

The Motion and the Noise

Yoknapatawpha's Shifting Soundscape

Matthew D. Sutton

Abstract

William Faulkner's dislike of unwanted sound is well documented. The acoustic environment of rural Mississippi amplified irreversibly after the introduction of the automobile, airplane, and automated farm machinery. In his *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), the jukebox and radio absorb pointed criticism for producing "canned" sounds outside of their "proper" environment. The narrowing gap between town square and dance hall signifies encroaching chaos, as noise drowns out the attenuated "harmony" that keeps elite whites in power and *Intruder's* African American protagonist Lucas Beauchamp out of the hands of the lynch mob. For Faulkner, the shift in the auditory environment presents both a disruption and an impediment to a system built on white bourgeois ideals. However, Faulkner's pessimism is counterpointed by sociological studies undertaken by Fisk University researchers. The Fisk study identifies the emergence of a blues culture in the Delta whose energy and boundary-crossing impulses illustrate the liberating possibilities of an expanding soundscape. By juxtaposing Faulkner's damning descriptions of "the motion and the noise" with the Fisk University researchers' illuminating fieldwork, this essay interprets a transformative period in the constantly shifting soundscape of the U. S. South. In line with Jacques Attali's dictum that "our music foretells our future," *Intruder in the Dust* anticipates the cultural upheaval that would energize the Civil Rights Movement. Both in fiction and in fact, the "noise" emanating from jukeboxes and radios in 1940s Mississippi accelerated social change at a volume much higher and a tempo much faster than Faulkner and other gradualists desired.

Suggested Citation: Sutton, Matthew D. "The Motion and the Noise: Yoknapatawpha's Shifting Soundscape." *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* 1, no. 2 (2020): 317–329, DOI: [10.47060/jaaas.v1i2.131](https://doi.org/10.47060/jaaas.v1i2.131).

Keywords: William Faulkner; southern literature; race; noise; jukeboxes

Peer Review: This article was reviewed by the issue's guest editors and an external reviewer.

Copyright: © 2020 Matthew D. Sutton. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC-BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which allows for the unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

The Motion and the Noise

Yoknapatawpha's Shifting Soundscape

Matthew D. Sutton

After a long period of neglect, the publication of *The Portable Faulkner* in 1946 elevated Southern author William Faulkner's fiction back into prominence. In the years following his critical and popular rediscovery, the author's predilections and idiosyncrasies became public knowledge. One of his more intriguing eccentricities concerned his obsession with silence and aversion to the manmade sounds he deemed to be "noise." Throughout the 1930s and the 1940s, he steadfastly refused to allow a radio, phonograph, or television into his home and private sanctum for writing in Oxford, Mississippi, Rowan Oak.¹ During the same period, he regularly declined to attend concerts and musical performances.² Allegedly, his wife Estelle purchased a radio while he was away laboring as a script doctor in Hollywood, only to have him remove the machine from the house upon his return.³ The owner of a restaurant in Oxford agreed to place an "Out of Order" sign on his jukebox when the author was dining.⁴ By 1958, Faulkner complained to his agent Harold Ober that, in contrast to his adopted second home in Virginia, there was not a place within a fifty-mile radius of Oxford where he could enjoy a meal out of the earshot of a jukebox. According to a close friend, Faulkner bristled at the new invention of television, objecting to its supposed "squawking."⁶ In sum, the author's irritability with nearly all popular entertainment marked him, in Alan Lomax's words, as "provincial."⁷

What are we to make, then, of the contradictory evidence that shows, in other places and situations, that Faulkner derived pleasure from popular music? For example, we have firsthand accounts of a young Faulkner and his friends enjoying the polished dance music of W. C. Handy's orchestra at numerous mixers at the University of Mississippi.⁸ That exposure to Handy's music likely served as the impetus for Faulkner later appropriating a line from the composer's "St. Louis Blues" for the title of his short story "That Evening Sun" (1931). We have accounts of Faulkner barhopping in "Roaring Twenties" Harlem with literati Carl Van Vechten and Bennett Cerf, again indulging in the strains of "St. Louis Blues."⁹ Closer to home, he checked in at Oxford country dances and "juke joints" around the Delta town of Clarksdale, Mississippi, in his twenties.¹⁰ It is well established that, before he banished recorded music

