A PHOTOGRAPHIC ROAD TRIP

THANKYOU PLEASE COMEAGAIN

HOW GAS STATIONS FEED & FUEL THE AMERICAN SOUTH

BY KATE MEDLEY

FOREWORD BY KIESE LAYMON



A PHOTOGRAPHIC ROAD TRIP

THANK YOU PLEASE COME AGAIN

HOW GAS STATIONS FEED & FUEL THE AMERICAN SOUTH

BY KATE MEDLEY

FOREWORD BY KIESE LAYMON



THANK YOU PLEASE COME AGAIN: HOW GAS STATIONS FEED & FUEL THE AMERICAN SOUTH

Published by The Bitter Southerner, Inc. Athens, Georgia

Design by Dave Whitling
Photo edit by Kate Medley & Dave Whitling

ISBN: 978-0-9980293-5-1

Printed in Canada

© 2023 by The Bitter Southerner, Inc. All rights reserved.

"THE STATIONS I STOPPED AT COMPELLED ME TO DIG DEEPER AND TO WONDER: WHO LIVES HERE? WHAT DO THEY DO FOR WORK? WHAT DO THEY EAT? WHAT DO THEY BELIEVE? WHAT IS THE PACE OF THE DAY? WHAT IS IMPORTANT IN THEIR AMERICA? THEIR SOUTH?"

- KATE MEDLEY





IT STARTED WITH JR. FOOD MART

KIESE LAYMON

It started on date night and in Jr. Food Mart, my obsession with Mississippi restaurants that served gas.

This was date night in 1984.

Ofa D, my grandmama's boyfriend, would come over Friday nights in the summer. Ofa D wore head-to-toe camouflage decades before it was in style, then out of style, then back in style to wear head-to-toe camouflage. He smelled like tobacco and, most importantly to everyone in Forest, Mississippi, Ofa D had an actual Coke machine in the front yard of his trailer. Not the goofy plastic kind, either. The kind where you had to pull out the ice-cold bottle. As quiet as it was kept, Ofa D was the sexiest man in Forest off of that fact alone. Ofa D would pick Grandmama and me up maybe 20 minutes before "The Dukes of Hazzard" came on Friday evening.

They'd sit in the front cab of a raggedy Ford listening to a Tina Turner tape. I'd sit in the back, next to burnt orange

pine needles, a few broken lawnmowers, and all forms of rust. Friday nights smelled like dead chickens, piney woods, browning water, burning yard, and the insecticide that the mosquito man sprayed over every mile of Forest.

Grandmama didn't wear her Sunday best, or even her Friday best, to Jr. Food Mart on date night with Ofa D. She'd drape herself in this baby blue velour jogging suit sent down from Mama Rose in Milwaukee. Grandmama was the best chef, cook, food conjurer, and gardener in Scott County. Hence, she hated on all food, and all food stories, that she did not make.

But Grandmama never, ever hated on the cuisine at Jr. Food Mart, our favorite restaurant that served gas.

I have no idea what I wore any of those Friday nights. I just knew that there was no more regal way to move through space in Forest, Mississippi, at 8 years old, no matter how you were dressed, than the back of a pickup truck near dusk.

At this time of evening, even on a Friday, or maybe especially on a Friday, there were more gangs of TGIF dogs roaming the roads than people walking to and from work. But I swear, even the gang of TGIF dogs were jealous of how we looked going where we were going on Friday night.

I loved everything about where we were going. I loved the smell of friedness. I loved the way the red popped in the sign. I loved how the yellow flirted with the red. I loved that the name of the restaurant started with Jr. instead of ending in Jr. Like, Food Mart Jr.

I loved that we could get batteries and gizzards. I loved that we could get biscuits and Super Glue. I loved that we could get dishwashing soap, which was also bubble bath, which was also the soap we used to wash Grandmama's Impala, and the good hot sauce in the same aisle. I was 8 years old. I never knew, or cared, that my favorite restaurant served gas. My Grandmama and Ofa D were deep into their 50s. They seemed to never know or care that our favorite restaurant served gas, either.

I suppose there were choices of where you'd eat out in Forest, There was a Pizza Inn. There was a McDonald's, There was Penn's Fish House. There was Kentucky Fried Chicken. But there were no choices in what we'd eat on Friday. Of a D would order a box of dark meat, a Styrofoam container of And I'm still sure it is. fried fish, and a brown bag filled with 'tato logs. Grandmama would grab a box of a dozen donuts. Grandmama and Ofa D would let me pick my own cold drank. I picked the six-pack Nehi Peach or RC Cola every single time.

Maybe 35 minutes later, I'd eat myself into a lightweight coma while Grandmama and Ofa D lightly petted and pecked each other on the couch with the week's greasiest lips. This was our practice. This was their romance.

I would have to get kicked out of college in Mississippi, then transfer to a school in Oberlin, Ohio, then go to graduate school in Bloomington, Indiana, then get a job in Poughkeepsie, New York, at 26 before I really understood that my favorite restaurant served gas, and this discovery didn't happen at a gas station or restaurant in any of the places I went to school or worked.

I was driving back to Mississippi with my partner, a Black woman raised in the Northeast, when she commented how there were so many more McDonald's and Subway restaurants connected to gas stations on I-81 South. "Isn't it just so American that we will eat anything right next to literal oil and gas."

The sentence shocked me. I'd never, ever thought about what it meant that so many restaurants on the way down to Mississippi from New York were parts of gas stations. That revelation tasted like crude oil. It didn't taste fried at all. I remember saying, "Gotdamn. That's so foul."

But I'd never really thought about the fact that my favorite restaurants, as a child, as a teenager, as an adult returning to Mississippi, nearly all served gas. And I never, ever thought of

them as gas stations that served food. That is, until I moved back to Mississippi to teach and write in 2015.

Oxford, Mississippi, was, in many ways, as far from home as one could imagine. That's where I came back to Mississippi to teach. But there were three restaurants that served gas between Batesville and Oxford that honestly gave my memory of Jr. Food Mart a run.

This is where the story gets a bit shameful, because though my favorite restaurants serve gas, and a staple of restaurants that serve gas is fried chicken and fried fish, I haven't eaten meat in 30 years. Granny worked the line at the chicken plant my entire childhood and I saw enough the few times I visited her at work to feel some kind of way about those little chickens, and the way the humans paid to kill, clean, slice, and wrap the chickens were paid.

Still, the restaurant that serves gas leading to the square has the best chicken-on-a-stick ever, I've been told. They definitely have the best fried potatoes, I know. The restaurant that serves gas on the other side of the square has the best banana pudding I've had anywhere other than Grandmama's kitchen.

And the restaurant right off 1-55, at the first Batesville exit, where Highway 6 takes you to Oxford, has the best pecan pie and sweet potato pie on earth. They only sell it by the slice, though, and on my worst days — which were also my best days in Oxford — I'd drive down to Batesville, pick out two pieces of each, look over at all the fish, chicken, potato salad,

macaroni and cheese, greens, and green beans and just feel so happy to be home, in a place where brutality leaves bruises, and a place that truly expects incredible restaurants to serve gas.

I missed that up North.

Yet it is the experience of eating food from restaurants that serve gas that really elucidates our American, or our deeply Southern American, conundrum. Our practices are literally poisonous. Mississippi charges me a tax for driving a hybrid car. It literally charges me for not wanting to fuck up our environment more. And. But. The friendships we make while experimenting and/or surviving the poisonous parts of Mississippi are what make our lives and definitely our childhoods — if we are willing to mine them — heavier, and actually most wonderfully Southern.

I missed that up North.

My grandmother had her 94th birthday last week. It was the first birthday we've had for her where the only people left (alive) were family, except for one woman who was slightly younger than Grandmama. This woman knew me and thought I should have known her. She introduced herself as Ms. Joyce. Ms. Joyce made all the food for my Grandmama's birthday, and apparently, she was the person I'd paid to cook for granny before she had to move in with my Auntie Sue. Ms. Joyce, I learned that day, also was a head cook at Jr. Food Mart all those decades ago.

Nancy Valentine Little Blue Store Falcon, Mississippi

I found a time to tell Ms. Joyce thank you for the birthday food and for the food she made at Jr. Food Mart. I asked her if she thought of Jr. Food Mart as a restaurant that served gas or a gas station that served food. Ms. Joyce said she thought of Jr. Food Mart as "my damn job."

She said she was the cook, the custodian, the shopper, the manager, the security guard, and the server. All for minimum wage. She said the job was actually the worst job of her life in terms of pay and labor, but she never had a better time at work because she got to love on her people every Friday night. Ms. Joyce compared Friday nights at Jr. Food Mart to Saturday evenings when the bus from Jackson would arrive in Forest and all these parents and grandparents would see kids who'd moved to Jackson.

I told her I understood, and said that my favorite restaurant still serves gas. Ms. Joyce looked at me and said, "Oh, OK," then hugged Grandmama's neck and said, "I miss my job. But I'm shole glad not to be washing them damn dishes and fooling with them gizzards no more."

My favorite restaurant served gas. My favorite restaurant served gas.

My favorite restaurant paid its most important asset, a human we called Ms. Joyce, as little as one could get paid to work in any restaurant. She was paid as little as one could get paid while smelling, and sometimes pumping, gas for folks unable to pump until her shift ended at 11 p.m.

This, now, is part of my favorite restaurant memory, too. And while I smell the memory as deeply as I've smelled anything in my life, I'm shole glad Ms. Joyce ain't cooking, cleaning, or washing no more damn dishes in any restaurant on Earth that serves gas.

I do miss her 'tato logs, though. I can't even lie about that.
I miss our date night.







THE FILLING STATIONS OF OUR TIME

KATE MEDLEY

Ten miles or so past the last stoplight in Hillsborough, North Carolina, a panoply of hand-painted signs dotted the roadside for the Farm & Garden Center: VEGETABLES, JELLY, LIVE PLANTS, LOCAL LAMB, BEER, BAIT. So I pulled off to gas up and was greeted by a shop dog named Parker, alongside the promised vegetables, bait, and beer.

Inside, an older Black woman donned a plastic hair covering in case of rain. A young Latinx couple purchased last-minute party provisions. Two white farmers seemingly shopped only for conversation. Peach hand pies, Bojangles biscuits pirated from an intown location, and organic beef came home with me that day in 2008. Four years later, I began documenting gas stations across the South — interviewing and photographing the people who run the shops, cook the food, and buy the goods. There is an egalitarian nature to the gas station, integral to the lives of people in every socioeconomic bracket if you live in the South, especially in rural areas. Working as a photojournalist, it became my way of studying this complex region, the people who live here, and how the populations and priorities are shifting.

New Yorkers have bodega culture. In the South, we have gas stations.

These one-stops were created with a single purpose in mind: to provide fuel for people as they moved their cars and farm equipment across land. In those early days, folks typically built gas stations onto existing general stores and pharmacies located in the middle of town. As cars became more affordable and commonplace by the 1930s, drive-in filling stations appeared along highways and bypasses, places with more space to accommodate the evolving infrastructure — underground tanks, multiple bays, and elaborate awnings.

Gas station amenities have since shifted. Up until the 1980s, you could get your car fully serviced in the garages of gas stations; now the garages are largely gone, and in their place are stores filled with fried chicken, taquitos, and Monster Energy drinks.

Today, industry insiders dispute the very term "gas station." Do gas stations even exist anymore? Jeff Lenard of the

Burlington, North Carolina

National Association of Convenience Stores would say no — we have convenience stores that sell gas. "The idea is to have a very competitive gas price, and when customers go into the store, you can make money off that transaction," Lenard told NBC News. A recent survey by the association found that almost 60 percent of people buying gas also go inside the store.

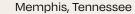
And while gas stations have changed, so have we. Our politics may be polarized, our economics stratified, our neighborhoods segregated, and our rhetoric strained, but still nearly everyone regularly passes through these same commercial spaces. We fill up the tank. We relieve our bladders. We grab a cold one on the way home from work. We take advantage of Friday night's "prime rib special." We may rub elbows as we pass the ketchup. In an increasingly atomized world of mediated interactions, we have fewer and fewer communal spaces that unite us.

When I first set out on this journey, I wanted to explore not only these shared and seemingly sacred corridors, but also the types of cooking that might be happening in the backs of gas stations. I took to the long road, both figuratively and literally, logging thousands of highway miles across 11 states in the Deep South. People sent recommendations along the way, but most of my approximately 150 stops were impromptu.

Preliminary research told me there are more than 145,000 gas stations in the U.S. Of those, 61 percent are owned by immigrants. The stations I stopped at compelled me to dig deeper and to wonder: Who lives here? What do they do for work? What do they eat? What do they believe? What is the pace of the day? What is important in their America? Their South?

I found gas station grills featuring emerging immigrant foodways. Others fuel the region's farmworkers with hot plate lunches. Predawn biscuits for hunters. Young chefs getting their career start. Easily portable meals for laborers and travelers. Basic groceries in towns without a Kroger or Publix.







I prioritized independently run establishments and places that sell gas, or did at one time. Some of these places are now closed or no longer standing, and others have since morphed into other forms — it's the nature of this type of business to constantly be evolving. And though I visited interstate-adjacent megastations, too, I did not photograph them. Instead, I trained my attention on the businesses that provided a portrait of a place. That quality is hard to define — more a vibe than a formula. But when you feel it, you know in your gut.

