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Living Blue in the Red States
Edited by David Starkey
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Introduction

David Starkey

I.

On the evening of the 2004 Presidential election, I sat at the computer in my Santa Barbara home and *willed* the voters in the Cleveland-area precincts to carry Ohio into the blue, Democratic column. I poured all my mental energy into it. If Ohio went for John Kerry, there might be just enough Electoral College votes to tip the balance in his favor. But if Ohio voted Republican red, it was all over: Bush would be reelected, this time with a majority of both the popular and the Electoral College votes.

I sat there for several hours—like someone praying for the safe return of a ship he inwardly knows has already foundered—but each time new counts came in, they were no help. Kerry needed a sharp upturn in the number of Democratic votes, but that didn't happen. Most of the Ohio precincts were favoring the Republican candidate. Even the "battleground" city of Columbus was drifting right. Finally, I went to bed, full of despair.

The next morning, like tens of millions of other progressive Americans, I woke up angry. *What the hell were those red voters thinking?* I wanted to know. The war in Iraq was going badly by almost everyone's account, and the weapons of mass destruction had never turned up. And what about Abu Ghraib? And Halliburton and Enron and Tom DeLay? Didn't any of those scandals matter to conservative hoi polloi? Was the president to be held accountable for *nothing*?

Sometimes I'd stare at the red and blue map I had taped to my

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wall and just seethe. It was easy, then, to lump everyone in the red states together as a bunch of Bible-thumping yahoos. I relished a map that began circulating on the Internet immediately after the election, which showed the blue states as part of The United States of Canada and the red states renamed Jesusland. In fact, my wife and I, like many liberals, talked briefly of moving to Canada, where there weren't so many bigots and morons. Compared to the indignity of suffering another term under Bush II, life in the Northwest Territories sounded pretty grand.

In the months that followed, there were plenty of explanations about why the election went the way it did. Some analysts argued that the many state amendments outlawing same-sex marriage brought out the Right in force. The numbers, at least, seemed to support the frequent assertion that Republicans had done a better job of getting out the vote. Writing in *The Washington Quarterly*, Charles Cook pointed out:

> The three-point gap in the popular vote between Bush and Kerry can be partially explained by a disparity in voter turnout increases between the Bush "red" base states and the Kerry "blue" base states. In the 12 "purple" swing states, voter turnout went up a whopping 17 percent over that of 2000. In the bright red states, those that were universally expected to vote Republican, turnout increased by 14 percent. In the bright blue states, those expected to go for Kerry, however, turnout went up by only 11 percent. It would be logical to assume, then, that, in those states that were not "in play," Bush supporters were more motivated than those voting against him. It's hard to find someone who was enthusiastically voting for Kerry, but not at all difficult to find someone who was passionately voting against the president.

Other pundits contended that the majority of people always find it easiest simply to support the status quo. I read somewhere that the soccer moms who'd voted for Clinton now backed Bush because they feared that terrorists threatened the safety of their children. Certainly, September 11, and the war in Iraq and the Patriot Act all played some role in the outcome of the election—just not in the way those of us on

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the blue side had been hoping. As William Chaloupka noted in a *Theory & Event* article entitled "What's the Matter With Us?": "There is a small group of infrequent voters (whose power was most important in states such as Ohio, Iowa, Nevada, New Mexico, and Colorado, and who are somewhat more often women than men) for whom disentangling the difficult knot of 'war and democracy' proved too daunting to do on their own. They voted the war on terror."

As Cook suggests, there *were* several maps that showed a slightly less either/or picture of the electorate. One "purple" map displayed the relative percentage of Democratic and Republican votes in each county. Outside a few Rocky Mountain and Midwestern states, dark red was rare, just as the deep blue pockets were largely limited to the coasts and a few large cities in between. Mostly America was purple—a reddish purple, granted, but purple nonetheless. Analysts looking to strike an optimistic note seized on the idea that we weren't so far apart after all. In his book *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, Morris Fiorina argues that "the hatreds and battles [of the political classes] are not shared by the great mass of the American people . . . who are for the most part moderate in their views and tolerant in their manner."