from Rowan Oak, Faulkner set up a portable phonograph alongside his writing desk that incessantly played George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" to "set the rhythm and jazzy tone" of his 1931 novel *Sanctuary*.¹¹ In his fiction, Faulkner could be extraordinarily attuned to sound. In *As I Lay Dying* (1930), Darl Bundren senses the "little trickling bursts of secret and murmurous bubbling" still present in his mother's corpse.¹² If Faulkner the artist could intuit the sounds inside dead bodies or explore the subtleties of pastoral silence in hunting stories like "The Bear" (1942), why did Faulkner the private citizen misapprehend the novel sounds of the mid-twentieth-century bursting from the radio, phonograph, and jukebox? Intentionally or not, Faulkner captures the democratization of midcentury culture through his condemnations of sounds that are "out of place" in spaces dominated by Jim Crow. In line with Jacques Attali's dictum that "our music foretells our future,"¹³ Faulkner's novel *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) anticipates the cultural upheaval that would energize the Civil Rights Movement. Both in fiction and in fact, the "noise" emanating from jukeboxes and radios in 1940s Mississippi accelerated social change at a tempo much faster than Faulkner and other gradualists desired.

Simply stated, over the course of his lifetime, William Faulkner's world grew louder. The baseline acoustic environment of northern Mississippi became more industrial and more mechanized, while manmade sounds became closer in proximity. The distinguishing sounds of Faulkner's community reflected this accelerating change. An increasingly mobile population took advantage of more powerful, thunderous railroads and automobiles as well as airplanes that approached the speed of sound.¹⁴ By the 1940s, tractors, flame weeders, and cropdusting planes had become the new characteristic sounds of the southern plantation.¹⁵ The establishment of lumber camps and textile mills in the region disturbed what seemed to be the natural soundscape and the pastoral sense of peace and quiet.¹⁶ Both the plantation and lumber camp were common sites for juke joints, where raucous music, both live and recorded, provided African American laborers both a safety valve for their frustrations and an expressive culture in which they could participate.

Simultaneously, the hybridized forms of popular music and the sound technology introduced while Faulkner was a young man were evolving. Both reflected, as Thadious Davis has pointed out, "postwar [WWII] changes and disruptions in manners, morals and conventions."¹⁷ On record and on the air, contemporary music blending European American and African American styles paid little heed to the prevailing customs of race-based law. Throughout the 1920s, black music made significant inroads in the white-dominated South, especially mediated through the phonograph and the jukebox.¹⁸ Partly owing to the fact that African American music was absent from the airwaves in the 1920s, black tenant farmers' modest homes often boasted costly phonographs bought on credit. Before the Depression virtually decimated the record-

ing industry, estimates of annual record sales among African Americans during the decade reached as high as ten million. Records became a social glue, transported to neighbors' homes, barbecues, and house parties.¹⁹ By 1940, 86% of U.S. homes had radios and listened to programming an average of four to five hours a day.²⁰ Electric current was not necessary for many rural listeners, who bought radios powered by large batteries and inexpensive phonographs that ran on spring-motor mechanisms.²¹ After World War II, sound became cheaper, louder, and mass-produced on an even greater scale. The first television sets went on sale in 1946; transistors, tape recorders, and high-fidelity stereophonic systems quickly followed.²²

But perhaps no invention recast the acoustic character of towns like Oxford more symbolically than the jukebox. Jukeboxes became a minor but telling obsession with Faulkner in the 1940s. "After the repeal of Prohibition," historian David Stowe writes, "the five-cent jukeboxes placed in bars, cafes, diners, and roadside dance establishments rivaled movies as a source of public entertainment for those with lower incomes."²³ The general public perceived the jukebox less as an exalted modern invention and more as a populist medium and a purveyor of what were then called "race" records. Though overall record sales plummeted in the midst of the Depression, between 1934 and 1940, the number of jukeboxes in the U.S. increased tenfold, from approximately 25,000 in 1934 to about 300,000 by 1940.²⁴ That number rose to 400,000 by 1942.²⁵