This is not a book about gas, nor a guidebook. I'm not reviewing these restaurants, or making any claim that they represent the best gas station food across the region. It's a book about work, culture, and survival.

So roll down the window and put the car in drive. We're taking a trip across the contemporary American South to meet the people who make these places so much more than what they appear to be: the fry cooks, mechanics, customers, road trippers and everyone in between.

FORGOING THE PUMPS

When I first hit the road in the Mississippi Delta, I did not find brighteyed gas station cooks filled with hope. I found service station owners struggling to get by, most of them serving a similar menu. Fried chicken. Burgers. Potato logs. In many instances they were the only commercial outlet for miles, so they couldn't afford not to sell food that is inexpensive, portable, and almost universally liked.

When I met Jeff Poynor, he was sitting outside his family's original gas station on the side of Highway 9 West in the no-stoplight town of Banner, Mississippi. Inside were original wooden mailboxes from the days when the gas station doubled as the post office in the 1980s. Way in the back sat a dusty upright piano — a vestige of the time when the space transformed into a dance hall in the evenings during the '90s. Today, it's a tire shop.

Poynor walked me across the street to show off his newly constructed and more modern gas station, a 76 called Pop's. Clad in corrugated steel, Pop's serves a plate lunch, and customers Amanda Simonson Old Town Grocery & Tackle Elaine, Arkansas

can sit at large round tables anchored by condiment-heavy lazy Susans. He introduced me to the five men who comprise what Poynor called "the 2 o'clock crowd."

"You see that guy over there? He delivered packages for UPS for 40 years. Since his wife died last year, he eats at Pop's for breakfast, lunch, and dinner," said Poynor. "Every piece of food that goes into his body comes from this gas station."

I traveled across the Mississippi River to Elaine, Arkansas, a town isolated both by the curvature of the river and its own troubled civil rights history — namely the Elaine Massacre of 1919, in which hundreds of Black people were killed after organizing to get more money for their cotton crops. Most of the commercial establishments in Elaine have closed. All of the gas is gone.

Gas is an expensive business. It requires significant upfront capital to build the under- and aboveground infrastructures, adhere to environmental regulations, and fill the tanks. For this reason, some gas station owners I visited had chosen to forgo

the pumps — either letting them run dry or ripping them out altogether — and focus their efforts instead on inside sales: snacks, beer, soda, cigarettes. And for some, hot food.

Empty pump columns remain outside of Old Town Grocery & Tackle near Elaine, where the slogan reads proudly: "We like our tea like we like our farmers — sweet and strong."

Amanda Simonson was operating as the cook, cashier, and general manager when I stopped in. "The closest gas is 30 miles away," said Simonson, "but I can offer you smothered pork chops."

When Old Town Grocery & Tackle went up for sale several years ago, a local farmer took interest, because without the restaurant inside — the only hot food for miles — his farmhands would not have had anywhere to eat. "We serve a plate lunch for the farm crew each day, and that's open to town folks, too," said Simonson. "Except today, we're serving a plate lunch for dinner because it's planting season. They'll be planting corn 'til midnight."





Gina Nguyen Banh Mi Boys Metairie, Louisiana

NEW FOODWAYS IN OLD PLACES

In the suburbs of New Orleans, Peter Nguyen earned his culinary chops from afternoons spent binge-watching Food Network in high school. In 2016, Nguyen opened Banh Mi Boys. Located in the vacant space next to his family's Texaco in Metairie, Nguyen offers a counter-service menu that blends the culinary roots of his Vietnamese heritage with his Louisiana upbringing. In particular, diners queue up for Nguyen's garlic butter shrimp banh mi, a sandwich served on New Orleans-style French bread and anchored by Cajun garlic butter flash-fried shrimp, dressed with cucumber, jalapeno, cilantro, and pickled carrots and daikon. "This sandwich merges the feeling of a Louisiana crawfish boil with the taste of a traditional banh mi," Nguyen said. "Together, it warms your soul and feels so comforting."

Nguyen is part of a long tradition of immigrant populations entering the United States workforce by way of feeding people. Partly because of constraints within the traditional labor market — language barriers, racial discrimination, bureaucratic red tape

— many foreign-born entrepreneurs have turned to food-centric businesses requiring relatively low capital investment. We see examples of this all over the country: halal food trucks in New York City, taco stands on the West Coast, and Chinese corner stores in the Mississippi Delta. In the South, gas station food is an integral part of this economy.

In Uptown New Orleans, Abbas Alsherees, an Iraqi refugee who first came to Louisiana in the 1990s, and his wife, Shannon, opened Shawarma On-The-Go inside a Jetgo station on Magazine Street. The two met while he was working the register at another gas station. "She would stop in for coffee every morning, and I finally asked her out," said Alsherees. "We got married one week later."

They purchased the Jetgo station in 2002, but it wasn't until 2016 that Shawarma-On-The-Go opened. The centerpiece here is three vertical rotisseries, spinning with cylinders of meat, all cooked inhouse. Perhaps most known for his chicken shawarma, Alsherees is particularly proud of the traditional Iraqi-style lula kebab (a blend of ground beef and lamb).

Gurjeet Singh Punjabi Dhaba Hammond, Louisiana

Across Lake Pontchartrain at an Icebox gas station in Hammond, Louisiana, I visited Gurjeet Singh, a partner in Punjabi Dhaba. Originally from Chandigarh, India, Singh took note of the increasing number of drivers in the American trucking industry from the northern Indian region of Punjab. "They travel across the country driving these trucks, and they have nowhere to eat," Singh told me.

In 2018, with the help of a few business partners, Singh bought this former Shell station because of its strategic location — at the **FULL SERVICE** intersection of interstates 55 and 12 — and opened his North Indian restaurant. Along the back wall emblazoned with local favorite Community Coffee advertising, Singh instead serves Punjabi chai. The aromas of meat, saag, and paneer offerings emanate from a cascade of steam tables in the middle of the dining room. Punjabi Dhaba is among an estimated 40 dhabas that have opened on interstate exits across the U.S. in response to the growing number of Punjabi drivers in the long-haul trucking industry.

While originally catering exclusively to these drivers, Singh's restaurant became a destination for people across the South seeking great Indian food. Soon he will remove the commercial kitchen, steam tables, and fine linens at Punjabi Dhaba and replace them with racks of Corn Nuts, Takis, and Fritos. The Punjabi restaurant will move into a dedicated space across town, and Icebox will revert back to a regular convenience store selling gas. "Because rich people," Singh said, "don't eat at gas stations."

Fred Eaton, along with six of his brothers and their father, opened Fred Eaton Service Station in Prichard, Alabama, in the early 1960s. It remains a full-service, cash-only enterprise. And it is one of less than 50 Black-owned gas stations in the country.

In addition to the fuel, oil changes, and tire repair, Eaton's has become a gathering place for folks in this tight-knit South Alabama community. "When people retire, they come sit around out front," said Eaton. "Take the preacher, for instance. He's retired. He'll sit around and we'll talk church





Betty Campbell Betty's Place Indianola, Mississippi

stuff. It's not real church, but it's a lot like real church. Right here at my own service station."

Even after the Civil Rights Act passed in 1964, traveling in the South was a perilous undertaking for Black people. As racist attitudes persisted at many white-owned businesses, travelers of color had to exercise caution when choosing a restaurant or gas station to patronize. Because of this, Black-owned gas stations, though few and far between, served as one-stop shops for travelers, offering fuel, restroom services, and restaurant-quality food. For many of these stations, food became the primary profit driver. An emphasis was placed on portable foods that could travel easily — fried chicken, sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, and sliced cake.

When Betty Campbell was a child growing up in Indianola, Mississippi, in the 1950s, her family did not patronize the Way's Chevron on Main Street. It was located just north of the tracks, which meant it was on the white side of town, in

a place that had recently birthed the White Citizens' Council.

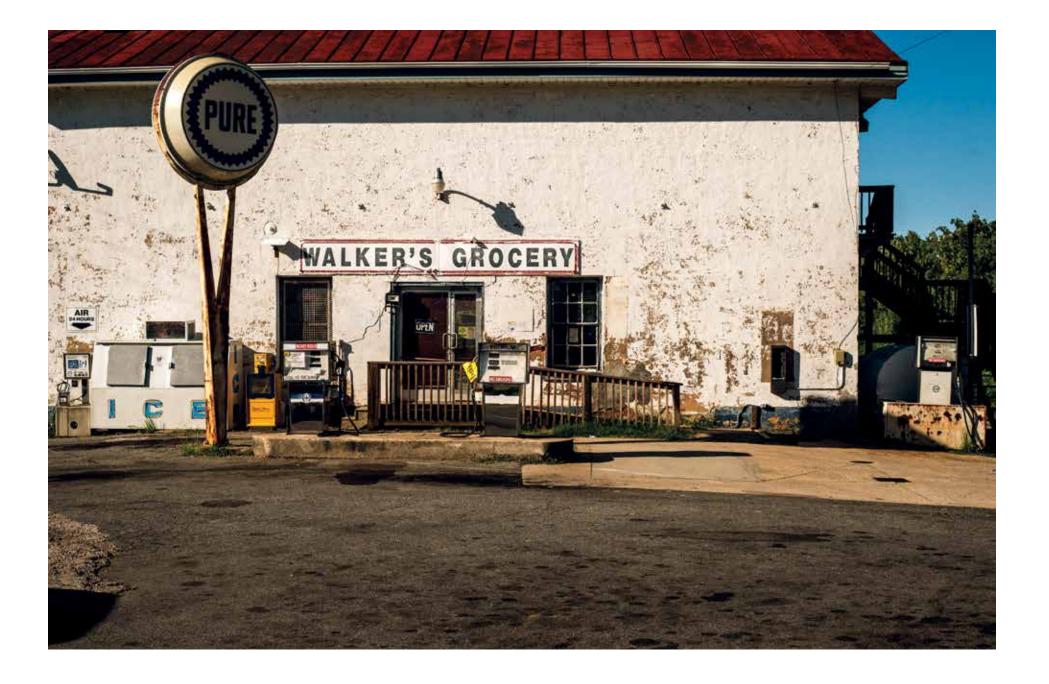
"Black people did not trade there," said Campbell. Her family

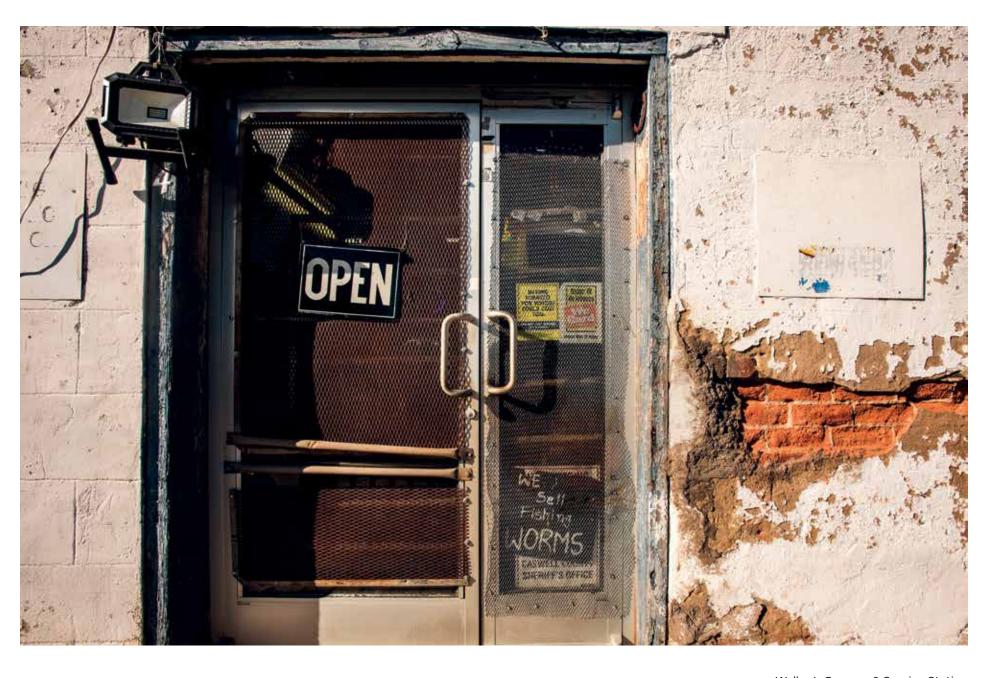
— a Black family — got their gas out on the highway instead.

In 2008, after becoming a private chef for notable clients such as B.B. King, Campbell and her husband decided to open a restaurant. The old Way's gas station on Main Street came up for sale, and Betty's Place opened. Campbell found it to be the perfect spot, in the heart of downtown and a stone's throw from the new B.B. King Museum, which sees some 30,000 visitors annually from all over the world. "They tell all the tourists about Betty's Place," said Campbell's brother, Otha.

"Not only do Black travelers see Betty's as a safe place to stop for lunch, white travelers see it as a safe place, too," he said. "White [folks] that may be visiting Mississippi and have ideas about racism down here, they walk into Betty's and I greet them with 'Welcome,' and they know I mean it. Everyone is welcome here at Betty's Place."

