris coedited the Encyclopedia of Southern Culture and is the author of Blues from the Delta. In 1991, Rolling Stone magazine named him among the top ten professors in the United States.

This study on the Mississippi Delta is a great addition to the study of folklife. Ferris uses the tools of this interdisciplinary to deconstruct this genre.

Ferris's book is a well-recognized classic study of blues music. The first section, entitled "Blues Roots," provides a highly readable and interesting overview of the history of blues music, and most of Ferris's conclusions have been supported by subsequent research within the past 30 years. The

second section, "Blues Composition," is a careful analysis of the various techniques for creating and performing blues music. Ferris avoids arcane ethnomusicological analysis, but he still provides readers with a good feel for the musicianship and lyricism of blues players. The final section is a presentation of a night at a blues house party, featuring lyrics, stage patter, jokes, speech play, and even some toasts by Pine Top Johnson, Floyd Thomas, Jasper Love, and Maudie Shirley. This presentation is an interesting depiction of ways in which blues music is performed in context, and it is an especially important historical documentation of an informal event held at Floyd Thomas's home in the Brickyard section of Clarksdale, Mississippi. Ferris's skill at presenting a slice-of-life portrait of a living tradition is clearly evident in this section of the book, and it's clear how he honed this type of research approach in subsequent documentary films. I also enjoyed reading this section while thinking about the recorded performances of the various blues songs that the musicians perform. The dialogue really creates a good feel for sitting in the shotgun house right along with these musicians. Although the research and the interviews were conducted in the 1960s and 70s, the book doesn't feel that dated. In fact, it is especially interesting to read the vivid accounts of Ferris's interviews with musicians like B. B. King, James "Son" Thomas, and other blues musicians during this time period. The book is also illustrated with excellent black and white photographs that portray a vivid feel for Ferris's impressions about the people and community of the musicians about whom he is writing.

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