Aside from their ubiquity, jukeboxes were unique in that they largely bypassed the established gatekeepers of culture. The telephone, phonograph, and radio were initially designed for oral communication but adapted for personal or musical uses unforeseen by their inventors.²⁶ By contrast, jukeboxes had one purpose: to play music for the masses, loudly and brazenly. Early phonographs were sold to middle-class families through assurances that "quality" music would enhance the order and peace of the domestic sphere. The jukebox had no such association with gentility. Beginning in the late 1930s, the Wurlitzer Company of Chicago refused to sell outright their jukeboxes to establishments, instead distributing them on a lease basis and urging operators to stock them with popular records.²⁷ Unlike the radio, jukebox selections were not bound to a standardized playlist, allowing the public to vote with their nickels and choose from a mix of music: old and new, rural and urban, black and white. To be sure, these jukebox operators were not social engineers; they merely followed the money and met the public's changing tastes. Yet, because jukeboxes were programmed by outsiders, the rigid lines dividing North from South and white from black became more permeable.

This "breakdown" of the established order was a long time in the making. As Mark M. Smith explains, generations of white southerners had associated African Amer-

icans and lower-class whites with excessive sound and aural “clutter.”²⁸ These stereotypes died hard. In *The Mind of the South* (1941), W. J. Cash belittled mill workers who spent their meager wages on radios. Cash painted a hellish portrait of the juke joints increasingly found on the sites of Mississippi Delta plantations. In overheated prose, Cash described the sounds emanating from the juke joint as bedlam, marked by the “jungle beat of drums; the wild chanting gibberish of nameless congregations packed in unlighted halls; the rhythmic swell of jazz and stomping feet . . . high, floating laughter; sudden screams, rising swiftly from the void and falling abruptly back into it again.”²⁹ For all its overtones of white paranoia, Cash captured a sense that the jukebox was amplifying and accelerating African Americans’ dissatisfaction with the plantation complex.³⁰ He thus depicted the “schizophonic” disassociation between sound in its original form and its reproduction in a different time and place,³¹ a troubling development for defenders of racial segregation in the South.

Sociological studies undertaken by Fisk University researchers beginning in 1941 counterpoint Cash’s pessimism. John Work and his team found nine juke joints in Clarksdale, Mississippi, alone, serving a population of only 12,000.³² Another survey reported that Greenville, Mississippi, boasted the fourth-highest concentration of jukeboxes in the nation. Though intended to find evidence of an enduring African American folk culture, the Fisk study identified the emergence of a progressive-minded blues culture in the Delta whose energy and boundary-crossing impulses conflicted with Faulkner’s desire for stasis. This change in the soundscape also represented a type of economic protest, as listeners paid to hear music with cash money, not scrip constantly recirculating through the closed system of the plantation/commissary economy. Based on his fieldwork, Work’s associate Samuel Adams wrote, “Specifically the Victrola, the radio, the juke box, the dance halls, the movies and the changes in technology make it possible for plantation Negroes to have a greater access to broader worlds of experience than ever before and this change reflects itself in their present-day expressive life.”³³ Surveying the jukebox selections in African American establishments in Coahoma County, researcher Lewis Jones found not only a remarkable mixture of popular crooners (like Bing Crosby), big bands, and blues singers but also several numbers that appear now as a commentary on the Great Migration that drew millions of black southerners north and west between World War I and World War II, such as Count Basie’s “Going to Chicago” and Jazz Gillum’s “Key to the Highway.”³⁴ Through close observations and closer listening, the Fisk researchers brought to light the jukebox’s role as a repository of affect for the generation who would reject the quiescence Faulkner embodied in many of his older African American characters, such as Dilsey in *The Sound and The Fury* (1929) and Lucas Beauchamp in *Intruder in the Dust*. While later Faulkner novels like *Intruder in the Dust* crusade for the virtue of silence in maintaining social order, especially in

regard to race, the Fisk study illustrates the liberating possibilities of an expanding soundscape.