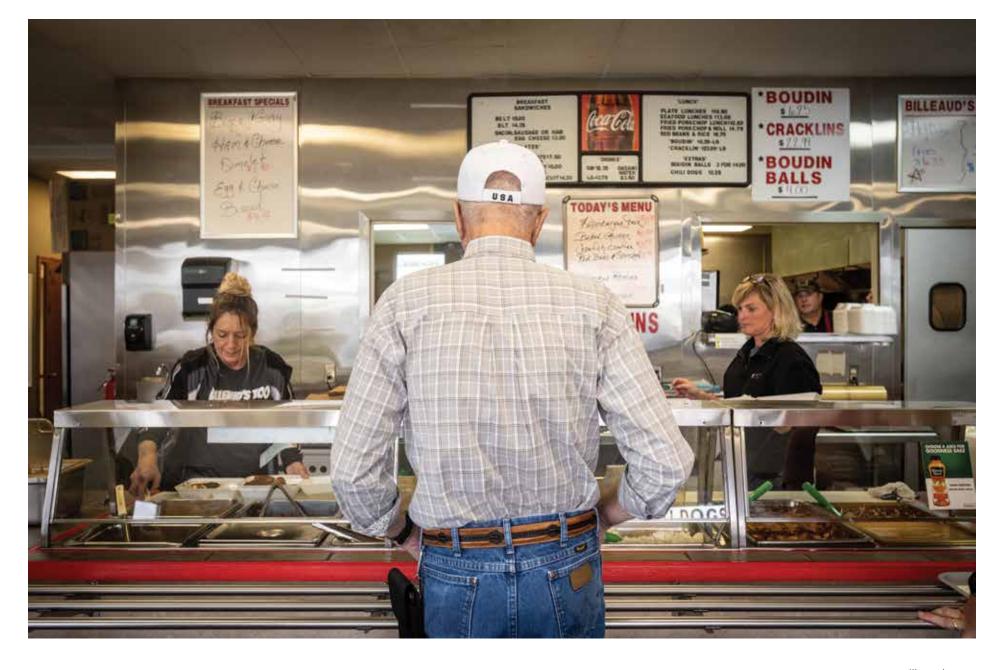






Walker's Grocery & Service Station Caswell County, North Carolina

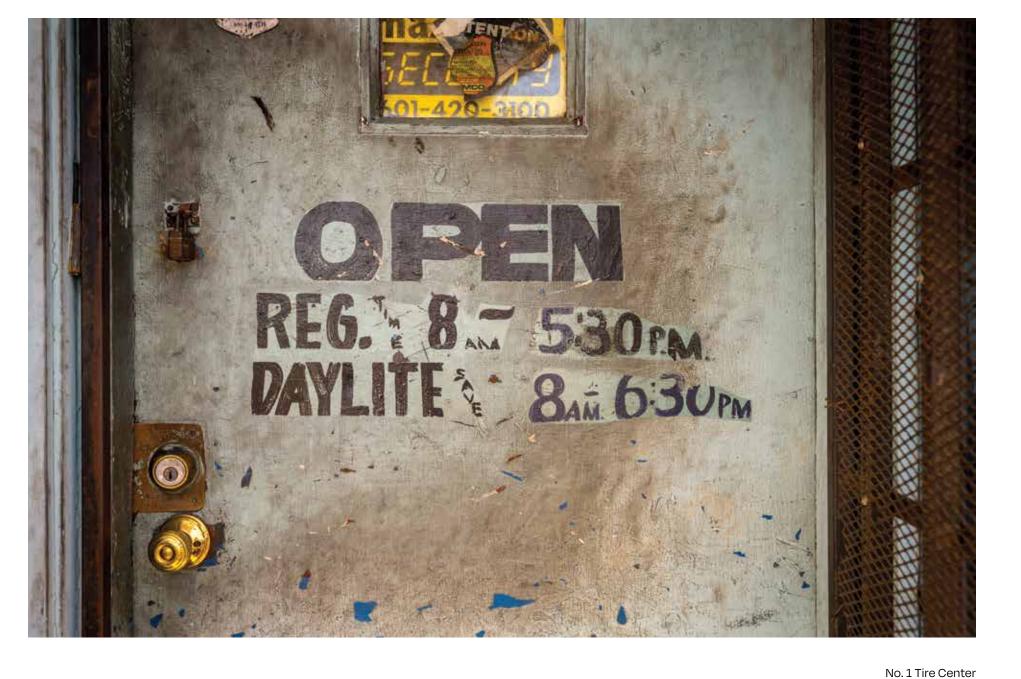




Billeaud's Too New Iberia, Louisiana

29





Five Points Grocery & Gas Clayton, Georgia

Jackson, Mississippi



Calvander Food Mart Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Destiny McCrory Buckhorn Cafe Lottie, Louisiana



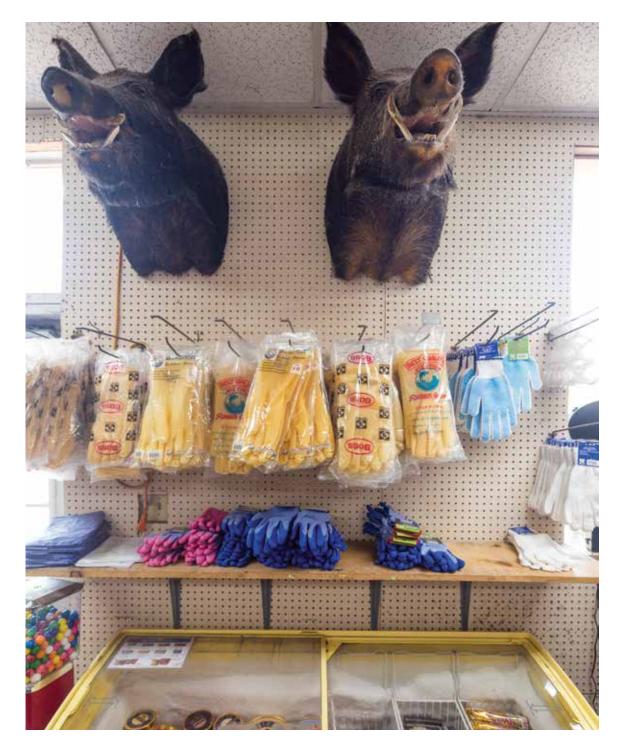








Big White Starch Down Prichard, Alabama



Fisherman's Choice Eastpoint, Florida



Green Sea, South Carolina





Hillsborough, North Carolina

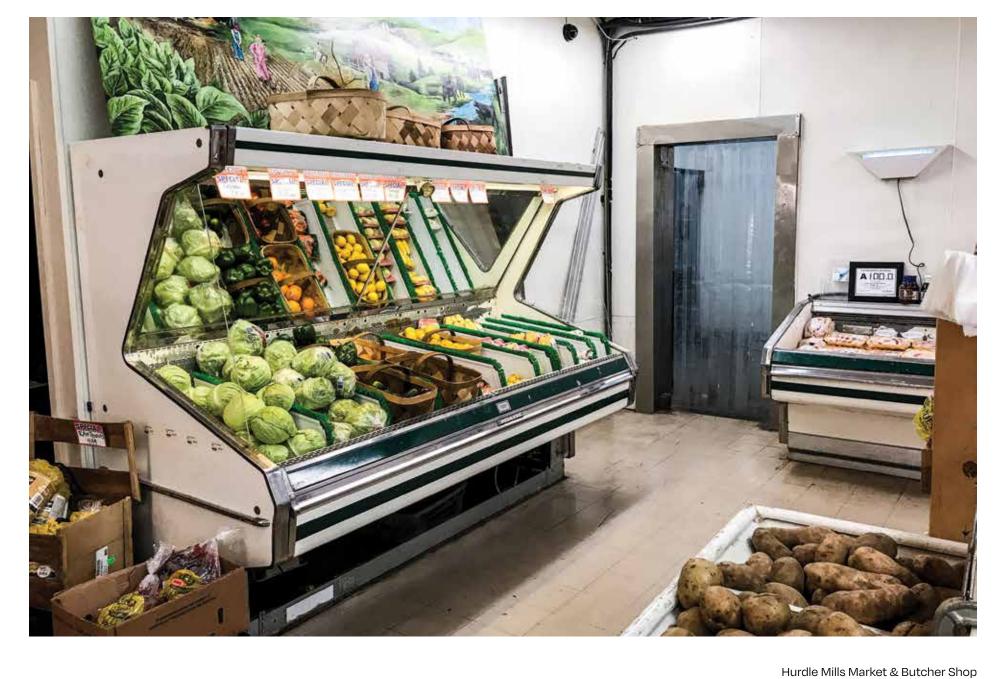
Hurdle Mills, North Carolina

 12



BMW Pit Stop Moon Lake, Mississippi





Kwik Chek Memphis, Tennessee

Hurdle Mills, North Carolina







Chiappini's Melrose, Florida



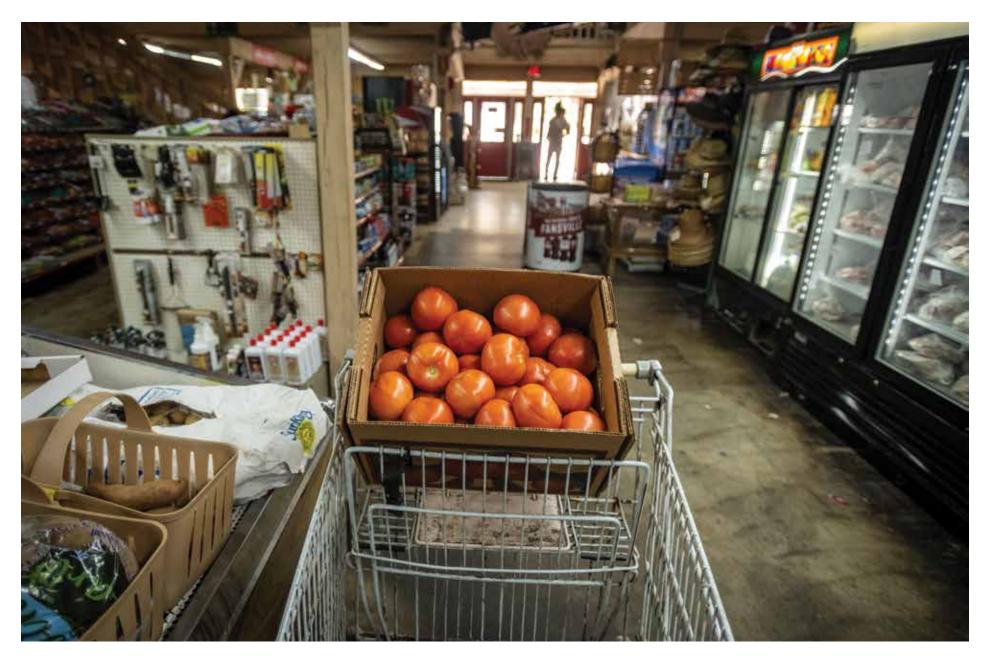
Alex Reyna Kwik Chek Memphis, Tennessee





Dunia Siles Key's Fuel Mart New Orleans, Louisiana





Mr. Bunky's Market Eastover, South Carolina Frazier's Store Wake Forest, North Carolina