But I didn't remember experiencing that sense of moderation and tolerance when I'd been living in the Deep South. Quite the contrary. For me, the most telling map—and the one that inspired this book—showed red and blue majorities by county. Again, there was significantly more red than blue, especially if you counted the square miles, but there were many reminders that the red states contained areas of dissent. Great chunks of Colorado, Iowa, New Mexico, and even Arizona were blue. South Texas along the Rio Grande, and the Mississippi River Delta, and the beach counties of southeast Florida: all those places had favored Kerry over Bush. Not surprisingly, throughout the South and Midwest, counties with large universities had voted for the Democrat. And it wasn't simply that there were blue patches in the red; the reverse was also true. In supposedly liberal California, only two noncoastal counties went Democratic. Indeed, the counties to the north and south of my own—San Luis Obispo and Ventura—had both voted for George W.

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Obviously, while it was convenient to revile the stupidity of one half of the country and laud the good sense of the other half, it was also profoundly naive. Even at the height of my righteous indignation, I knew I was oversimplifying the matter. It was relatively easy for my wife, who has lived her entire life in liberal Santa Barbara, to formulate a two-dimensional picture of the "fly-over states." But I was born and raised in the red Central Valley of California. I spent every summer of my life, from the time I was born until I turned sixteen, at my grandparents' homes in Beaumont, Texas, and Lake Charles, Louisiana. And I'd lived out there in America for thirteen years, seven of those years in the Deep South. No doubt about it, the political atmosphere is markedly different in Republican strongholds, but some of the bluest people I've ever met live in the red states.

In the following months, I began corresponding with those people—writers, most of them. What were they thinking? How were they dealing with the feeling of being outnumbered that I remembered so keenly? As I listened to their stories of depression and fury and bafflement, I came to believe that it was important to gather some of their voices together in a collection of essays. *Living Blue in the Red States* seemed an obvious title for the book, and I began soliciting work that would reflect on the experience of being deeply committed to regions of the country where the majority of the citizens don't share many of the writer's core values. "It seems to me the best art is political," Toni Morrison has written, "and you ought to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time." That became precisely my aim in gathering a collection of new essays that I hoped would shed some light on nothing less than the past and future of America.

Granted, the self-critique I heard most often from those on the Left was that we were too fair-minded, too willing to look at both sides of an issue. Still, I wanted to put together a book that, while pointedly and unapologetically progressive, would gather the work of essayists who were able to look beyond the passions of the moment. And this was to be a work of *literature* above all—"irrevocably beautiful"—so it was essential that every essay succeed first of all as a piece of creative nonfiction. I planned to shy away from one-sided rants (unless

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they were truly brilliant) and remain wary of highly topical allusions that would quickly fade from public memory. Yes, many of the essays might take the Iraq war and the reelection of George W. Bush as their starting points, but my project was to collect essays that would be just as readable and relevant fifty years from now as they were the day the book was published.

I hoped, therefore, that my contributors would grapple with big questions. How exactly *does* one live blue in a red state? What compromises are required? What unexpected benefits result from the inevitable friction between liberal and conservative values? What accounts for the current gulf between red and blue states? Over the years, has it gotten worse, or better? Is there something in the American character that's been leading to this schism all along? Is the gap likely to widen or narrow? What are the "duties" of essayists who live in a democracy they believe is headed in the wrong direction? What, if anything, might bring our country together again?