In depicting this brave new “louder” world in Oxford’s imagined analogue, Jefferson, in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, Faulkner seemed to cling to an equivocation: sound was acceptable so long as it either originated in nature or was bound to dedicated space, for example the strains of African American choirs emanating from rural churches at the conclusions of *Soldier’s Pay* (1926) and *The Sound and the Fury*. Just as noise and sound have traditionally been divided into a dialectic, based on “usefulness,” any sound overheard beyond these boundaries in Yoknapatawpha registers as noise, particularly sounds breaking out of segregated space.³⁵

One of the first forecasts of this change in the soundscape comes in *Sanctuary*, as Horace Benbow, an heir of the old Southern order, encounters Jefferson’s town square on a Saturday in May. Drowning out the typical sounds of county-seat commerce, “competitive radios and phonographs in the doors of drug- and music stores” resound. The music radiates from “imitation wood cabinets” and mass-produced “pebble-grain horn-mouths” of Victrolas.³⁶ Fittingly, these contraptions blare out mechanical and soulless music, made up of “disembodied voices.” The artificiality and novelty of this “noise” hypnotize the small farmers and sharecroppers of Yoknapatawpha County who have come into town ostensibly to trade. In Erich Nunn’s reading of cross-racial musical interchange in *Sanctuary*, he underscores the Otherness of mass-produced popular music in this context, as it assumes the status once held by orally transmitted ballads and folk culture.³⁷ A similar disorientation occurs when Temple Drake (a college student raped and kidnapped by a gangster) hears a player piano’s tinny, unnatural music in a daze at Miss Reba’s Memphis brothel.³⁸ By likening the uncanny new soundscape of Jefferson’s town square to an urban house of ill repute, Faulkner marks the change in the keynote sounds of the square, suggesting its immorality. In both the small-town marketplace and the city’s vice district, the clamorous music is not simply foreign and “canned” but as mechanized, impersonal and incessant as any dynamo or industrial machine.

A reader can find dozens of examples of sonic bedlam in Faulkner’s late work. The increasing exposure of jazz-influenced popular music in the public sphere, combined with his growing obsessions with privacy and anti-modernity, had affected Faulkner’s outlook by the mid-1930s, when, as Tim A. Ryan concludes, “he developed an outspoken antipathy toward music of any kind.”³⁹ As the author’s niece Dean Faulkner Wells documents, Oxford’s central square remained a uniform acoustic space for generations, made up of the reliable sounds of the clock tower, the idle chatter of the local gentry, and the occasional rumble of a cotton gin.⁴⁰ As a young man, Faulkner spent hours absorbing these sights and sounds; friends and acquaintances recall

young Faulkner as peculiarly withdrawn and quiet, especially in public situations.⁴¹ As an author, Faulkner relied on this predictable, relatively quiet auditory environment to draw out raw material for his fiction. As he explained in a letter to editor Malcolm Cowley, “I listen to the voices, and when I put down what the voices say, it’s right. Sometimes I don’t like what they say, but I don’t change it.”⁴² Faulkner found it essential to recognize and tune into the square’s unique soundscape. The “noise” of the modernizing plain folk and the radios and phonographs they desired presented something of an occupational hazard to Faulkner because they drowned out the mimetic sounds and dialogue he translated and transported from Oxford to Jefferson.

The writer’s location of this struggle over sound at the town center was probably deliberate, as Oxford’s town square underwent major renovations in the spring of 1947 while he was writing *Intruder in the Dust*.⁴³ Just as the title *Intruder in the Dust* connotes a shift in the physical landscape, a similar disruption occurs in the stasis of the aural landscape, as Faulkner characterizes the square as a cacophonous site of economic expansion, rather than a bustling, carnivalesque marketplace. The novel’s numerous narrative digressions about “the motion and the noise” in Jefferson’s town square suggest that an implied right to “sonic privacy” is being violated, as the town begins to echo the rising crescendo of the outside world.⁴⁴

Published in 1948 (the year the two major U. S. political parties realigned, largely based on the issue of segregation, and President Harry Truman issued an executive order to integrate the military), *Intruder in the Dust* was eagerly anticipated as Faulkner’s grand pronouncement on race relations in the post-World War II South. In the main plot of the novel, Lucas Beauchamp, an older black man infamous in Jefferson for the pride he takes in his blood relation to a prominent white family, is accused of shooting a poor white man, Vinson Gowrie, in the back, based on circumstantial evidence. Too proud to plead his innocence or beg for mercy, Lucas makes oblique hints to a young white boy, Chick Mallison, about the identity of the real murderer. Indebted to Lucas for once saving him from drowning, Chick investigates with the help of an African American companion, Aleck Sander, and a matron, Miss Habersham, going so far as to dig up Gowrie’s grave, only to find another body, thus exposing a plot to frame Lucas for the killing. To exonerate Lucas, Chick also enlists his uncle Gavin Stevens, a Heidelberg-educated lawyer and racial moderate who initially expresses skepticism of Lucas’s innocence and orates lengthy disquisitions on his “gradualist” beliefs that African Americans are not socially or intellectually prepared for full equality. Along with the local sheriff, Chick and his team hold off a bloodthirsty lynch mob until the murder is exposed as a fratricide and the authorities release Lucas.

