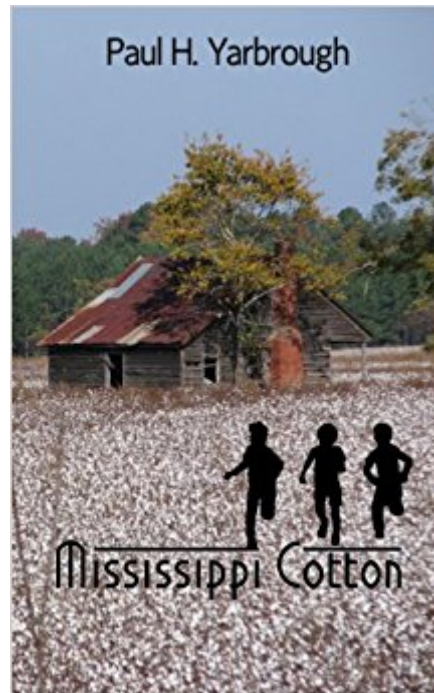




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# Mississippi Cotton



## Synopsis

Paul Yarbrough's critically-acclaimed debut novel, *MISSISSIPPI COTTON*, brings to light the complex history of rural Mississippi in the 1950's. It is 1951. Young Jake Conner gets on a bus to visit his cousins in the Mississippi Delta. But when the body of an unknown man is found in the Mississippi River, Jake's summer vacation gets a little more adventurous as he and his cousins snoop around in a mystery that is better left to the grown ups. "First time novelist, Paul H. Yarbrough, masterfully transports readers deep into the world of Mississippi Cotton, where life is not as simple as it seems." ~Julie Cantrell, editor, *Southern Literary Review* and bestselling author of *Into the Free* "In Mississippi Cotton a 20th Century Huck Finn has a real adventure. No matter that his raft is a Trailways Bus along the river, the trip is no less toward maturity. If you like a good story, this is your book, a book told by someone who knows the terrain--its history, people, landscape and culture. Only a proper native could have his narrator say that his daddy taught him never to hold onto anything with Lincoln's face longer than you had to." ~Dr. James Everett Kibler, author, *Walking Toward Home*, *Memories Keep*, and *Our Father's Fields* "Set in 1951, in the fictional Delta town of Cotton City, the story is more broadly a Southern story...an agrarian story. It is also a murder mystery. The body of an unknown man is found in the river at the Greenville Bridge. Jake's bus ride visit to his Delta cousins begins a parallel journey that ends in the discovery of the dead man's identity." ~Noel Workman, *Delta Magazine* "From *MISSISSIPPI COTTON*: "Earl put his brown hat in the chair next to him. In his work clothes, he looked tanned and strong--a real cotton farmer. His blue cotton shirt sleeves rolled up revealed big hairy forearms, with hard-looking muscle that came from farm work. He had a gentle way about him, but a mannerism that made you know he was definitely no softy. One of his big hands swept around the cup, not using the crook, and took a big swallow. Black. No sissy coffee for Earl Hightower."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"First time novelist, Paul H. Yarbrough, masterfully transports readers deep into the world of Mississippi Cotton, where life is not as simple as it seems." ~Julie Cantrell, editor, Southern Literary Review and bestselling author of *Into the Free* "In Mississippi Cotton a 20th Century Huck Finn has a real adventure. No matter that his raft is a Trailways Bus along the river, the trip is no less toward maturity. If you like a good story, this is your book, a book told by someone who knows the terrain--its history, people, landscape and culture. Only a proper native could have his narrator say that his daddy taught him never to hold onto anything with Lincoln's face longer than you had to." ~Dr. James Everett Kibler, author, *Walking Toward Home*, *Memories Keep*, and *Our Father's Fields* "Set in 1951, in the fictional Delta town of Cotton City, the story is more broadly a Southern story...an agrarian story. It is also a murder mystery. The body of an unknown man is found in the river at the Greenville Bridge. Jake's bus ride visit to his Delta cousins begins a parallel journey that ends in the discovery of the dead man's identity." ~Noel Workman, *Delta Magazine*

Paul Yarbrough's critically-acclaimed debut novel, *MISSISSIPPI COTTON*, brings to light the complex history of rural Mississippi in the 1950's. It is 1951. Young Jake Conner gets on a bus to visit his cousins in the Mississippi Delta. But when the body of an unknown man is found in the Mississippi River, Jake's summer vacation gets a little more adventurous as he and his cousins snoop around in a mystery that is better left to the grown ups. Southern stories, Southern writers, Southern writing, are indeed a study: From the fiction of Joel Chandler Harris to Margaret Mitchell and Caroline Gordon to Tom Wolfe, John Grisham and James Kibler. From the essays of the Vanderbilt Agrarians to Clyde Wilson (*THE* authority on John C. Calhoun), the richness of Southern literature has been a devotion of my lifelong education. To love Magnolias and Roses is not to love flowers, it is to love beauty. And like these two, Southern Literature sometimes is pure and white, and sometimes dark red with thorns. But in my world, all, and both are striking, and didactic, and beautiful. I once told a friend that there were three books every Southerner should have in his library: *Gone with the Wind*, *I'll Take My Stand*, and the Bible. I did comment: "Not necessarily in that order." It isn't the case that all Southern prose, from Virginia to Texas, is captured by these. But they do reach into the Southern soul for a view of life,

past present and future. And that is what I want to write and read about: the South and its life: past, present and future.~ ~ The South is more than worthy of study.