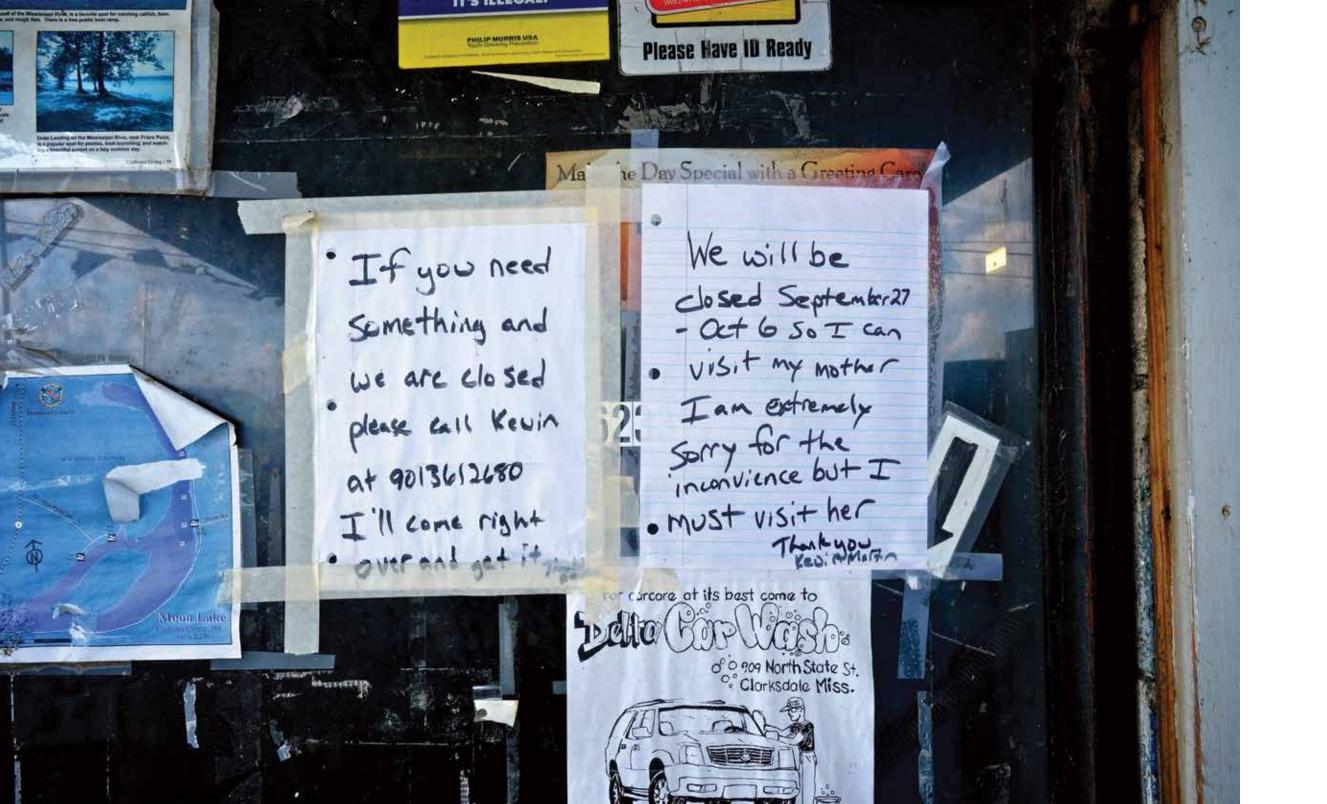




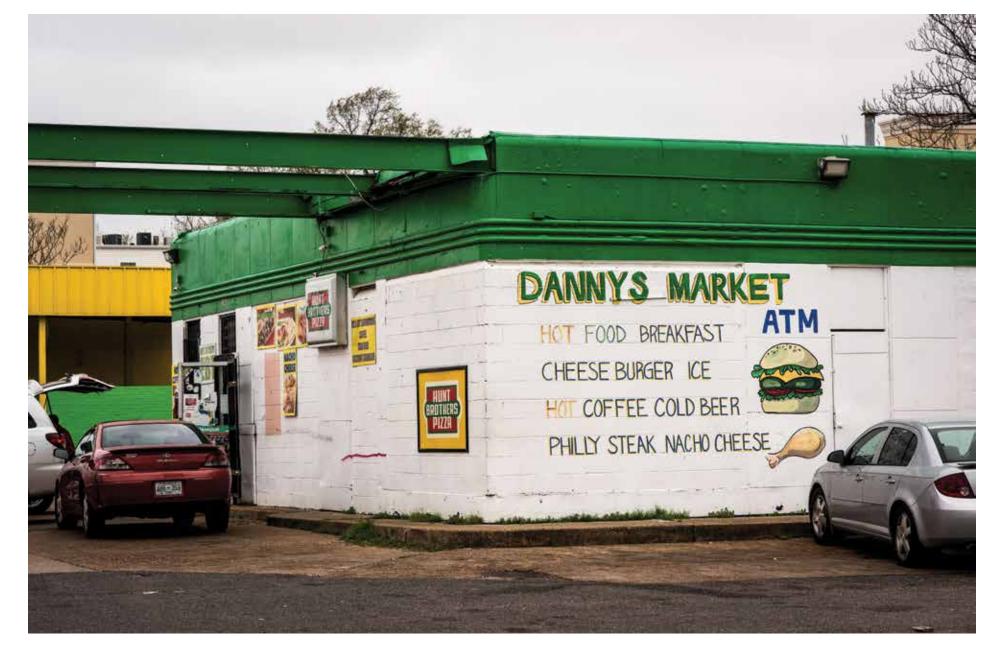












Chelsea Express Memphis, Tennessee

Danny's Market Memphis, Tennessee





Amore Eats Rockville, Maryland

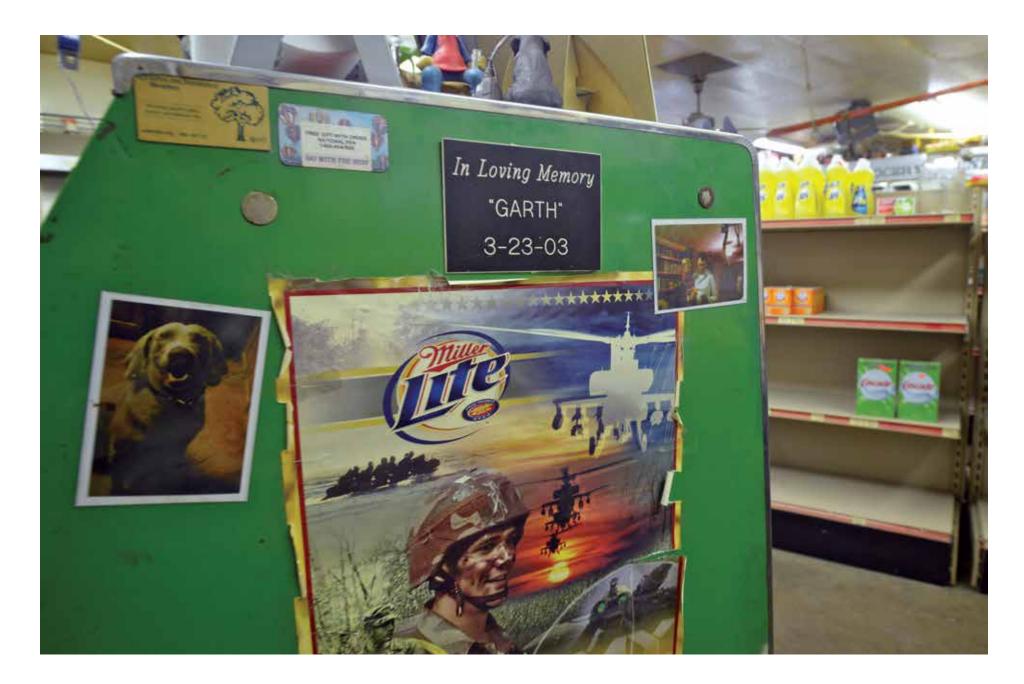


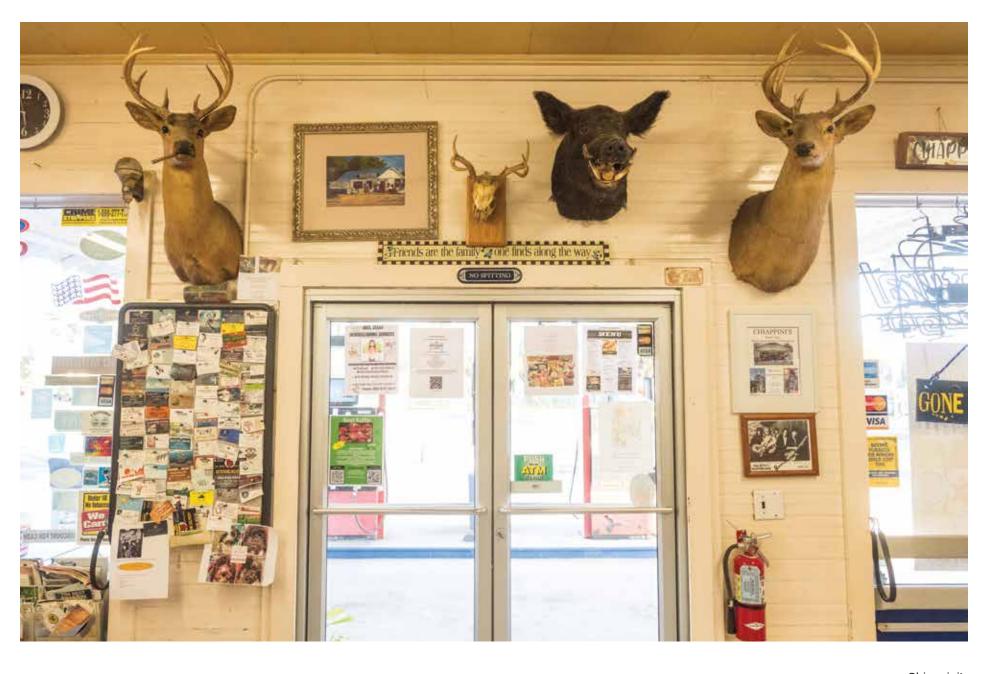


La Cabana Taqueria Raleigh, North Carolina



La Cabana Taqueria Raleigh, North Carolina





Maddox Grocery Avon, Mississippi

Chiappini's Melrose, Florida



Cliff's Cash and Carry Cades, South Carolina

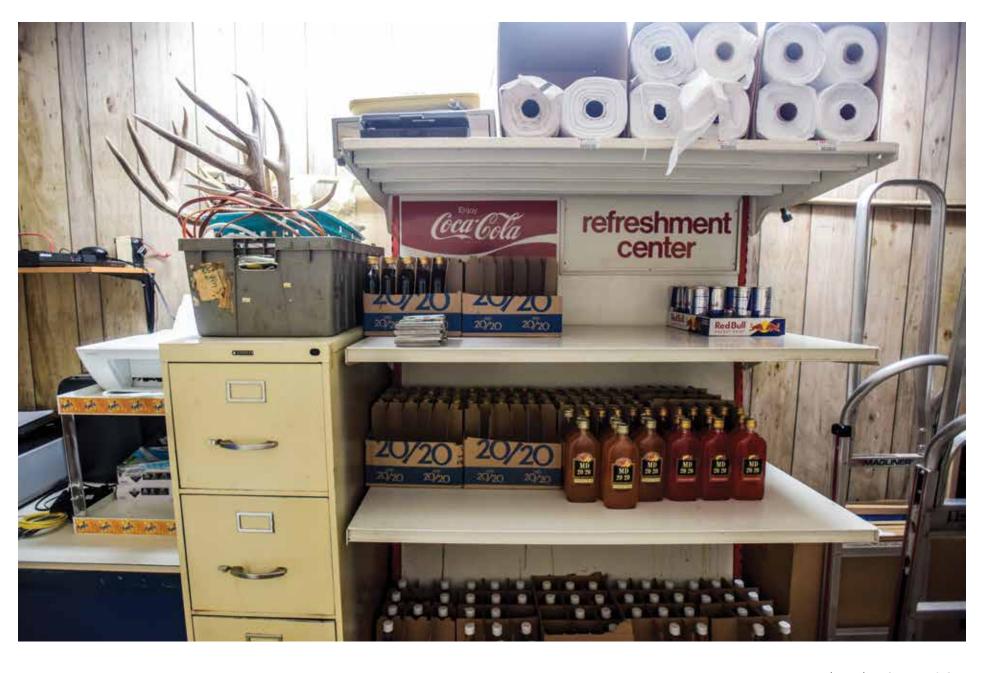




Hurdle Mills Market & Butcher Shop Hurdle Mills, North Carolina

Cozart Fruit and Produce Durham, North Carolina





Five Points Grocery & Gas Clayton, Georgia



Marta Miranda Quik Shoppe Charlotte, North Carolina