Through the evolving portrayal of Lucas Beauchamp, we sense an intriguing variation on the Joycean creed of “silence, exile and cunning.”⁴⁵ With a surname derived

from the French phrase meaning “beautiful field,” Lucas Beauchamp lives peacefully in his cabin without a radio or a phonograph for distraction. Even before he willfully withholds the information about his innocence from Chick and Gavin, Faulkner depicts Lucas as an inherently quiet character, in harmony with the “vast abateless hum” of nature and secure in his self-conception as the mixed-race descendant of an old-money white landowner.⁴⁶ After his wrongful arrest, Lucas’s silence shows his subjectivity, his refusal to play a demeaning, submissive role in a segregated society (be it the victim of lynching or the benign “Sambo” in Gavin’s formulations). In essence, he chooses to be silent in order not to be silenced.

In stark contrast to Lucas’s small pastoral domain, Jefferson’s town square resounds with unfamiliar, foreign sounds and what we commonly refer to today as “noise pollution.” Automobiles, motion pictures and drugstore jukeboxes disrupt the traditional baseline sounds of personal interaction and activity on the square.⁴⁷ Cars and radios engage in a struggle for aural supremacy.⁴⁸ This intensification of sound, in Gavin’s analysis, results in an enervated populace, whipped into a near-frenzy, into a “spurious uproar” by “cheap shoddy dishonest music.”⁴⁹ The narrator picks up the thread, remarking that the encroachment of noise ensures that “nowhere inside the town’s uttermost ultimate corporate rim should man woman or child citizen or guest or stranger be threatened with one second of silence.”⁵⁰ In another aside, the narrator denigrates the jukebox as a symbol of idleness and wasted time.⁵¹ Such a shift in the auditory environment around Yoknapatawpha County’s courthouse, jail and central marketplace presents both an interruption and an impediment to a system that needs “peace and quiet” as well as time to achieve the next stage in race relations. This new, chaotic soundscape deterritorializes the town square, making it the domain of derelicts, demagogues, and the outliers who make up lynch mobs.

Ultimately, the quiet tenacity and reasoning of Chick, Aleck Sander, Miss Habersham and, in time, Gavin saves Lucas from the loud mob. Yet even though they win this battle, the war against noise in Yoknapatawpha County continues. Echoing the criticism of public noise in *Sanctuary*, the narrator comments in *Intruder’s* concluding chapter that Saturday is “radio and automobile day” on the square, with the town buzzing along noisily and pointlessly while Lucas ambles along to Gavin’s law office as a newly free man.⁵² Similar to the figure of the flâneur conceptualized by Walter Benjamin,⁵³ Lucas takes in the popular music he hears on the square as part of a larger, immersive sensory experience. In settling his legal expenses with Gavin, Lucas voices skepticism when the lawyer charges him a nominal fee of two dollars. “That don’t sound like much to me,” Lucas says, “but then I’m a farming man and you’re a lawing man and whether you know your business or not I reckon it aint none of my red wagon as the music box says to try to learn you different.”⁵⁴ Given the steady stream of invective leveled at radios and jukeboxes throughout the novel, it is remarkable to

“hear” the soft-spoken, introverted Lucas invoke a specific popular song transmitted on “music boxes” (jukeboxes) without criticism.