The book I most admire on the current Great American Divide is Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas?* Frank squarely addresses the central conundrum for those of us on the Left: why do so many middle- and working-class Americans vote against the Democrats, the party that would seem to have their best interests at heart? The answer, according to Frank, is that Republicans have convincingly buried economic issues beneath cultural populism. As long as the Right can effectively present the Left as a clique of all-powerful Ivy League, Volvo-driving, latté-drinking, church-hating snobs, most working Americans will turn their wrath in that direction rather than at the corporations that Frank claims are doing the real damage. The irony, as he points out, is that by pledging allegiance to Values rather than Economic Opportunity, the people who were once the backbone of the Democratic Party now support the very people who exploit them.

Whether or not Frank's thesis adequately explains the great red swaths in some very poor parts of these United States, his book deftly weaves autobiography and argument. It is political reporting, yes, but it's also an eminently readable work of creative nonfiction. *What's the Matter with Kansas?* quickly became my model for integrating personal experience and social analysis, although I imagined that in

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my book, narrative and memoir and description would be even more crucial to every chapter's overall argument. Generally, that turned out to be the case.

Of course once the essays began arriving, I had to find something to do with them. Having edited and coedited a number of books already, I knew I had the savvy to put a collection together and get it to press, but what of the fact that I was no longer a red-stater? I worried over that for a week or so until I realized that if I still lived in Louisiana or South Carolina, it would probably have never occurred to me to make this book. Drowning in a sea of red, it was all I could do to keep my head above water. Now, from my tiny blue island on the edge of the country, I could catch my breath and call out to my friends in that great red sea who are stronger swimmers than I ever was.

Ultimately, though, I did not want the book to be a festival of red state bashing, so I decided to seek a publisher not from New York or Chicago or Seattle or San Francisco, but from the red states themselves. I reasoned that many of the buyers of humanities books published by red state university presses are as blue as anyone living on the coasts, and therefore there might be a blue editor or two among those publishers. My hunch turned out to be correct. Many of the editors of the red state university presses I queried responded enthusiastically to my proposal. It only remained to poll contributors and learn which one they favored, and the University of Nebraska Press emerged early as the clear favorite. Somehow that seemed fitting, if ironic. After all, Nebraska is one of the three states (Oklahoma and Utah are the other two) where the Democratic candidate for president in 2004 didn't carry a single county.

II.

Living Blue in the Red States is divided into three parts—West, Midwest, and South—to reflect the major geographic divisions of the red states. While discussions of the misunderstandings and resentments between people on opposite sides of the political fence carry over from essay to essay, there are distinct differences between the three sections. Again and again in the four West essays, we have a sense of

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the expansiveness of the land, the physical presence of mountains and trees and animals. Yes, every square inch may be owned, surveyed, and coveted, but there is still the sense that something unknown and wonderful may yet lie over the next ridge. Even more than the land, weather itself helps shape the outlook of the essayists living in the Midwest. But neighbors are a greater presence here; the weight of contrary human opinion from those living nearby figures vividly in this part of the book. In the section on the South, the pressure to conform to family and community standards, especially in the sphere of religious doctrine, comes to the forefront. According to *Living Blue*'s contributors, thinking differently in the South has clear and immediate consequences.

The book begins with Sherry Simpson's magisterial analysis of bear hunting in Alaska. For thirty years, the McNeil River State Game Sanctuary on the Alaska Peninsula has cultivated the ecotourist activity of bear watching. With the bears now thriving, hunters have put increasing pressure on the state government to ease restrictions on where bears may be shot; even the land adjacent to the sanctuary is now in play. Simpson's essay addresses the inevitable conflict between environmentalists and sport hunters, a recurring blue-red battle. As she says, "The history of wildlife management in Alaska is the history of Alaska, which is an inevitable extension of the history of the West, the United States, the New World. Which is another way of saying that the way we talk about bears—and wolves and squirrels and moose and forests and land—is the way we think of ourselves and our place in the world."