Paul Cozart Cozart Fruit and Produce Durham, North Carolina





Nina Patel Tasty Tikka Irmo, South Carolina



Mr. Bunky's Market Eastover, South Carolina







Joel Baldree JR's Aucilla River Store Lamont, Florida

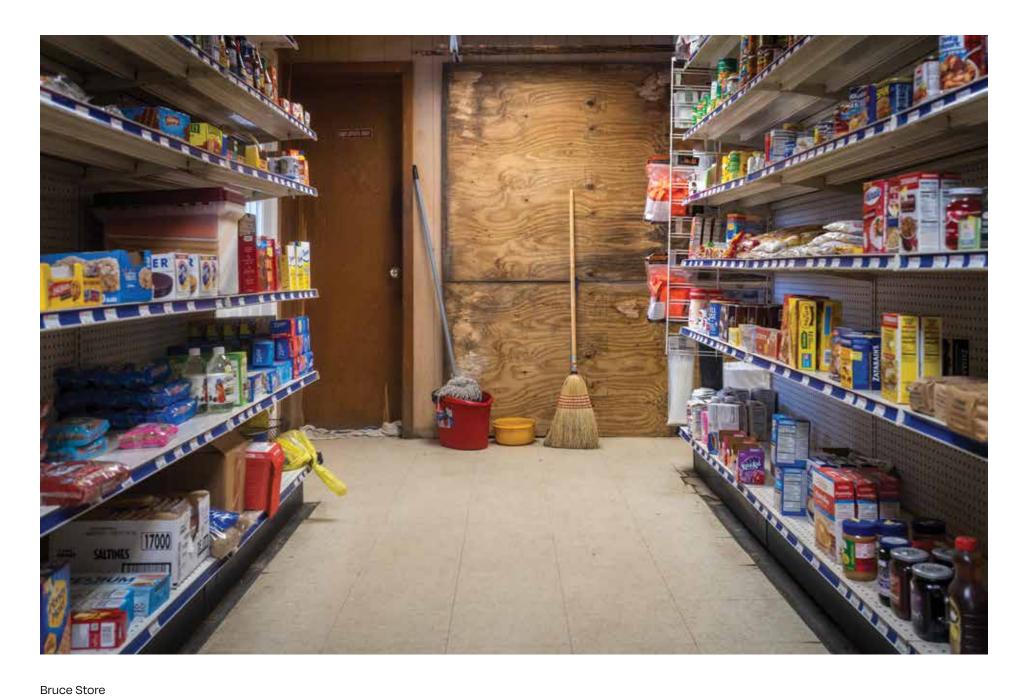


Fisherman's Choice Eastpoint, Florida



Ken Abumsa The Original Brown Derby No. 3 New Orleans, Louisiana







Ponce de Leon, Florida

Hillsborough, North Carolina





Shannon and Abbas Alsherees Shawarma On-The-Go New Orleans, Louisiana





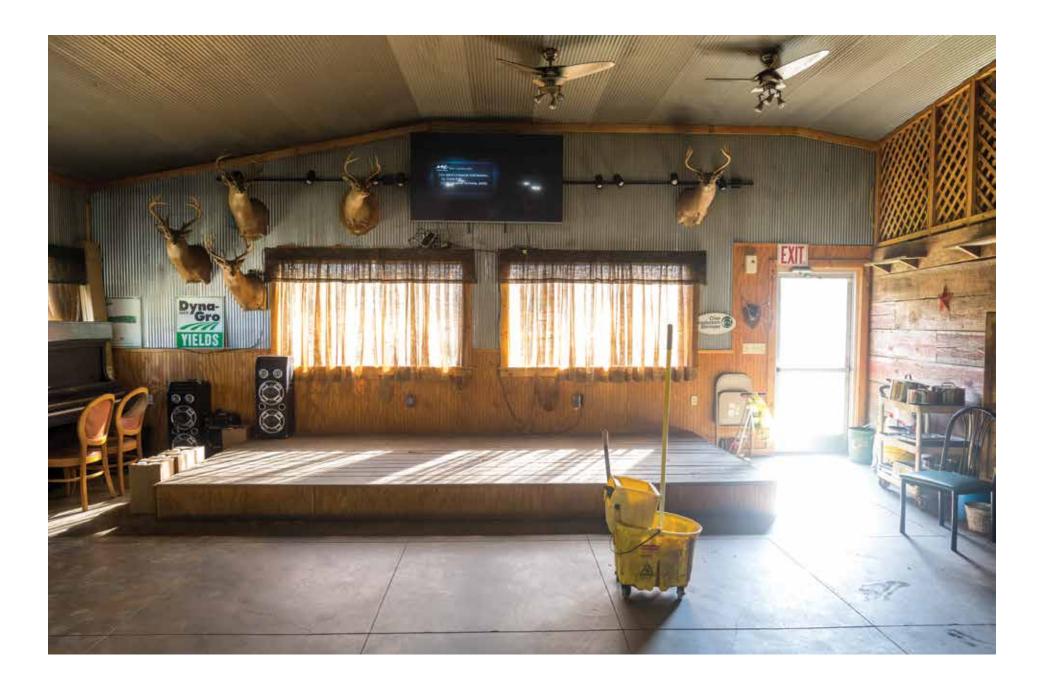






Mr. Bunky's Market Eastover, South Carolina







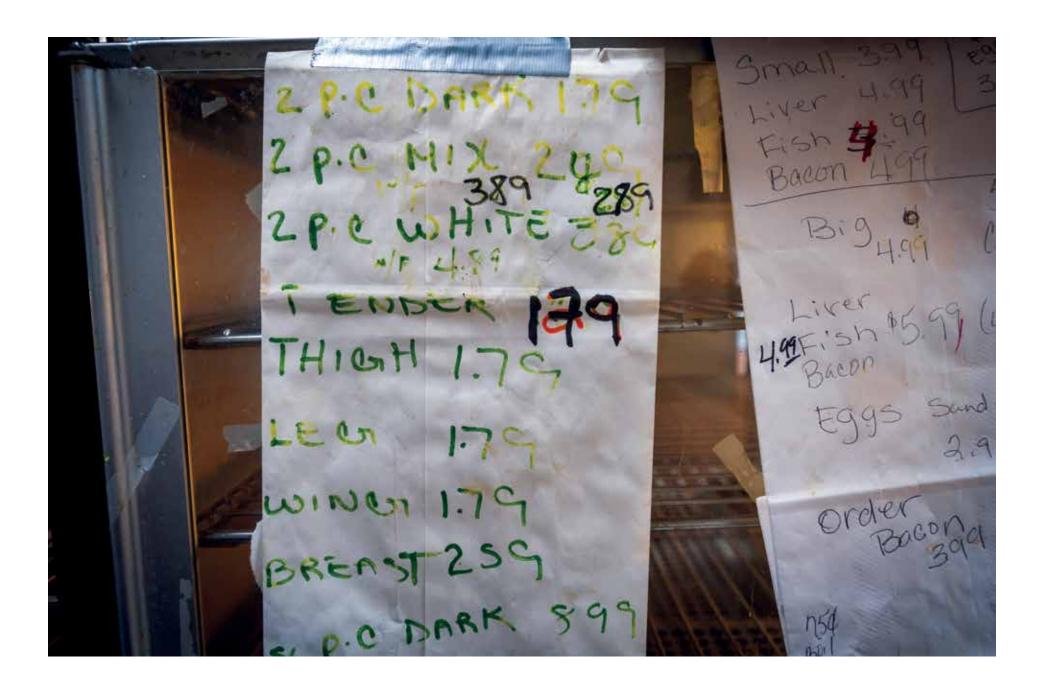
Great River Road Country Store Rena Lara, Mississippi