The phrase “that’s your red wagon,” as glossed by Stephen Calt in his dictionary of blues idioms, essentially means “that’s your problem,” and implies that the speaker has washed his hands of a controversy.⁵⁵ As the phrase crossed over into general slang usage, it was adopted as the title of a song by the Forest, Mississippi-born bluesman Arthur Crudup, recorded in Chicago in September 1946. Through 1946 and 1947, “That’s Your Red Wagon,” rearranged to reach a wider pop audience, underwent successful remakes by the white western-swing bandleader Bob Wills, jazz drummer Ray McKinley, the Andrews Sisters, and Count Basie and His Orchestra.⁵⁶ The jukebox was the nexus for this dizzying back-and-forth-and-back-again racial crossing and likely the medium through which Faulkner overheard one of the few pieces of popular music to enter into his later works.⁵⁷

Within the context of Faulkner’s narrative, the reference to the “red wagon” song lyric signifies that, for all his outward impassivity, Lucas is indeed engaged in deep listening during his rambles around the town square, to townsfolk and jukebox alike. The allusion to “That’s Your Red Wagon” is a rare instance of Faulkner not simply having what Adam Gussow calls geographic, chronological, and thematic proximities to the blues, but apprehending vernacular music’s ability to speak for African Americans.⁵⁸ While Gussow accurately notes the sparsity of blues musicians in Faulkner’s Mississippi, the evocation of Lucas Beauchamp as a blues *listener* is just as noteworthy, suggesting that Crudup’s music and lyrics inform the character’s low-key, bemused reaction to slipping the noose of Jim Crow, representing much the same oblique challenge to racial injustice as the more mythologized figure of the bluesman. Although there is no concrete proof that Faulkner was lending an ear to Arthur Crudup as assiduously as, for instance, a young Elvis Presley was, growing up in Tupelo, Mississippi, the crossover popularity (or co-optation) of Crudup’s song does reflect the increasing power and reach of African American music in the late 1940s.⁵⁹

Even in its most whitewashed iterations, the song’s defiant chorus voices the insouciance of Lucas Beauchamp, who insinuates to Gavin that the curious type of justice that lets an innocent black man go free only through the determined intercession of sympathetic children and elderly women is white (male) southern society’s problem to fix; he flatly states he cannot (and will not) “try to learn” Gavin any further.⁶⁰ More directly, Lucas’s laconic borrowing of the blues lyric strongly suggests that he perceives Gavin Stevens’s two-dollar fee as more a gesture of condescension than parity; whatever guilt Gavin feels about coming late to Lucas’s defense is solely his “red wagon,” free of any burden or obligation on Lucas’s part. Like a sympathetic string, Lucas’s listening sensibility resonates with frequencies, like those in Crudup’s

song, on the same wavelength; though mass-disseminated, the song crystallizes individual experience. The irony and brevity of Lucas's comment to Gavin undercuts the lawyer's long-windedness, his paternalism toward African Americans and the sense of race and class privilege that motivates him to speak on behalf of the entire South.

Moreover, the comment proves that Lucas is more attuned to Yoknapatawpha's shifting soundscape than he appears on the surface, and that Lucas ably distinguishes sound from noise. Lucas and the "music box" transmit the bitter truth about racial injustice on the same "lower frequency" Ralph Ellison would evoke a few years later in *Invisible Man* (1952). It bears noting that in the year of *Intruder in the Dust's* publication Memphis radio station WDIA became the first radio station with all-black on-air talent and an emphasis on racial uplift complementing the sounds of popular music. This intertwining of music and the politics of respectability on the airwaves carved out a new place in the soundscape for southern African Americans. Faulkner ultimately recognizes the breakthrough of music, specifically the blues, that talks back to Jim Crow via the jukebox, but demonstrates it only through the somewhat detached character of Lucas, instead of voicing this sensibility affirmatively in the book's rather didactic narration or through authoritative characters like Gavin Stevens. By maintaining his composure in the face of a near-lynching, Lucas embodies Albert Murray's conception of the "blues hero," whose adaptive skill, in Murray's words, "affirms his personal equilibrium, sustains his humanity, and enables him to maintain his higher aspirations in spite of the fact that human existence is so often mostly a low-down dirty shame."⁶¹ By the novel's conclusion, Faulkner has transmitted the "low-down" realization that the law is barely one step ahead of the lynch mob and a potential lynch mob is always in earshot in the Jim Crow South. Through Lucas's nuanced characterization, we induce Faulkner's response (however ambivalent) to the call of African American expression. By transporting the wit and economical turns of phrase of the blues lyric from the juke joint to the other side of the color line without resorting to a tone or volume that would alienate the social order, Lucas defies what many white Southerners perceive as a society increasingly unable to distinguish a signal from the surrounding noise.

