

ROAD TRIP

A DEMOCRATIC WAY OF LOOKING

FOOD, DRINK, AND POP CULTURE IN SOUTHERN PHOTOGRAPHY

"I HAD THIS NOTION of what I called a democratic way of looking around, that nothing was more or less important." That's how Memphis native William Eggleston, the color photography pioneer, describes his approach to capturing his surroundings. Eggleston's primary-hued world of grocery-store parking lots, drive-in restaurants, and gas-station signs inspired this assemblage of photographs from the Pop Culture South.

Popular culture is defined and disseminated through images. When most effective, pop culture images are essentialist, distilling complex webs of people and places and ideas into simple and direct photographs. The food and drink images that follow tell us something about twelve Southern states and one Southern precinct. They broadcast values, realities, and aspirations.

Many of these photos are roadside glimpses, and for good reason. Mass-market goods get delivered on roadways. Along those routes, billboards and storefronts compete for consumer dollars. Join SFA as we travel the highways and byways of the Pop Culture South.

PAGE 12



ALABAMA

Barbecue has long been a roadside food. Many of today's most storied joints began as shebangs with earthen pits. Today, earthen pits are few. And barbecue trailers, like this one in the Black Belt town of Selma, are many. Culinary tourism is booming in the Black Belt. Hunters travel here to shoot their limit of bucks each year. And barbecue pilgrims bag their rib sandwich limits at Sherry's Cook Out. *Photo by Jerry Siegel.*

ARKANSAS

The Arkansas Delta town of Helena, on the west side of the Mississippi River, shares geographic, demographic, and cultural features with the better known Mississippi Delta, which hugs the eastern bank of that big and muddy river. This restaurant doubles as a juke joint, placing it firmly in the long tradition of rakish Delta establishments famous for inexpensive food, hard drink, and ragged blues. *Photo by Dave Anderson.*

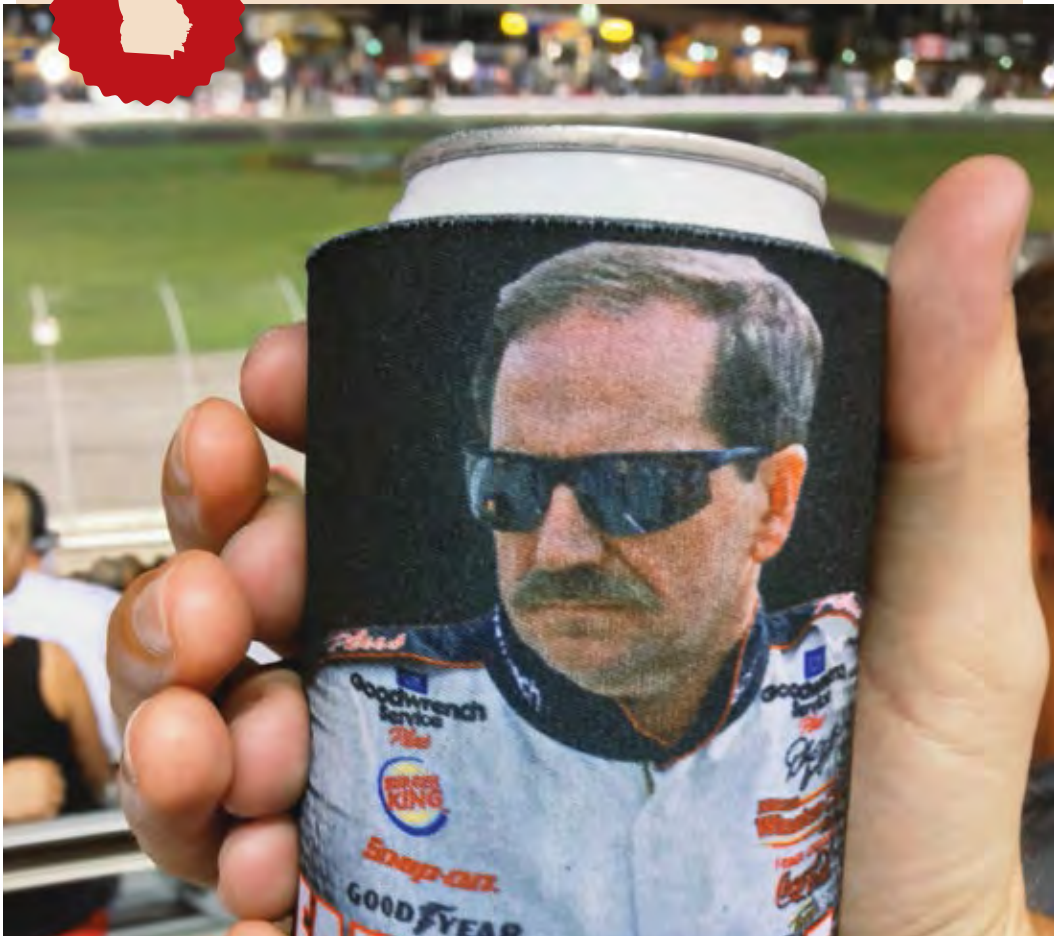


FLORIDA

Dangling from the rest of the continental United States, framed by the Atlantic and the Gulf, Florida is the South's destination state. A first beach for immigrants and a last beach for snow birds, it's also an occasional last resort for criminals. On January 9, 1991, Aileen Wuornos was arrested outside the Last Resort Bar in Port Orange. Charged with the murders of seven men, Wuornos, who had been working as a prostitute, made a full confession. She was executed by lethal injection in Florida in 2002. *Photo by Joshua Dudley Greer.*