Another Alaskan, Frank Soos, furthers the discussion of his state's unique opportunities and the shortsighted self-interest that too often threatens the very resources that support its citizenry. For Soos, hauling one's own water from the local spring becomes a metaphor for both the value of and the restrictions imposed by self-reliance. Soos believes Alaskans' insatiable desire for "more than is necessary"—selling the state's resources in exchange for "the mountains of wasteful by-products of our getting and spending"—is, ironically, putting "Alaska on a course that will make it more like the Lower 48, that place most of us came here to escape."

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David Romtvedt, Wyoming's Poet Laureate, argues that "the coding of our states as red or blue according to whether they have given their vote to a Republican or Democratic Party candidate tells us very little about the people with whom we are passing our lives." He believes this way of thinking not only "isolates us from one another and forces us to lead lives that are intellectually and emotionally impoverished," it is an "early symptom" of the mindset that leads to ethnic cleansing. Instead, Romtvedt values "the strange beauty of each person" in a state where cowboy poets read their work to lesbian feminists and people leave their keys in the ignitions of their unlocked trucks in case someone else has an emergency and needs "to get somewhere—the hospital, or something."

Unlike Romtvedt, Jennifer Sinor feels far from comfortable in the Utah-Idaho border area where she works and lives, despite its great natural beauty. She wonders if her difficulties "come from living in a rural area rather than a red one. Perhaps my problem . . . has nothing to do with the number of Republicans living in Idaho and more to do with the number of cows." However, she adds sardonically, "it is a hard distinction to draw." "Running in the Red" is both wry and sad, the journal of an outsider, a young mother who is also an avid jogger trying to pound her daily worries and conflicts "into a manageable size by the end of a long run."

The Midwest section begins with Lee Martin's lyrical "Election Season," which contrasts the all-for-one work ethic of his boyhood life in southern Illinois with the presidential election in suburban Columbus, Ohio, where he now lives. Martin considers himself relatively apolitical, but the antigay fervor of his neighbors forces him to reconsider everything from his political activity to whether or not he should withhold the bountiful crop of tomatoes from his backyard. This isn't a trivial consideration, for unlike election season, the earth's seasons really matter: "Then the killing frost comes, and then winter's snow and ice, and we wait again for spring and the thawed earth and the chance once more to put our trust in the sunlight and the rain and the plants that grow. How small we are—how insignificant in the light of all this."

Jonis Agee's "Trapping" is a meditation on death and honor. After

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all the trouble she's had with raccoons, allowing a trapper onto her rural property in Nebraska seems like a good idea. But the sudden death of her brother, both of whose sons are headed to the war in Iraq, causes her to rethink her decision: "Because you see what I had done. I had drawn myself into a trap and now there was hardly anything I could do or forget." She ends the essay by quoting Lucretius: "So each man flees himself, or tries to."

Steve Heller balances his decades of living in Oklahoma and Kansas against his new life in southern California. Cutting back and forth from Clay Center, Kansas, to his apartment in Marina Del Rey, which looks out on the yacht of Midwest native Johnny Carson, Heller tries to answer the question, "When did the civil conversation, the one we used to have with our buddies and our families, whether they were red or blue, bigots or progressives, whether it was face-to-face or by emissary, when did it end?"

Michael J. Rosen's "America, Where's Your Sense of Humor?" is certainly the lightest piece in this collection. With blithe disregard for "the work of statistics experts, political pundits, or well-credentialed analysts in the given field," Rosen attempts to surmise the political leanings of those who submitted work to the most recent version of his humor anthology *May Contain Nuts*. Drawing on data that may, or may not, be accurate, Rosen nevertheless concludes that humor in America, "always the province of minorities and underdogs" is, not surprisingly, "pretty darned blue."

While Robin Hemley's "Control Issues" contains a number of somber moments, it does go some way toward answering Rosen's question about what happened to America's sense of humor. With a dark, scathing, sometimes absurdist wit, Hemley compares the illegal annexation of Hawai'i and the Philippines with the recent invasion of Iraq. He is boggled not only by the similarities but also by "how often we have no control over the way others perceive us, how often the viewpoint of others is in conflict with the way we see ourselves."