This perception embodies what Jennifer Lynn Stoeber terms "the listening ear," or the apparatus by which those in power judge and enforce the division between sound and noise through custom and law.⁶² Such negotiations play out in public space, as the center of Jefferson becomes an "instrumentarium," a "reservoir of sound possibilities . . . used to give substance and shape to human relations and the everyday management of urban space."⁶³ With sounds in collision, the town square is acoustically remapped as both centralized and liminal space for producing and receiving sound. Significantly, in their final scene, Lucas walks through the sonically remapped

town square, able to interpret sounds and their multiple signifiers, whereas Gavin, self-appointed guardian of custom and law, misses Lucas's sly, teasing reference to the "red wagon" and fixates only on the encroaching "noise."

Though Faulkner's exact intentions remain debatable, *Intruder in the Dust* denotes a sensory breaking point in the aural habitus of Yoknapatawpha County, where there is simply too much sound for traditionalists, and where the "noises" of industrialization, transportation, and media signify the forward motion of progress. Jacques Attali summarizes the relationship between disruptive sound and social change: "Music is a credible metaphor of the real. It is neither an autonomous activity nor an automatic indicator of the economic infrastructure. It is a herald, for change is inscribed in noise."⁶⁴ Music and noise herald the shifting soundscape of Yoknapatawpha, foretelling the passage from rural to urban, Jim Crow to equal citizenship, closed society to fluid community. Though *Intruder in the Dust* is largely a narrative of gradualism, its brief evocation of sound's liberating potential reflects an underlying understanding of changes reverberating in the air.

Notes

- 1 Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1974), 1096, 1291.
- 2 Tim A. Ryan, *Yoknapatawpha Blues: Faulkner's Fiction and Southern Roots Music* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 191.
- 3 Meta Carpenter Wilde and Orin Borsten, *A Loving Gentleman: The Love Story of William Faulkner and Meta Carpenter* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), 103.
- 4 Blotner, *Faulkner*, 1713.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 1698.
- 6 Ben Wasson, *Count No 'Count: Flashbacks to Faulkner* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983), 173.
- 7 Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began* (New York: New Press, 1993), 328.
- 8 Wasson, *Count No 'Count*, 64.
- 9 David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 183.
- 10 Adam Gussow, *Journeyman's Blues: Modern Blues Lives from Faulkner's Mississippi to Post-9/11 New York* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 133–37.
- 11 Blotner, *Faulkner*, 754.
- 12 William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 212. The previous year, Erich Maria Remarque described the sounds of decomposing corpses lying on the battlefield in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. See Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 64.
- 13 Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 11.
- 14 In 1908, when Faulkner was ten, his grandfather helped pass an anti-automobile ordi-

- nance in Oxford due in part to the noise, likely making this the first modern-day noise ordinance in the town. See Robert W. Hamblin, *Myself and the World: A Biography of William Faulkner* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 18.
- 15 John W. Work, Lewis Wade Jones, and Samuel C. Adams, Jr., *Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University–Library of Congress Coahoma County Study, 1941–1942*, ed. Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), 232.
 - 16 William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 138.
 - 17 Thadious M. Davis, “From Jazz Syncopation to Blues Elegy,” in *Faulkner and Race*, ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), 78.
 - 18 James Cobb, *Redefining Southern Culture: Mind and Identity in the Modern South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 117.
 - 19 Kenney, *Recorded Music*, 129–30.
 - 20 Bruce Lenthall, *Radio’s America: The Great Depression and the Rise of Modern Mass Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 12.
 - 21 Jeff Todd Titon, *Early Downhome Blues: A Musical and Cultural Analysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 273.
 - 22 W. T. Lhamon, Jr., *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 12.
 - 23 David W. Stowe, *Swing Changes: Big-Band Jazz in New Deal America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 114.
 - 24 Kerry Segrave, *Jukeboxes: An American Social History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), 1.
 - 25 Roland Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph 1877–1977* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 278.
 - 26 See Timothy D. Taylor, “General Introduction: Music Technologies in Everyday Life,” in *Music, Sound, and Technology in America: A Documentary History of Early Phonograph, Cinema, and Radio*, ed. Timothy D. Taylor, Mark Katz, and Tony Gradeja (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 6.
 - 27 Segrave, *Jukeboxes*, 90.
 - 28 Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 10.
 - 29 W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 318.
 - 30 This paranoia was taken to an extreme when local officials in Memphis limited the number of jukeboxes in the city limits in 1944 and chapters of the White Citizens Council distributed flyers warning white parents to shield their children from black music on the radio and jukebox. See “Memphis Sings New Tune,” *Billboard* (January 15, 1944), 63; Jason Berry, Jonathan Foose, and Tad Jones, *Up From the Cradle of Jazz: New Orleans Music Since World War II* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 105.
 - 31 See R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994), 90.
 - 32 Work, Jones, and Adams, *Lost Delta Found*, 229.
 - 33 *Ibid.*, 251.
 - 34 *Ibid.*, 311–13. Exemplifying how overtly urban blues became the sound of escape for north-