Tony Young Heritage Grill Durham, North Carolina





New Orleans, Louisiana



Delta Fast Food Cleveland, Mississippi





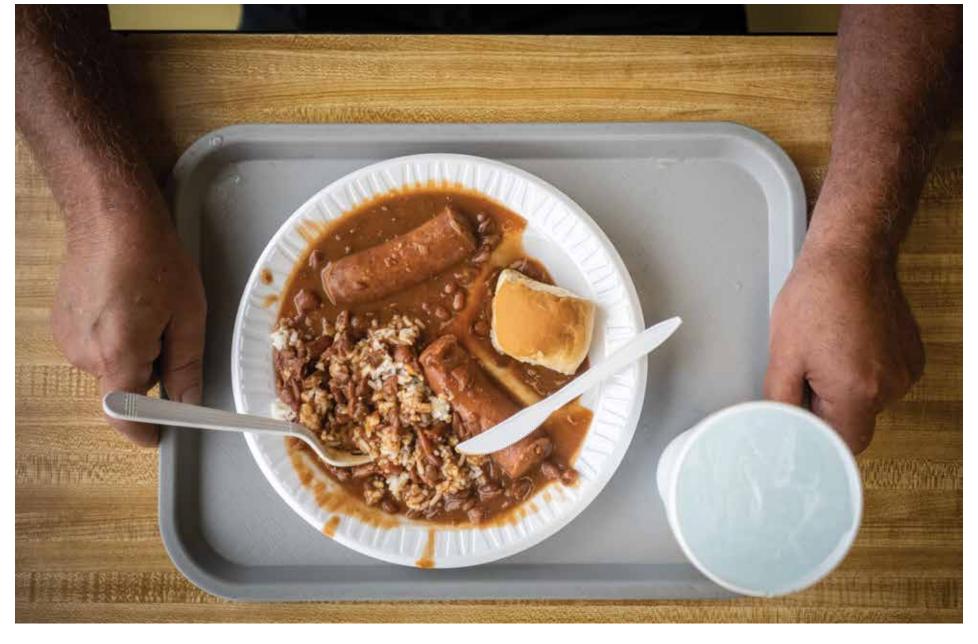
Buckhorn Cafe Lottie, Louisiana











Billeaud's Too New Iberia, Louisiana





Alba Padillia 4 Corners Chevron Oxford, Mississippi







Shayla Westmoreland Buck's One Stop Calhoun City, Mississippi







Nana's Fastfood & Seafood Charlotte, North Carolina

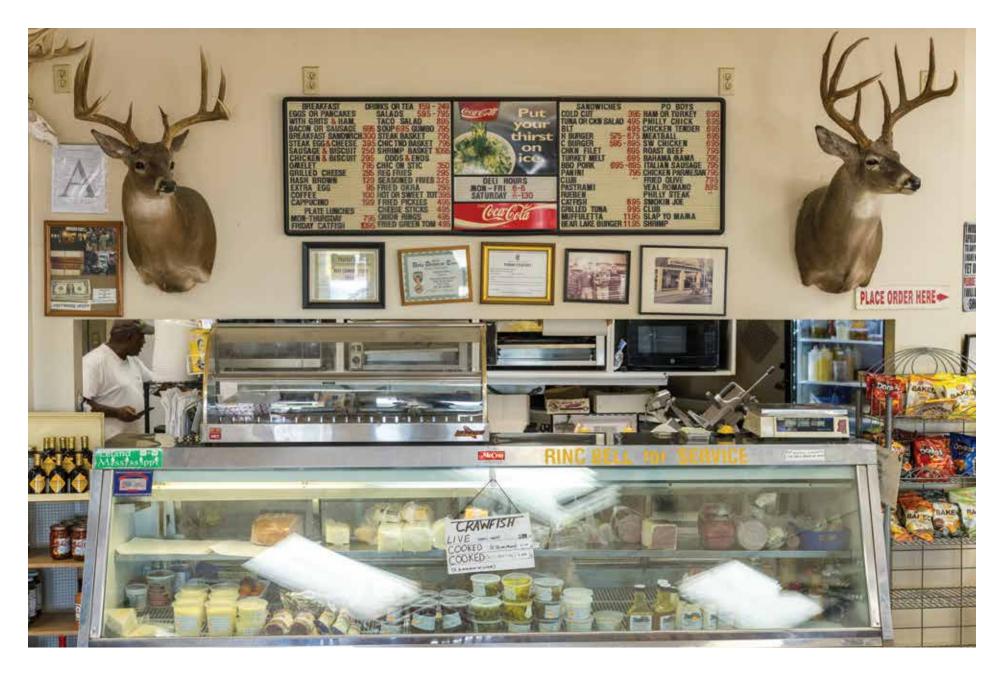




Betty's Place Indianola, Mississippi



Betty Campbell Betty's Place Indianola, Mississippi



Fratesi Grocery and Service Station Leland, Mississippi









Bassie Service Station Gunnison, Mississippi



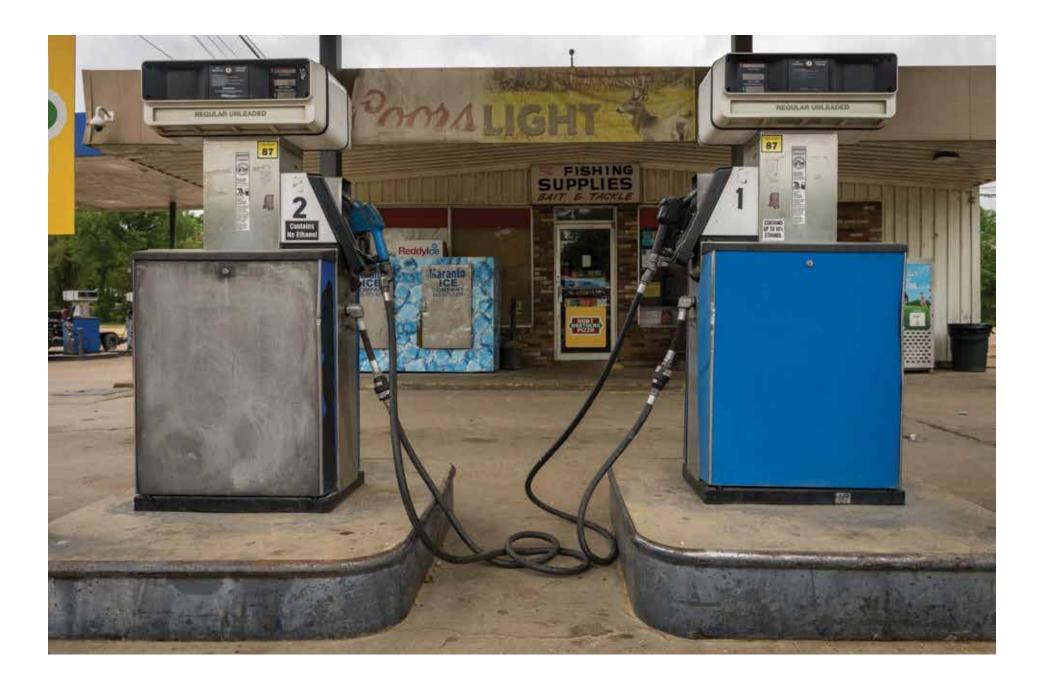


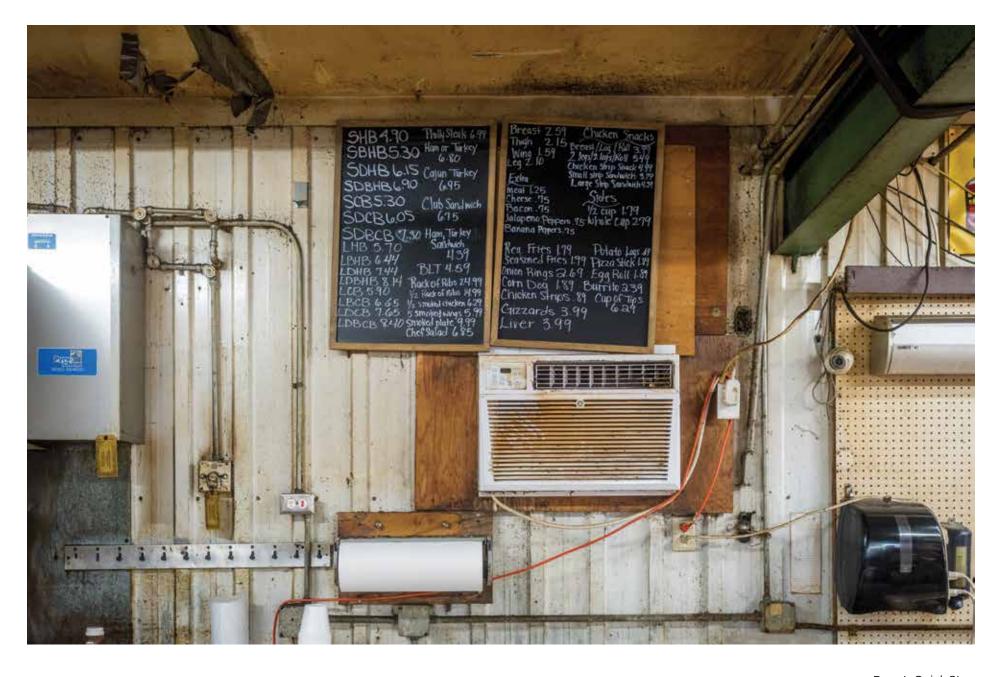
Helena, Arkansas





A.J. Henderson and Deon Henderson Old Town Grocery & Tackle Elaine, Arkansas

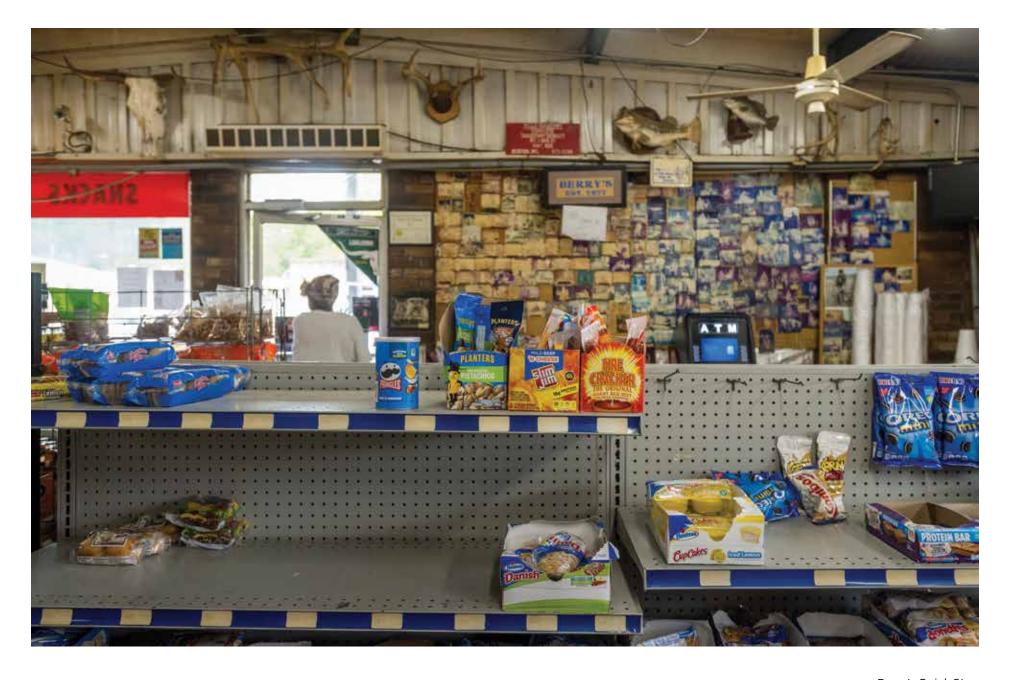




Berry's Quick Stop Benton, Mississippi





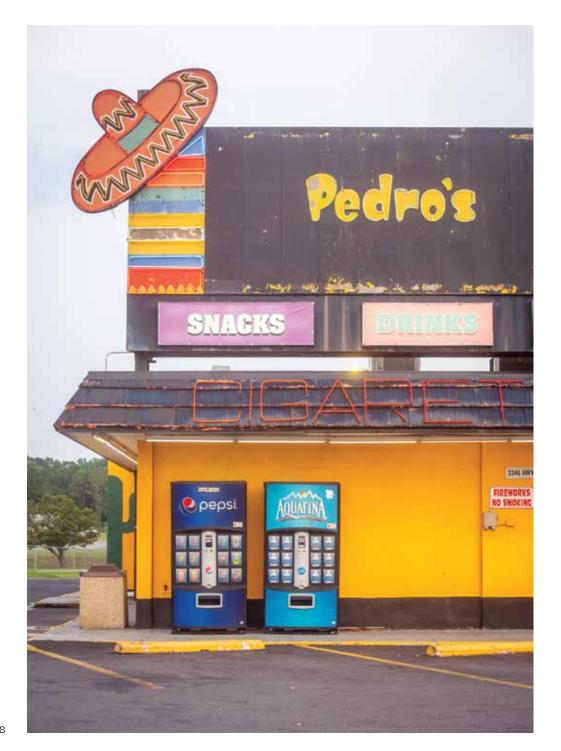


Berry's Quick Stop Benton, Mississippi

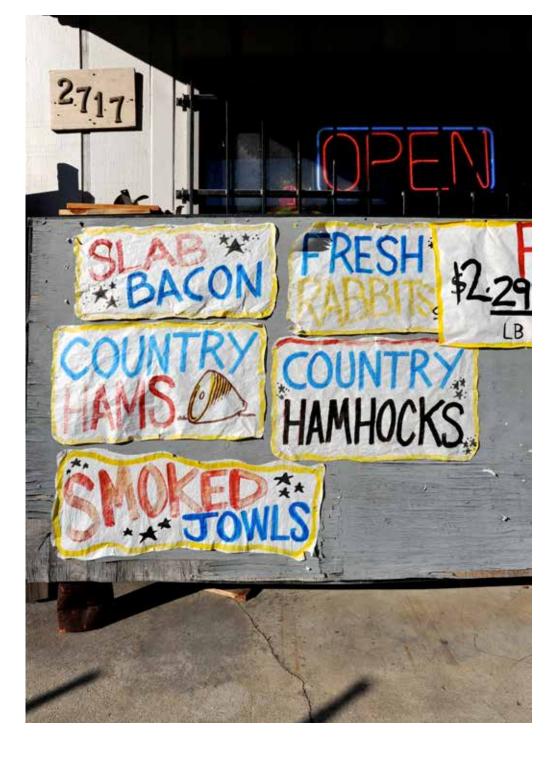








South of the Border Dillon, South Carolina



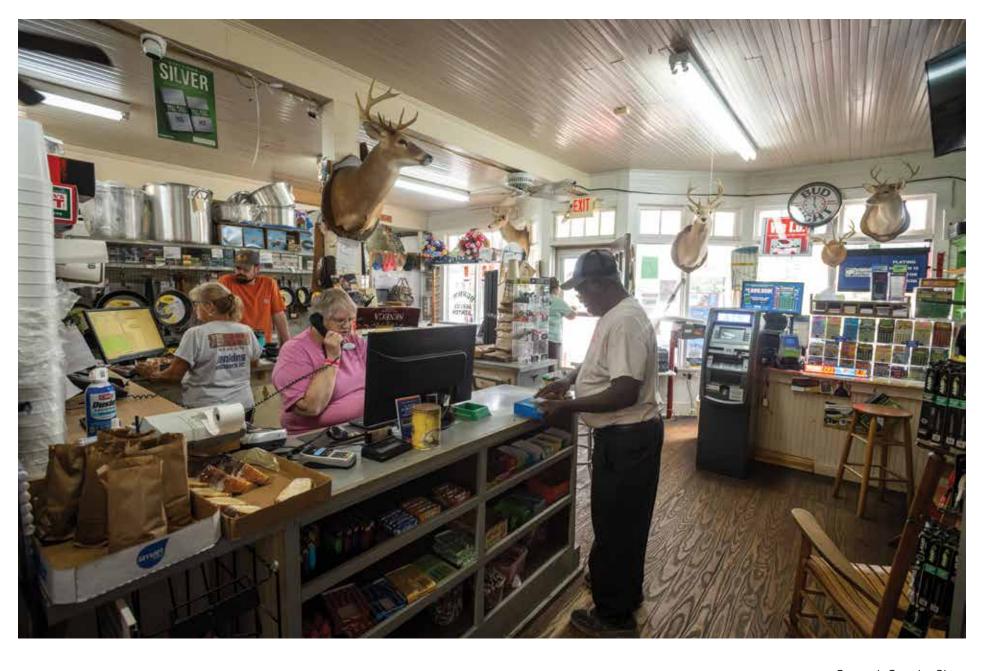
Cozart Fruit and Produce Durham, North Carolina