The Midwest section is bookended by another election story. Deb Olin Unferth's "A Campaign That Failed" narrates her disastrous turn as a MoveOn political coordinator in the Kansas City suburb of Independence. Like Hemley, Olin Unferth writes prose that is both acidic

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and droll. "I had thought that once I got through the messy parts, the planning parts, the boring parts, and despite the difficult prelude, that in the end the experience would be a good one. But now, as I peered through the screen into the cool apartment beyond, I understood that no part of this was going to be fun, and it wasn't." Despite fully acknowledging "the heavy weight of things I did not understand," Olin Unferth manages to see the farcical aspects of her unsuccessful crusade.

The Southern section is the longest in the book not only because my own roots are in the South, but also because I think this region has the most powerful influence on how the rest of us define just what it means to be red. While most of the essayists make an effort to see both sides of the red-blue divide, David Case is having none of that. "Playing Debussy in the Heart of Dixie," which begins this grouping, is an unapologetic screed against the racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, and general small-mindedness of his native Alabama. The essay is scornful and poignant and, frankly, without hope that anything very blue will ever take root in the Heart of Dixie. In Case's words: "As far as I can tell, being 'progressive' among Alabama whites means reaching out to Catholics, learning to dislike African Americans a bit less, and reserving most of their current hatred for feminists, Hispanic immigrants, and gays."

Like David Case, Jim Peterson finds his attitude toward the South has been deeply affected by childhood, but unlike Case, who only thinks of escape, Peterson's way of battling his dominating and "truly libertine" father was to embrace the evangelical Christianity that Case disparages. Peterson uses "The Amazing Kreskin," a hypnotist capable of convincing people to do all manner of silly things, as his central metaphor. He argues that withstanding "the Kreskin Effect" is the key to avoiding the blue-red dichotomy: "Living blue in a red state, or living red in a blue state for that matter, may well be a continuing process of resisting the powerful attractions of conformity and acceptance."

John Lane's chapter, like Peterson's, focuses on the role of Christianity in Southern life. Having faced in a short span the deaths of three people close to him—a colleague, his mother, and his aunt—Lane

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considers the complications, contradictions, and possible consolations offered by faith: "all these deaths made me think of my own mortality. It also made me realize how similar we all are—fragile, human, puny—and how little the political and social issues really matter at the very end. No matter how painful, these three deaths made me better, made me hang onto every detail of life rushing past."

Where Sherry Simpson and Frank Soos discuss the fate of vast tracts of land in Alaska, Gilbert Allen simply wants to turn less than five acres of small-town wasteland into a park. "How to Ruin a Perfectly Good Swamp in South Carolina" chronicles the years-long efforts of Allen and his wife to do things "the Red State Way": "We watched the remnants of a perfectly good swamp ruined, in the name of Free Enterprise. When what was ruined was about to become even worse, we and our neighbors decided to protect ourselves. We had no local park, and we made one, while our government watched—and, at the end, smiled for the camera."

In "Rescue the Drowning, Tie Your Shoe Strings"—the title is Thoreau's advice to would-be philanthropists—Sidney Burris compares the political leanings of his own generation with those of his red state students. He finds that, unlike in the '60s and early '70s, when being a young person in college meant being a de facto liberal, today's students at least *believe* that their political choice begins by looking inward. Still, Burris is wary: "I wonder if they aren't finding their community of friends first, and then internalizing the group's way of doing things; I wonder if they aren't adopting their politics after they've found their friends." Ultimately, Burris concludes: "Our political opinions are dear to our hearts because it is our hearts, and not the national interest, that we are tending to when we utter those opinions."