ern-bound African Americans and a siren call for the Great Migration, in Bill Broonzy's 1932 "Brown Skin Shuffle," the singer gives an exact street address in Chicago, specifying to black southern listeners where freedom lies. See John Minton, *78 Blues: Folk-songs and Phonographs in the American South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 64. In *Intruder in the Dust*, the narrator mentions in passing that Lucas's only child, a daughter, has left Mississippi for Detroit. William Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 23.

- 35 See Smith, *Listening*, 11.
- 36 William Faulkner, *Sanctuary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 112.
- 37 Erich Nunn, *Sounding the Color Line: Music and the Racial Imagination* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 156.
- 38 Memphis, Tennessee, lies about eighty miles northwest of Faulkner's home in Oxford, Mississippi. As the city most proximate to Oxford, Faulkner knew it as a center of commerce, transportation, entertainment and vice. The author employed Memphis's urban soundscape as a foil to small-town Mississippi consistently in his writing, notably in *Sanctuary* and *The Reivers* (1962).
- 39 Ryan, *Yoknapatawpha Blues*, 191.
- 40 Dean Faulkner Wells, *Every Day by the Sun: A Memoir of the Faulkners of Mississippi* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2011), 13–14.
- 41 Daniel J. Singal, *William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 41; John B. Cullen and Floyd C. Watkins, *Old Times in the Faulkner Country* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 4.
- 42 Malcolm Cowley, *The Faulkner-Cowley File: Letters and Memories, 1944–1962* (New York: Viking Press, 1966), 114.
- 43 Blotner, *Faulkner*, 1227.
- 44 Faulkner, *Intruder*, 237.
- 45 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 269.
- 46 Faulkner, *Intruder*, 129.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 213.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 235.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 155.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 238.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 213.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 235.
- 53 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 10–11, 14, 21–23.
- 54 Faulkner, *Intruder*, 245.
- 55 Steven Calt, *Barrelhouse Words: A Blues Dialect Dictionary* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 244.
- 56 Larry Birnbaum, *Before Elvis: The Prehistory of Rock 'n' Roll* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 9.

- 57 According to Patrick Samway's research into *Intruder in the Dust's* typescripts, Lucas's "red wagon" comment stayed constant during the book's composition, while Faulkner tempered Gavin's anti-Modern comments criticizing the automobile over successive drafts. Patrick H. Samway, *Faulkner's Intruder in the Dust: A Critical Study of the Typescripts* (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing, 1980), 226–27.
- 58 Gussow, *Journeyman's Blues*, 132–33.
- 59 Presley covered Crudup's "That's All Right" as the A-side for his first single, released by Memphis's Sun Records in July 1954.
- 60 Faulkner, *Intruder*, 245.
- 61 Albert Murray, *The Hero and the Blues* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 37.
- 62 Jennifer Lynn Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 13–16.
- 63 Jean-François Augoyard and Henry Torgue, "Introduction: An Instrumentation of the Sound Environment," in *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds*, ed. Jean-François Augoyard and Henry Torgue, trans. Andra McCartney and David Paquette (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 8.
- 64 Attali, *Noise*, 5.

About the Author

Matthew D. Sutton holds a PhD in American Studies from the College of William and Mary. Currently, he is revising his dissertation, *Storyville: Discourses in Southern Musicians' Autobiographies*, into a book. His work on U.S. Southern literature, music and sound has appeared in *Mississippi Quarterly*, *Popular Music and Society*, and several edited collections.

Contact: Matthew D. Sutton; mdsutt@email.wm.edu.