Eric Anderson Harold's Auto Center Spring Hill, Florida







Cooper's Country Store Salters, South Carolina

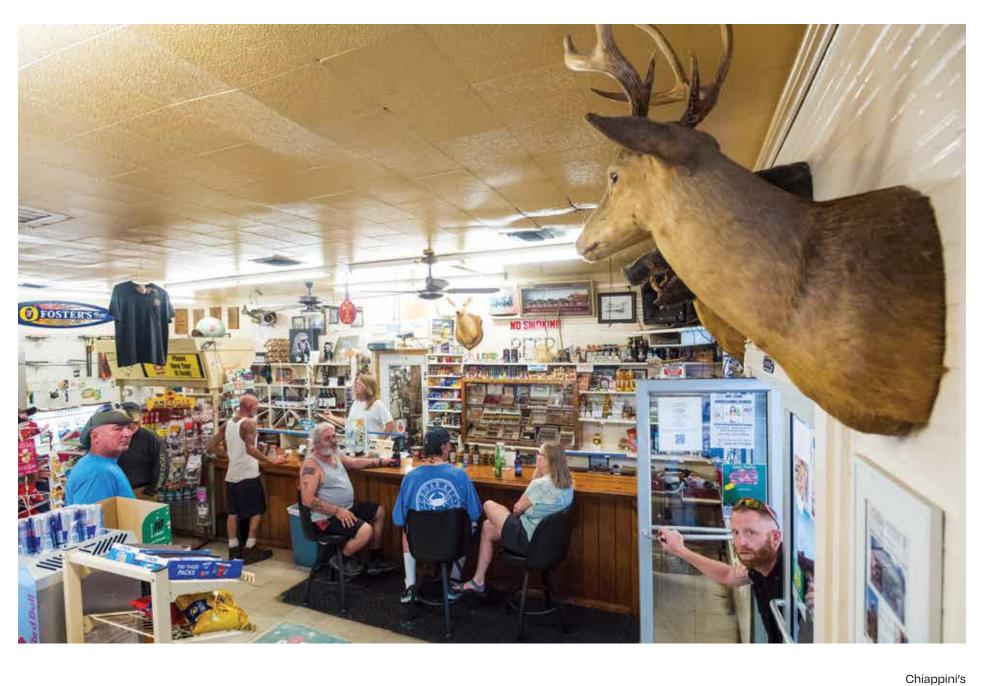




Hansel Carter (aka Mr. Bunky) Mr. Bunky's Market Eastover, South Carolina







Cedar Key General Store Cedar Key, Florida

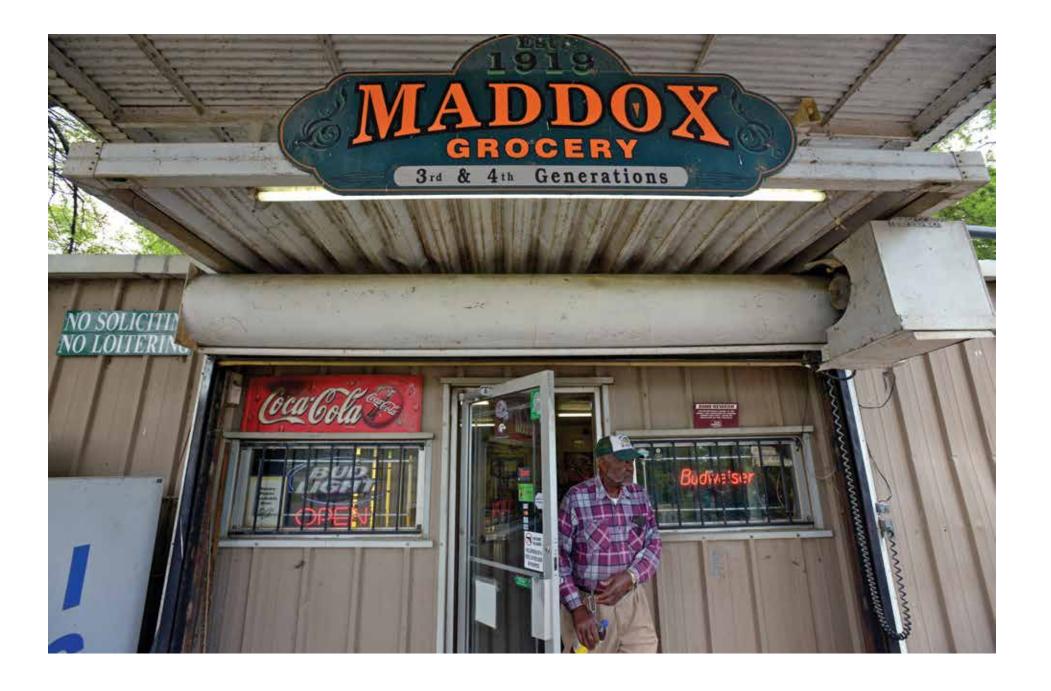
Melrose, Florida

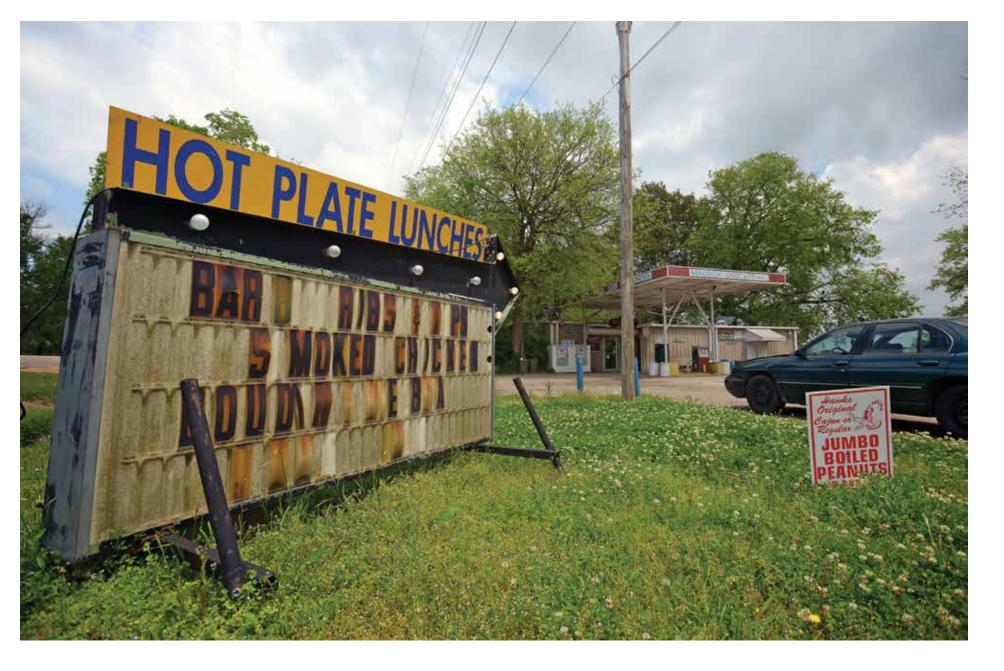




Eastend Grocery Cleveland, Mississippi







Maddox Grocery Avon, Mississippi





Maddox Grocery Avon, Mississippi

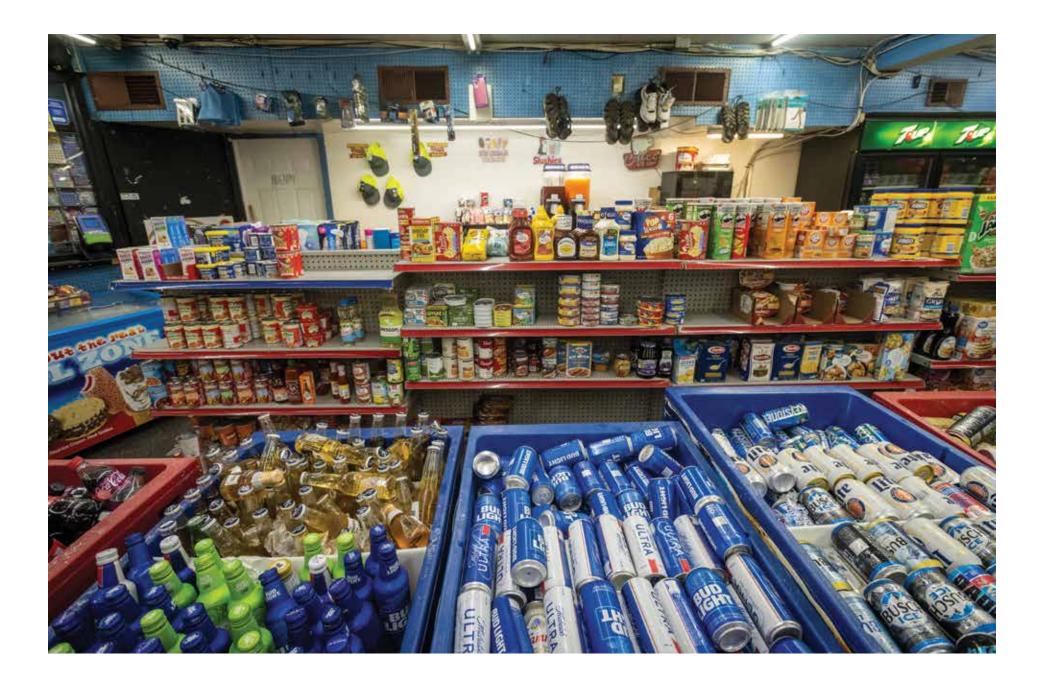




Starch Down Prichard, Alabama



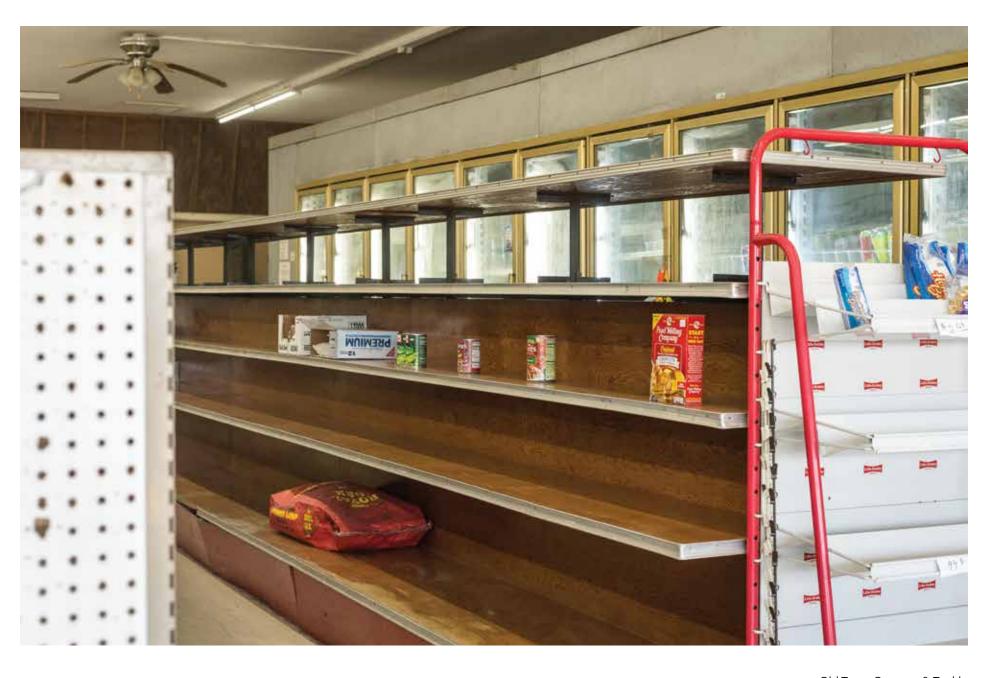






Obama Gas Station Columbia, South Carolina





Old Town Grocery & Tackle Elaine, Arkansas

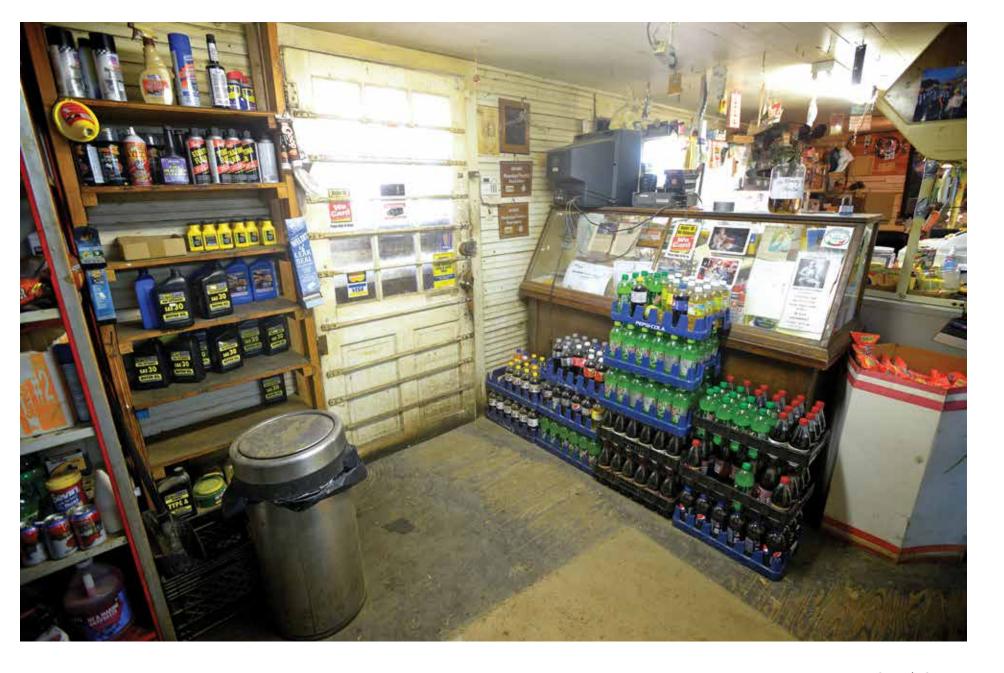




Yazoo County, Mississippi

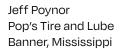
Satartia Grocery Satartia, Mississippi





Satartia Grocery Satartia, Mississippi





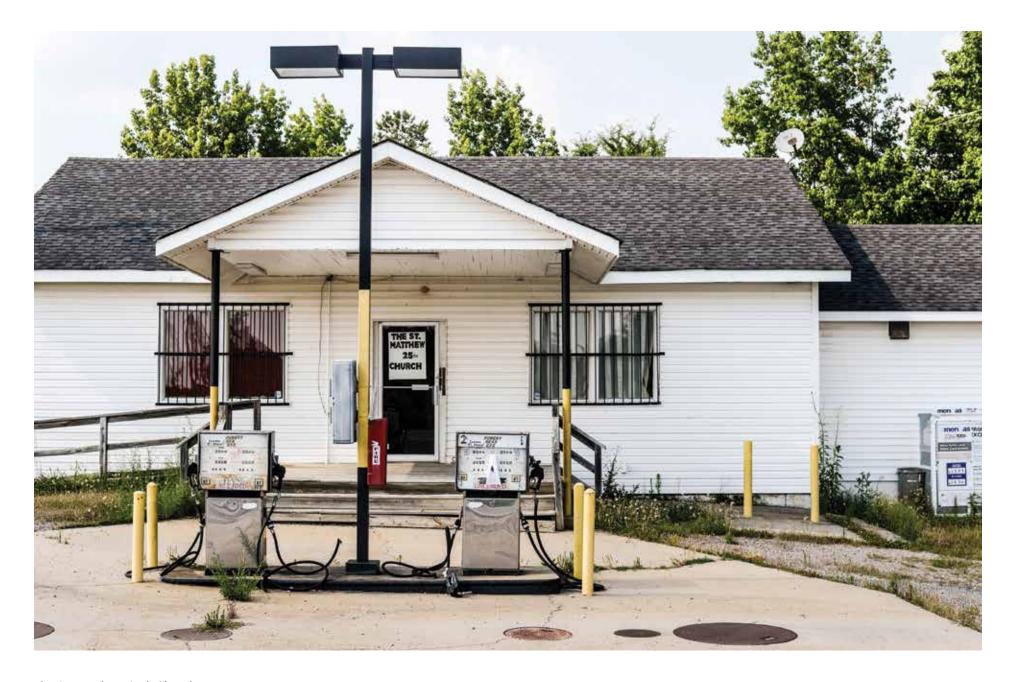






L&D Grocery and Grill Durham, North Carolina

Kwik Chek Memphis, Tennessee





The St. Matthew 25th Church Stony Creek, Virginia

Minny Mart Memphis, Tennessee







Otha Campbell Betty's Place Indianola, Mississippi





An Luu and Lu Xuyng Nana's Fastfood & Seafood Charlotte, North Carolina





The Gizzards and Livers Store Wilson, North Carolina







Mr. Bunky's Market Eastover, South Carolina

Cooper's Country Store
Salters, South Carolina



The Church of God No. 1 at Grady Grady, Arkansas





Northampton County, North Carolina



Bird Owattragool Akami Sushi Bar Apex, North Carolina





Mouhamadou and Bator Cisse Saint Louis Saveurs Greensboro, North Carolina



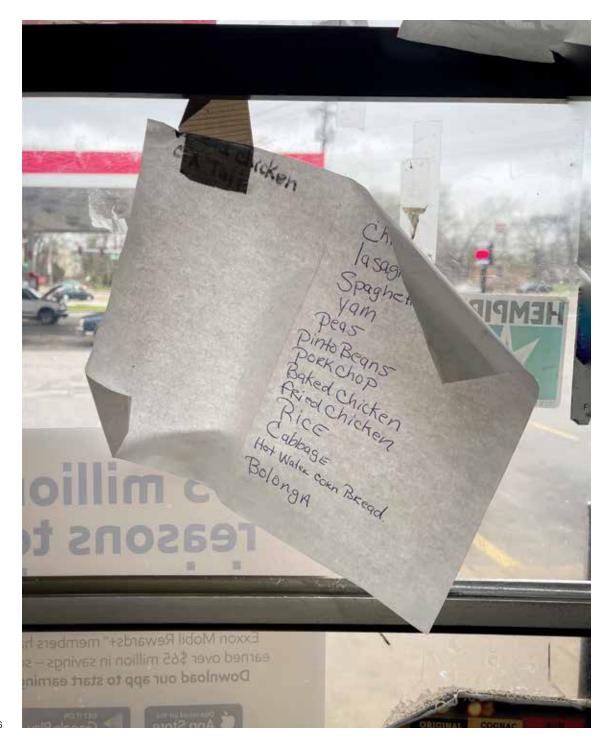


Ponce de Leon, Florida

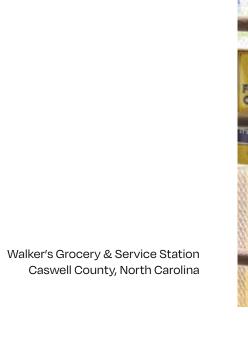




Graystone Variety Mart Henderson, North Carolina



Chelsea Express Memphis, Tennessee



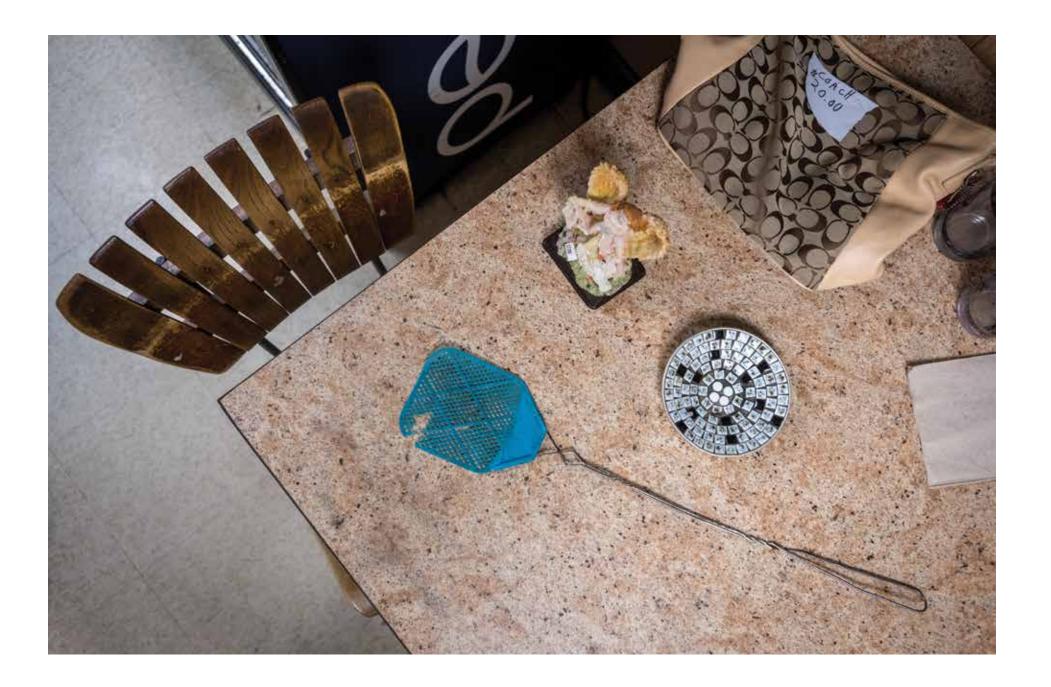






Clarksdale, Mississippi

Indianola, Mississippi





Ponce de Leon, Florida

GAS STATION INDEX

Indianola, Mississippi

pp. 22, 152, 153, 154, 224, 225,

Cedar Key, Florida

p. 190

Cleveland, Mississippi

pp. 192, 193

4 Corners Chevron Billeaud's Too Chelsea Express Elberta Grocery La Cabana Taqueria Obama Gas Station South of the Border Great River Road Country Store Oxford, Mississippi New Iberia, Louisiana Memphis, Tennessee Elberta, Alabama Rena Lara, Mississippi Raleigh, North Carolina Columbia, South Carolina Dillon, South Carolina pp. 139, 142, 143, 144 pp. 28, 29, 140, 141 pp. 70, 246 pp. 112, 175 pp. 120, 121 pp. 76, 77, 78 pp. 204, 206, 207 p. 178 Abney's Store BMW Pit Stop Chiappini's Farm & Garden Center Harold's Auto Center Liberty Food Mart Old Town Grocery & Tackle Starch Down Sunflower, Mississippi Moon Lake, Mississippi Melrose, Florida Hillsborough, North Carolina Spring Hill, Florida Charlotte, North Carolina Elaine, Arkansas Prichard, Alabama pp. 24, 38, 200, 201, 242 p. 61 pp. 44, 68 pp. 50, 51, 66, 81, 191 pp. 36, 42, 109, 176 p. 180 p. 182 pp. 17, 164, 165, 208, 209 Akami Sushi Bar Bruce Store Cliff's Cash and Carry Fisherman's Choice Heritage Grill Little Blue Store Pop's Tire and Lube Tasty Tikka Apex, North Carolina Ponce de Leon, Florida Cades, South Carolina Eastpoint, Florida Durham, North Carolina Falcon, Mississippi Banner, Mississippi Irmo, South Carolina pp. 4, 108, 240, 241, 250, 251 p.9 pp. 236, 237 p. 82 pp. 40, 102 pp. 62, 124, 125 pp. 214, 215 p. 95 Maddox Grocery Buck's One Stop Punjabi Dhaba Amore Eats Cooper's Country Store Five Points Grocery & Gas Hurdle Mills Market & Butcher Shop The Church of God No. 1 at Grady Rockville, Maryland Calhoun City, Mississippi Salters, South Carolina Clayton, Georgia Hurdle Mills, North Carolina Avon, Mississippi Hammond, Louisiana Grady, Arkansas p. 74 pp. 146, 147, 148 pp. 10, 72, 184, 185, 194, 230 pp. 30, 86, 87, 202 pp. 43, 47, 84 pp. 80, 196, 197, 198, 199 p. 21 p. 232 Banh Mi Boys Buckhorn Cafe Cozart Fruit and Produce Fratesi Grocery and Service Station JR's Aucilla River Store Mr. Bunky's Market Quik Shoppe The Gizzards and Livers Store Metairie, Louisiana Lottie, Louisiana Durham, North Carolina Leland, Mississippi Lamont, Florida Eastover, South Carolina Charlotte, North Carolina Wilson, North Carolina p. 88 pp. 18, 114 pp. 33, 48, 132 pp. 85, 90, 91, 179 pp. 156, 157 pp. 98, 100, 101 pp. 58, 96, 117, 186, 187, 231 p. 228 Bassie Service Station Cajun Corner Danny's Market Frazier's Store Key's Fuel Mart Minny Mart Saint Louis Saveurs The Original Brown Derby No. 3 Gunnison, Mississippi Krotz Springs, Louisiana Memphis, Tennessee Wake Forest, North Carolina New Orleans, Louisiana Memphis, Tennessee Greensboro, North Carolina New Orleans, Louisiana pp. 158, 160, 161 p. 122 p. 71 p. 59 pp. 54, 55, 57, 116, 172 p. 219 pp. 238, 239 pp. 104, 106, 126, 127, 136, 220 Berry's Quick Stop Calvander Food Mart Delta Fast Food Fred Eaton Service Station Kwik Chek Nana's Fastfood & Seafood Satartia Grocery The St. Matthew 25th Church Chapel Hill, North Carolina Cleveland, Mississippi Memphis, Tennessee Benton, Mississippi Prichard, Alabama Charlotte, North Carolina Satartia, Mississippi Stony Creek, Virginia pp. 46, 52, 217 pp. 166, 167, 168, 170, 171 pp. 32, 188 pp. 128, 130 pp. 64, 65 pp. 150, 151, 226, 227 pp. 211, 212, 213, 256 p. 218 Betty's Place Cedar Key General Store Graystone Variety Mart L&D Grocery and Grill No. 1 Tire Center Shawarma On-The-Go Touch of Class **Eastend Grocery**