The letter "P" stands for both "Poetry" and "Pacifism" in Stephen Corey's "*P* Is For . . ." A native of Jamestown, New York, Corey has spent more than thirty years in the Deep South, a perennial "visitor/observer/interloper," always searching for ways "to explore the possibilities of life and language in a distinctive, individualized way, [which] is *ipso facto* diametrically opposed to notions of doing intentional harm and of allowing others (whether individuals or political organizations) to make one's moral decisions."

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In “Minority within Minority: Dynamics of Race and Culture in the New South,” Anthony Kellman is befriended by a white real estate agent named Gordon, but there are many stresses on an interracial friendship in the Deep South. Kellman, from Barbados, finds that while Southern whites show less prejudice toward Caribbean blacks than toward African Americans, the same racial pigeonholing nevertheless eventually occurs: “And the results are the same. Always the same. Every crab in his own hole.”

Like so many other contributors to this volume, Donald Morrill resents the “misleading binary” of blue state–red state, which he believes is “imposed for its high-contrast tele-value.” Yet Morrill’s essay is among the angriest in the book. He “dangle[s] over the spike of contempt for George W., a man who’s never accomplished a thing on his own and has the blankness of his arrogance to prove it.” Postmodern in the very best sense of the word, “Theater of Operations” is a fusion of quotations, journal entries, dialogue, poetry, and personal observations.

The title of Crescent City native Mona Lisa Saloy’s “The World Loves New Orleans, but America Has Not Come to Its Rescue” sums up her frustration with the federal government’s response to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. In a warm and lively voice, Saloy remembers living through Hurricane Betsy, then gives a detailed account of her exodus following Katrina. At the center of her essay is a description of the complex network of friends and family that has helped so many evacuees survive the tragedy.

Angus Woodward, current resident of Baton Rouge, former resident of New Orleans, takes a broader look at “Louisiana’s New Political Landscape” in the wake of Katrina. With impressive lucidity, Woodward unpacks the complex situation before and after the natural disaster that turned New Orleans “into a brutal testing ground for Bush, Chertoff, Brown, Blanco, Landrieu, Nagin, and dozens of other politicians on the local, state, and national levels.”

“Summertime,” my own contribution to the book, juxtaposes my childhood summers in Texas and Louisiana with my adult life in Louisiana and South Carolina. The essay is my attempt to “reconcile the different parts of myself—the red and the blue, the bold and the

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meek, the agitated and the peaceable, the optimistic and the cynical, summer and winter—just as this country is trying to hold itself together, to see its many conflicting impulses not as a weakness, but as a source of strength."

The book closes with an afterword in which I reflect, with the generous help of my contributors, on the various characteristics—the pleasures and challenges and peculiarities—of the "subspecies" of creative nonfiction that this anthology brings together.

III.

During the early stages of the book's evolution, a cartoon appeared in *The New Yorker* showing a uniformed repairman talking to a female office worker as she feeds a piece of paper into a copier. Elbow on her file cabinet, the mustached repairman tells the woman: "You Democrats will never win back the red states if you keep refusing to go out with me." These essays have a different message. I think it is something like what I imagine the woman's response might be: "I'll never go out with you if you don't change the way you see the world."

In her essay "Small Wonder," Barbara Kingsolver writes:

> One problem with democracy as it plays in our country is that the majority rules so hard; we seem bent on dividing all things into a contest of Win and Lose, and declaring that the Losers are losers. Nearly half of us are routinely asked to disappear while the slim majority works its will. But the playing field is the planet earth, and I for one have no place else to go.

Most of the contributors to *Living Blue in the Red States*—deeply rooted in their homes and communities—share Kingsolver's sense that there's no place else to go. They would, at any rate, prefer honestly and articulately to discuss their issues and concerns rather than pack up and move to more cerulean pastures. If you live in a blue state, they are your largely unheard comrades in arms. If you are a red-stater, they are your teachers and your neighbors, your family and your friends.

