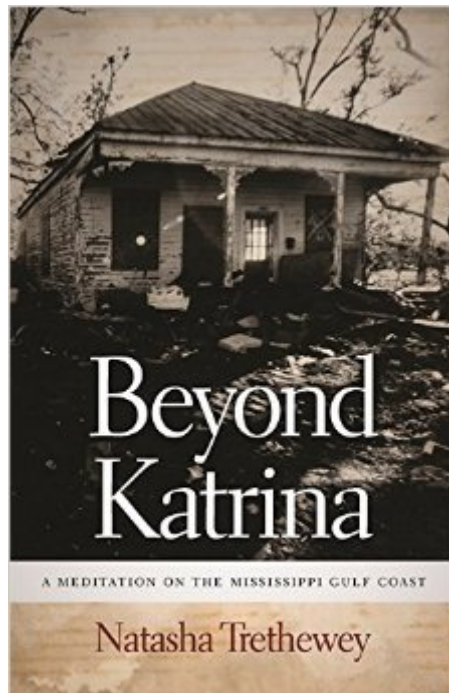


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# Beyond Katrina: A Meditation On The Mississippi Gulf Coast (Sarh Mills Hodge Fund Publications)



## Synopsis

Beyond Katrina is poet Natasha Trethewey's very personal profile of the Mississippi Gulf Coast and of the people there whose lives were forever changed by hurricane Katrina. Trethewey spent her childhood in Gulfport, where much of her mother's extended family, including her younger brother, still lives. As she worked to understand the devastation that followed the hurricane, Trethewey found inspiration in Robert Penn Warren's book Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South, in which he spoke with southerners about race in the wake of the Brown decision, capturing an event of wide impact from multiple points of view. Weaving her own memories with the experiences of family, friends, and neighbors, Trethewey traces the erosion of local culture and the rising economic dependence on tourism and casinos. She chronicles decades of wetland development that exacerbated the destruction and portrays a Gulf Coast whose citizens—particularly African Americans—were on the margins of American life well before the storm hit. Most poignantly, Trethewey illustrates the destruction of the hurricane through the story of her brother's efforts to recover what he lost and his subsequent incarceration. Renowned for writing about the idea of home, Trethewey's attempt to understand and document the damage to Gulfport started as a series of lectures at the University of Virginia that were subsequently published as essays in the Virginia Quarterly Review. For Beyond Katrina, Trethewey has expanded this work into a narrative that incorporates personal letters, poems, and photographs, offering a moving meditation on the love she holds for her childhood home. A Sarah Mills Hodge Fund Publication.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Natasha Trethewey is a powerful woman, a Pulitzer prize-winning poet and academic who grew up and out of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Her book reflects the varied facets of her character, being a collection of essays, poems, photographs and family stories that together form a portrait of the culture of these warm shore lands. The book is also an effort to draw attention and even investment to a part of the country that was devastated by Hurricane Katrina, but is often overlooked because of the focus on New Orleans. As Trethewey paints a picture of the Gulfport of her grandmother's time, and explores the changes for her family over the years, she also interviews friends and neighbors and applies journalistic objectivity to the impacts of old storms and new ones. Looking back to Hurricane Camille, a category 5 storm in August of 1969 that flattened most of the Mississippi coast and killed 259, Trethewey finds that the region's people, including herself and her family, have lived with a sense of vulnerability and a certain fatalism ever since. Going further back, she sees the pattern of development that class and racial segregation created, which her uncle recognized when he returned from World War II. Uncle "Son" worked hard to overcome those barriers, and was able to open a small nightclub that funded his steady acquisition of rental properties in the black neighborhood of North Gulfport. Repairing the run-down places, he provided affordable housing to his community. Trethewey shows us the ripples of such individual action. Yet those rentals were to be her younger brother's inheritance, and their loss to Katrina set him on a desperate path and forced many neighbors out.

Natasha Trethewey, the newly selected Poet Laureate of the U.S. and current professor of English and Creative Writing at Emory University, wrote this book, a combination of memoir, history and elegy, about her family and other residents of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, which was decimated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Although the eye of the storm made landfall in Louisiana, the brunt of the winds and the associated coastal flooding was felt in cities such as Bay St. Louis, Pass Christian, Gulfport and Biloxi, Mississippi. Over 90% of these towns were flooded, and nearly all private residences and public buildings suffered moderate to severe damage. At least 235 people were killed in the state as a result, and the region continues to feel the effects of the storm seven years later. Natasha Trethewey grew up in North Gulfport, a mostly African-American portion of the city, from the mid 1960s to the early 1980s. Although racial segregation and discrimination were formally outlawed by the time of her birth, its effects lingered in the Deep South for many years afterward, as many blacks continued to frequent stores owned by their neighbors and to employ local tradesmen. One of these men was her great-uncle Willie Dixon, known as "Son" to his family and neighbors,

who used his earnings from his nightclub to repair, buy and sell rental properties in North Gulfport. Her younger brother Joe took over the family business after Uncle Son's death, and his story of steady success followed by devastation and tragedy is the central element of this book.

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