Durham, North Carolina

p. 216

Henderson, North Carolina

p. 244

252

Jackson, Mississippi

pp. 31, 222

New Orleans, Louisiana

pp. 110, 111

Yazoo County, Mississippi

p. 92

Walker's Grocery & Service Station

Caswell County, North Carolina

pp. 26, 27, 247

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I traversed the South over the years making photos of gas stations, I knew I wanted this book to be a reflection not of the physical buildings themselves but of the communities surrounding them. My deepest gratitude to those entrepreneurs, workers, and community members across the South who agreed to be featured in this book. You are the heart of this whole thing.

I am indebted to many friends and colleagues — those who sent gas station recommendations, shared a meal along the way, and offered guidance: Sarah and Tom Allin, Abbas and Shannon Alsherees, Brett Anderson, Land Arnold, Joel and Jennifer Baldree, Jim Barger, Scott Blackwell, Marshall Blevins, Eric Booth, Betsy Bradley, Virginia Bridges, Jennings Brody, Jerry Elijah Brown, Betty Campbell, Otha Campbell, Laura Candler, Robin Chiappini, Mouhamadou and Bator Cisse, Katy Clune, Jared Cohee, Christina Cooke, Russell Cooper, Cainnon Craig, Ann Craver, April Cypher, Antonio Darby, Kasey and Joseph Decosimo, Rory Doyle, Erin Durkin, Fred Eaton, Kate Elia, Ayşe Erginer, Bill Ferris, Rien Fertel, Jill Franzosa, Mark Fratesi, Marie Funk, Elijah Gaddis, Eric Ginsburg, Demetric Goldsmith, Lissa Gotwals, Maddy Gray, Ben Hamburger, Anna Hamilton, Kasimu Harris, Mary

Hartwell and Beckett Howorth, Hannah Hayes, Sarah Holtz, Brenda Huckaby, Will Jacks, Drew Jackson, Pableaux Johnson, Caroline Keys, Vickie King, Alexa Kleysteuber, Natalie Knox, Matt Machilski, Ann Marshall, Brett Martin, Erich Martin, Marta Miranda, Thabi Moyo, Peter Nguyen, Nancy Nicholson, Bird Owattragool, Alba Padillia, Dhinal Patel, Nina Patel, Rex Pennycuff, Lou Perron, Brian Pickard, Donna Pond, Jeff Poynor, Susan Puckett, Kathleen Purvis, Bryan Rackley, Tom Rankin, Hanna Raskin, Allison Rice, Joanne and Bill Robbins, Ray Rupani, Stafford Shurden, Dunia Siles, Amanda Simonson, Gurjeet Singh, Lisa Sorg, Randy Spencer, Teresa Tamura, Dominick Tartaglia, Monique Truong, Jenny and Jess Tucker, Boyce Upholt, Rich Voltz, Makaelah Walters, Cornell Watson, Charlie Whinham, Malcolm White, Mary Margaret White, Jeremy Wildfire, Martha Wolf, and Sara Wood.

Special thanks to both the Hambidge Center in Rabun Gap, Georgia, and JX Farms in Cleveland, Mississippi, who granted me space and solitude to work on this project.

My deep gratitude to: Emily Wallace, who has been a part of this gas station exploration since 2012 as — at various times — contributor, editor, eater, and pal; John T. Edge, who

showed me how one can study a place and a people by way of food, and then championed my doing so; Marcie Ferris and Alexa Dilworth, who first helped me believe these rough ideas could and should become a book.

My thanks to the entire Bitter Southerner team, who consistently held great vision and confidence for this body of work. To Rachel Priest, E. A. Axelberg, and Jan Winburn for the deft editing. Eric NeSmith, thank you for believing. Kyle Tibbs Jones and Dave Whitling, thank you for bringing your brilliance and encouragement to the table, day in and day out. Your intrepid approach to storytelling gives us renewed hope about the South.

Kiese Laymon: Thank you for giving voice to the experiences of being from Mississippi — the dreams, the realities, the tragedy, and the often hilarious. You continually teach me about this complicated home place.

To my father, Tim Medley, who drove me around the Mississippi countryside before I was old enough to do so myself, offering to stop wherever I wanted to make a photograph. And to my mother, Jean Nicholson Medley, who

ensured that my world from an early age was filled with artists, writers, and creators. Y'all made me believe.

To my daughter, Ruth, who spent a year telling the other kids at daycare that her mama takes pictures of gas stations for a living. And my son, Lewis, who waited to take his first steps until I could be home to catch his fall. To my husband, Will, who endlessly champions my pursuits, helps deploy my parachute as needed, and cooks the best antidote to a gas-station-food diet. Together, you three make this world a truly wild and fun adventure.



KATE MEDLEY is a Durham, North Carolina-based visual journalist and filmmaker documenting the American South. Her work focuses on storytelling and environmental portraiture and often explores issues of social justice and the shifting politics of the region. As a kid growing up in Jackson, Mississippi,

her first job was making snowballs at a gas station.

KIESE LAYMON is a Black Southern writer from Jackson, Mississippi, and the Libbie Shearn Moody Professor of English and Creative Writing at Rice University in Houston. Laymon is the author of *Long Division* and *How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America*. His best-selling *Heavy: An American Memoir* won the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence and was named one of the 50 Best Memoirs of the Past 50 Years by The New York Times.

Satartia Grocery Satartia, Mississippi