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Contributors

Jonis Agee is the author of eleven books, including four novels, *Sweet Eyes*, *Strange Angels*, *South of Resurrection*, and *The Weight of Dreams* and five collections of short fiction, *Pretend We've Never Met*, *Bend This Heart*, *A .38 Special and a Broken Heart*, *Taking the Wall*, and *Acts of Love on Indigo Road*. Her newest novel, *The Riverman's Wife*, will be published by Random House in the summer of 2007. Among her awards are a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, two Loft-McKnight Fellowships for fiction, two Minnesota State Arts Board grants in fiction, and the Nebraska Book Award. She teaches creative writing at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, where she directs the Nebraska Summer Writers' Conference. She is currently at work on a collection of essays.

Gilbert Allen has published four collections of poems: *In Everything*, *Second Chances*, *Commandments at Eleven*, and *Driving to Distraction*, which was featured on Garrison Keillor's *The Writer's Almanac*. He received the South Carolina Literary Arts Fellowship in 2002–3, and he is a five-time winner of the South Carolina Fiction Project Prize. He coedited the anthology *A Millennial Sampler of South Carolina Poetry* (Ninety-Six Press, 2005). Since 1977 he has lived in upstate South Carolina with his wife, Barbara. She is a lifelong Democrat with a Rolodex memory.

Sidney Burris is currently completing a memoir of reading. Portions of it have appeared in *AGNI Magazine*, *The Georgia Review*, *The South-*

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ern Review, *Five Points*, and *Studies in the Literary Imagination*. Another section is forthcoming in *The Southwest Review*. Two of these pieces were selected in 2003 and 2005 as a "Notable Essay" in *Best American Essays*. He has also written two volumes of poetry—one with the University of Utah Press (*A Day at the Races*, 1989) and the other with Louisiana State University Press (*Doing Lucretius*, 2000). These poems originally appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Poetry*, *The Kenyon Review*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and other journals. His work was also included in *Best American Poetry, 1996*.

David Case teaches English at Los Angeles City College and plays piano for the Amphion Quartet. He has published poems, reviews, and articles in the usual variety of places—several of them in the South, no less—and has a novel called "Poison Cures" ready for publication, or at least ready for perusal. David also helps edit *King Log* poetry magazine: poets, please take note of www.angelfire.com/il/kinglog.

Stephen Corey, born in Buffalo, New York, and reared in nearby Jamestown, was educated at Harpur College/Binghamton University (BA, MA) and the University of Florida (PhD). He has published ten poetry collections since 1981, most recently *There Is No Finished World* (White Pine Press, 2003). His essays have appeared in such periodicals as *Shenandoah*, *The Laurel Review*, *Poets & Writers*, and *Connecticut Review*. Corey was cofounder, coeditor, and editor of *The Devil's Millhopper*, an independent poetry journal, from 1976 to 1983. Since 1983 he has been on the editorial staff of *The Georgia Review*, for which he is currently acting editor.

Steve Heller is professor and chair of the MFA in Creative Writing Program at Antioch University–Los Angeles. He grew up in the wheat country of central Oklahoma, where much of "Here Was Johnny" is set. Steve is best known for his novel *The Automotive History of Lucky Kellerman* (Anchor, 1989) and his book of short stories, *The Man Who Drank a Thousand Beers* (Chariton Review, 1984). His essays, nonfiction narratives, and short stories have appeared in numerous maga-

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zines and anthologies, including *New Letters*, *Colorado Review*, *Fourth Genre*, *Southern California Anthology*, *Manoa*, *American Cowboy*, and *In Brief: Short Takes on the Personal*. He is currently working on a new novel called *Return of the Ghost Killer*.

Robin Hemley is the director of the Nonfiction Writing Program at the University of Iowa. He is the author of seven books of fiction and nonfiction, including *The Last Studebaker*, *The Big Ear* and *Nola: A Memoir of Faith, Art and Madness*. His most recent books are *Turning Life into Fiction* (Graywolf, 2006) and *Invented Eden* (Bison Books, 2006).