Before Jake had even got into Cotton City to visit his cousins, he heard of a body that was found in the river. Now he and his cousins are doing their own investigation. They go out at night to investigate because their days are filled with hoeing the cotton fields, going fishing, and well, probably because there's less chance of being found out what they're up to. Feel their fear as they hide out under the porch and 8-year old Casey digs his fingers into Jake's arm. Even the bus ride into Cotton City is able to hold the reader's interest as Jake has to share his seat with an old woman with way too much rouge on her cheeks which makes her yellow teeth look even yellower. She drinks what smells like lighter fluid from a Barq's Root Beer bottle which she shares with the stranger in the busting-at-the-seams shirt across the aisle who convinces her he doesn't have TB. Laugh out loud moments such as when the old woman on the bus mentions her "late" husband and Jake asks what he was late for. The author describes what it's like working in the cotton fields. I knew it would be back-breaking but I hadn't thought about the bugs and spiders that are particular to that area. It's easy to picture yourself sitting at the counter in the drugstore, sipping a cherry coke or down by the water poking a stick at a snake to determine whether it's alive or not. And try not to bust out laughing as you catch Casey staring at Mrs. Culpepper's bosom and sort of blinks both his eyes at you.

I downloaded this book even though it seemed to be more slanted to young adults because, being from the South, I am always interested in reading books set in the Deep South. I am so happy that I did! When I was reading Mississippi Cotton, I was transported back to my childhood days of growing up in rural Louisiana. We also went to school for only a half day during the month of September because we kids had to help get that cotton out of the fields. Even the author's use of slang was right on Southern speaking as only a fellow Southerner could have done it. Thanks, Paul, for taking me on a trip back to my youthful days of growing up in the Deep South!

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. This book was about a young black boy, Jake, growing up in the 1950's. If you think this book might be about racism or strife between blacks and whites, it is not. The book is not built on a foundation of racism or pity for the former slaves and the current black land owners. Instead, the book incorporated pride, a strong work ethic, respect for one's elders, the importance of family and church, and the amazing bonds of friendship in the black community. In

fact, one of the elders tells the boys if they know someone who doesn't want to work hard, they are to avoid him. There's nothing in here I would not want a tween reading, because even though there is a murder, it is not gruesome or gory. There is another murder from the past that is revealed. Even though it is more gory, it's still not overly described. I appreciated this book very much. In fact, I may read it again soon. It was an interesting murder mystery and a tale of boys enjoying their summer together.

Although this book was written from a 10 year old boys perspective, I wouldn't necessarily classify it as a YA book. It is a nice trip through the early 50's with a look at expected behaviours of the period. There is a murder that involves several people from the town and the mystery is all seen and told through Jakes eyes, as he and his cousins lurk around eavesdropping and asking questions when they can. The mystery was slowly developed, and not predictable or formulaic. The editing was clean with good grammar and spelling for the most part. There was no smut making it an appropriate read for any age group. Excellent book by a talented author.

A charming story of a childhood summer in the Mississippi delta in a time not yet modern when people sat on front porches, remembered their manners, and enjoyed fried chicken and freshly baked pies for Sunday dinner. This is a story rich in texture, one that appeals to all the senses. Warmed by the author's love for all that is Mississippi, the tale flows like the great river. The only criticism rose toward the end of the book from the author's stepping away from storytelling to wax a bit too long about his passion for the place, the people and their history. He would have been better served simply trusting his readers to share his feelings through their delightful encounters with Jake and company.

I love the fact that the author wrote about facts and fiction and that he took me back in time. I love the way he switch between characters but you could follow them all and not be lost. I love this book and if you decide to read it don't get upset just continue reading it, you'll love it as well.

I'm not normally interested in old-time South stories. While some can be truly good stories, they're also very depressing with horrible race issues and with many evil people hating and abusing others. Thusly I started this book with some trepidation. To my surprise, I found this book entertaining and enjoyable! There is a murder mystery the boys get involved in, of course, but it was well handled. It was so refreshing to read a book where the common people and the police were fair with all races

and just wanted to do the right thing. I wouldn't be uncomfortable sharing this story with young readers and for me, that's saying a lot!

Reading this story of young Jake and his friends and the mystifying world of the adults was almost like tearing pages out of my own past and weaving a darn good story around them. I hope that Paul Yarbrough will continue to write books such as this one. This is a 10 star book and one heck of an excellent first novel. I'll be looking for his future works. Mr. Paul Yarbrough, you done yourself good. Keep writing. Every one else, if you want a good clean story about what growing up was like in much of America for most boys in the 1950's then this is the book you'll want to read.

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