

Praise for

THE STATUE AND THE FURY

A Year of Art, Race, Music and Cocktails

By Jim Dees

Hardcover with dust jacket ■ 6 x 9 ■ 340 pages ■ \$24.95 ■ ISBN: 978-1-936946-80-8

**Bronze Winner of Independent Publisher Book
Award for U.S. South – Best Regional Nonfiction**

Nominated for Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters Award

“*The Statue and the Fury* reads like a fever-dream. The writing of Jim Dees turns out to be just as gonzo as his shirts, and that’s saying a lot. For those of us who wish we could live year-round in Oxford, this wild book is as close as you can get without having to pay property taxes.”

Harrison Scott Key, Author of *The World’s Largest Man*
and winner of the Thurber Prize in American Humor

“At times profound, at times deeply insightful and often hilarious, Jim Dees’ *The Statue and the Fury* is a loving look at small-town life, journalism and politics. I’ve been a fan of Dees’ writing for years, and this is the book I’ve been waiting for.”

Tom Franklin, Edgar Award-winning author of *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter*

“This book may be the best thing I’ve read out of Mississippi in a long while. Dees knows where the bodies are buried and takes great glee in exhuming them. Throw in his deadpan humor, and you have a rollicking, informed and erudite read about everything from James Brown to the Hale-Bopp comet.”

Rheta Grimsley Johnson, syndicated columnist and Pulitzer Prize finalist

“Only Jim Dees could take a small-town controversy and turn it into the backbone of such a terrific book. This is the kind of inspired eye for detail and recognition for the absurd that Robert Altman would have loved. A truly unique reflection on a storied Southern town at a turning point. I’m so glad Dees was there to document it all and write this funny and insightful true story.”

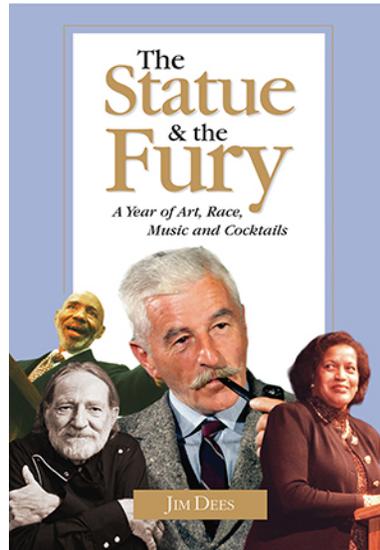
Ace Atkins, *New York Times* bestselling author, *The Innocents*

“A great book for anyone interested in small-town politics. Or journalism. Or Southern studies. Or Faulkner. Or racial reconciliation. Or good writing. Or, well, anything. . . This delightful cultural history, mediated through Jim Dees’ clear-eyed, humorous and surprising prose, provides so much entertainment that we might not notice how much we’re learning. This is a thoroughly necessary book.”

Beth Ann Fennelly, Poet Laureate of Mississippi

“In his humane and sardonic way, Jim Dees is writing about the soul of Oxford, Mississippi. There’s no one better for the job. This book is no cold, stately object. It’s funny, violent, serene and surprising — a living thing, like a tree.”

Jack Pendarvis, Emmy Award-winning writer



*A “furiously” funny chronicle of the year
a small town honored a legend*

OXFORD, MS — In *The Statue and the Fury*, Jim Dees, host of the public radio program *Thacker Mountain Radio*, chronicles a tumultuous year in the life of a small Southern town, complete with down-home eccentrics, famous figures and explosive events.

In 1997, Oxford, Mississippi, sought to erect a statue to honor the one hundredth birthday of native Nobel laureate, William Faulkner. After a magnolia tree at City Hall was cut down to make room for the sculpture, “all Faulkner broke loose.” Fiery city board meetings erupted, angry threats came from the feisty Faulkner family and civic tension ensued, leaving a bewildered artist, sculptor Bill Beckwith, caught in the middle.

Dees covered the city beat as a reporter for the local daily, the *Oxford Eagle*. At age forty, he was the newbie, a cub reporter at “the first job I’d ever had where I was older than my boss.” Dees brings the small town newsroom to life, including the vile coffee, deadline duress, cubicle psychosis and drudging daily obituary duty.

Dees notes, “My salvation was the country life out in Taylor, seven miles south of Oxford, pop. 323. I lived in an old house on a couple of acres with a cornfield, my girlfriend, two dogs and an outdoor basketball hoop. It was a little backwoods Eden.”

The year and the craziness raged on: the six-term Oxford mayor declined to run for re-election following the magnolia tree debacle and a first-ever female candidate stepped forward. Oxford became increasingly embroiled in a heated “trees versus development” dispute that saw nine citizens arrested for blocking bulldozers. Meanwhile, the hometown University of Mississippi pursued plans to discourage use of the Confederate flag, the song “Dixie” and the Colonel Rebel mascot, setting off protests, death threats and FBI visits.

Notorious rap group 2Live Crew showed up in town and induced nude chaos, as evidenced by several raunchy amateur videos shot during their “performance.” In his role as city reporter, Dees was asked by Oxford’s chief of police to watch one of the tapes and verify how salacious the show really was (the three promoters served three nights in jail). The result is hilarious and, as they say, “not safe for work.”

Dees brings the wit and insight his radio listeners enjoy to the page in writing about his town’s whacky and pivotal events. The book includes interviews with civil rights pioneers James Meredith and Myrlie Evers; late authors Shelby Foote and Willie Morris; a foggy encounter with legendary singer, Willie Nelson and a sweaty face-off with the late James Brown, the Godfather of Soul.

Henry Kissinger makes a cameo, as does O.J. lawyer, Johnnie Cochran. Sam Phillips, the visionary who discovered Elvis, descends on Oxford for an up-close rock and roll history lesson. “Bootleg preacher” the late Reverend Will D. Campbell triumphantly returns from exile.

All of this, and much more, made 1997 a wild year in Oxford, Mississippi, and now, it’s a wild, insightful and hilarious book.



Jim Dees is the author of *Lies and Other Truths: Rants, Raves, Low-Lifes and Highballs* and the editor of *They Write Among Us: New Stories and Essays From the Best of Oxford Writers*. Since 2000, he has been the host of *The Thacker Mountain Radio Hour*, a music and literature program heard weekly on Mississippi Public Broadcasting.

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