John Lane's books include *Against Information and Other Poems*, *Weed Time: Essays from the Edge of a Country Yard*, *Waist Deep in Black Water*, *The Dead Father Poems*, and, most recently, *Chattooga: Descending into the Myth of Deliverance River*. He teaches at Wofford College in Spartanburg SC, where he is writes a weekly environmental column, The Kudzu Telegraph. He is also one of the cofounders of Spartanburg's Hub City Writers Project, a national model for community publishing and literary life. He lives and writes deep within the "Red" territory. In the last presidential election his precinct voted almost 70 percent Republican.

Anthony Kellman was born in Barbados and has lived in the South for the past twenty years, first in Louisiana, where he was a graduate student at Louisiana State University, and then in Georgia, where he is a professor of creative writing at Augusta State University. He has published four books of poetry, most recently *Limestone*, and two novels, most recently, *The Houses of Alphonso*. He is the editor of the first full-length U.S. anthology of English-language Caribbean poetry, *Crossing Water*, and is a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts poetry award.

Lee Martin is the author of the novel *The Bright Forever*, a finalist for the 2006 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction; two memoirs, *From Our House* and *Turning Bones*; another novel, *Quakertown*; and a short story col-

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lection, *The Least You Need to Know*. He is the winner of the Mary McCarthy Prize in Short Fiction and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ohio Arts Council. Since 2001 he has taught in the MFA program at The Ohio State University where he is now a professor of English and the director of creative writing.

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David Romtvedt lives in Buffalo, Wyoming, and serves as the poet laureate for the state of Wyoming. His most recent book of poems is *Some Church* (Milkweed Editions, 2005). His essays have appeared in the collection *Windmill: Essays from Four Mile Ranch* (Red Crane, 1997) as well as in *The Sun*, *Poets and Writers*, and *Orion* magazines. He loves languages, and, since he is a musician as well as a writer, he is currently working on making a multilingual arrangement of the U.S. national anthem.

Michael J. Rosen has published some sixty books of poetry, children's books, cookbooks, and fiction. As an editor he has worked with over a thousand authors, illustrators, photographers, and chefs to create more than fifteen volumes that benefit Share Our Strength's fight to

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create a hunger-free generation and various animal welfare efforts across the country. Recent titles include three volumes of the humor biennial *Mirth of a Nation, The 60-Second Encyclopedia* and *ChaseR: A Novel in E-mail*. He lives on one hundred forested acres in central Ohio.

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Sherry Simpson is the author of *The Way Winter Comes: Alaska Stories* (Sasquatch Books, 1998) and is writing a book about bears and people for the University Press of Kansas. She frequently writes about wilderness and wildlife for anthologies, journals, and magazines. She teaches creative nonfiction writing at the University of Alaska–Anchorage. She grew up in Juneau.

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Frank Soos is the author of two collections of short stories, *Early Yet* and *Unified Field Theory*, which won the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction in 1997. His collection of essays, *Bamboo Fly Rod Suite,* has just been reissued in paperback by the University of Georgia Press. He has lived, fished, and skied in Fairbanks, Alaska, for twenty wonderful years.

David Starkey's essays have appeared in *American Literary Review*, *Barrelhouse*, *Cimarron Review*, *Gulf Stream Magazine*, *Santa Clara Review*, *Tampa Review*, and elsewhere. He teaches at Santa Barbara City College and is the author of a textbook, *Poetry Writing: Theme*

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and Variations (McGraw-Hill, 1999), as well as several collections of poems from small presses, most recently *Ways of Being Dead: New and Selected Poems* (Artamo Press, 2006). With Paul Willis, he coedited *In a Fine Frenzy: Poets Respond to Shakespeare* (University of Iowa Press, 2005), and with Wendy Bishop he cowrote *Keywords in Creative Writing* (Utah State University Press, 2006). He is currently at work on an introductory creative writing textbook for Bedford/St. Martin's.

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