GEORGIA

Atlanta Motor Speedway in suburban Hampton, where this beer was consumed, is hallowed ground. As a boy, President Jimmy Carter worked as a ticket-taker here. The track was also the backdrop for opening scenes in the film *Smokey and the Bandit II*. Dale Earnhardt, depicted on this foam insulator, is a five-time Atlanta 500 champion who won for the first time in 1980. A crowd favorite, Earnhardt went on to win Atlanta four more times. *Photo by Troy Stains.*



KENTUCKY

Forego the Colonel in favor of Indi's spicy fried chicken. That's what in-the-know folk do at this mini-chain with locations on both sides of the Ohio River. Indi's is famous for fried keel bones of chicken drenched in homemade vinegary hot sauce, washed down with pink lemonade. Bright lights and big flavors are the touchstones of the Louisville outpost. *Photo by Titus Ruscitti.*

LOUISIANA

Crawfish and Louisiana State University are two of the state's most recognizable icons. Each winter and spring LSU students and alumni alike stage crawfish boils on campus in Baton Rouge and in New Orleans, the city to which its graduates flock. Most crawfish are harvested in Cajun Country, south of I-10 and west of New Orleans. Today, crawfish and crawfish boils serve as proxies for the state. *Photo by Pableaux Johnson.*



MISSISSIPPI

Most of the nation's farmed catfish is produced in Mississippi. Much of it is now farm-raised in ponds. Wild catfish can also be caught by line, by dynamite, or by hand. That middle technique, sometimes called blast fishing, is generally illegal. The latter technique, known as noodling, involves a blind dig into a catfish hole and a bare-handed grab of a gill. Catfish are rife in Mississippi waterways such as Sardis Lake, north of Oxford, pictured here. *Photo by Houston Cofield.*

NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina is the nation's largest producer of sweet potatoes. A 1995 letter-writing campaign mounted by elementary school children secured the place of this root as the state's official vegetable. In towns like Graham, pictured here, locals take pride in Beauregards, Rubies, and Jewels. The best roots are cured immediately after harvest to convert starches to sugars and intensify flavors. Of late, sweet potato greens have become a white-tablecloth specialty across the region and beyond. *Photo by Chris Fowler.*



SOUTH CAROLINA

Pancake houses dot Kings Highway in Myrtle Beach, serving cheap breakfast fare to hungover spring breakers and beach-bound families with children. This flank of South Carolina was once plantation country. Tourists can now book scenic boat tours that depart from Wacca Wache Marina in nearby Murrells Inlet. The operators promise “rice plantations, trunk gates, slave cabins, moss-laden oak trees, alligators, eagles, and osprey.” *Photo by Chris Fowler.*

TENNESSEE

McDonald's sells burgers and fries in more than 100 countries. Franchises often attempt to go native. In Oxford, Mississippi, home of *Gravy*, William Faulkner memorabilia blankets the walls of the University Avenue location. Tourists who journey to Gatlinburg for the Smoky Mountain vistas don't even have to leave the McDonald's to take in the mountain panorama, thanks to this wall-plastered photograph. *Photo by Joshua Dudley Greer.*



TEXAS

Vencil Mares has been smoking beef and pork at Taylor Café since 1949. Here, a satisfied regular exits the café after his meal. Likely, he ate a “bohunk” sausage and washed it down with a Lone Star beer. What you can't see from the street, but what this photo hints at, is that the interior of this barbecue joint is a drinker's reliquary, the sort of smoke-patinaed saloon that beckons locals and culinary tourists alike. *Photo by Jody Horton.*

VIRGINIA

The Old Fiddler's Convention in Galax has been drawing musicians and dancers since 1935. B.K., pictured here, is a flatfoot dancer whose fashion broadcasts his history. Nearby Franklin County was once a hub of moonshining. Today, the region is a hub of music making. In the Appalachian South, string music and white-dog whiskey have long been commercial products. *Photo by Pat Jarrett.*



NEW YORK CITY

During the Great Migration of the twentieth century, African American Southerners sought a better life in Northern cities. Many immigrants from the Carolinas landed in Brooklyn. Here in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood, the Southern diaspora still shops for tastes of home at the Carolina Country Store and grubs at Soul Food Kitchen. And each year the Brooklyn Borough Hall stages a Thanksgiving sweet potato and collard green giveaway for hungry or homesick locals. *Photo by Nicole A. Taylor.*