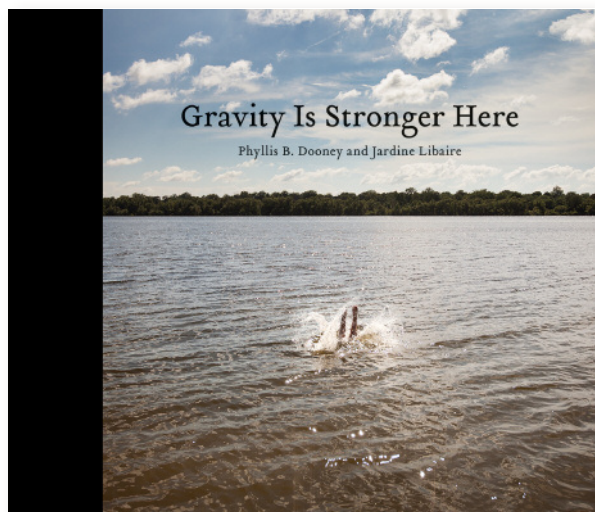


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Phyllis B. Dooney and Jardine Libaire Gravity Is Stronger Here

Photographs by Phyllis B. Dooney
Texts by Jardine Libaire

Designed by Patricia Fabricant
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Life of an archetypal American family in Mississippi – full of contradictions, of violence and tenderness

Gravity Is Stronger Here is a creative nonfiction montage made from photographs by award-winning photographer Phyllis B. Dooney and docu-poems by critically acclaimed writer Jardine Libaire; it's a book about looking for America in America. In 2011, Dooney visited Greenville, Mississippi, starting a five-year-long documentary project featuring Halea (who is openly gay) and her dynamic Southern American family. The Browns dream out loud while fighting the silent undertow of poverty and recurrent domestic narratives. In the cinematic and ambiguous photographs, and in the poems (constructed from interview transcripts and immersion with the family), the participants are candid about addiction, love, the military, domestic abuse, money, gay life, religion, loyalty, conspiracies, and freedom.

Greenville is a key tile in our national mosaic as it represents the American boom town left in the wake of a changing global economy. Intoxicated by the Delta air, a Greenville local once said that "gravity is stronger here", a reference to the complex city and to "home" in general. The book presents us with a place/space where love for a gay daughter and an Evangelical love of God can exist in one mother, violence and tenderness in the same relationship, and hope and hopelessness in the same daily life. These multiple truths are often lost in stories that collapse American families into constituencies. *Gravity* upholds this constellation of truths by creating a prismatic portrait of the Browns.

Dooney and Libaire also consider the limitations of an ethnographic approach by exploring transparency and collaboration particularly in Dooney's first-person introduction, Libaire's poem *Outsiders*, and in the music videos online (co-conceived with the Browns). The story is extended by its multimedia components which can be found at gravityisstrongerhere.com.

Dooney's experimental short films feature the Browns, whose roles vary; sometimes they're collaborators, and at other times they're documentary participants sharing a love story from their own life or an intricate belief system by which they live.

Gravity Is Stronger Here provides less an imposed narrative than a consciousness; the subjects are within reach — you can smell the musk, cigarette smoke, meat cooking in the backyard, a magnolia blooming by the door. The experience inside the pages is a nearness, a grazing of shoulders with another's humanity.

Gravity Is Stronger Here was awarded Honorable Mention by The Center for Documentary Studies' Dorothea Lange-Paul Taylor Prize in 2016.

Phyllis B. Dooney is a social documentary photographer and visual storyteller. Her work has appeared in The New York Times Magazine, Feature Shoot, American Photo, The Atlantic, The Washington Post, Prison Photography and elsewhere online and in print. Phyllis was awarded first place for The Center's Editor's Choice Prize in 2015. In 2016 she was a Screen Projects mentee, and highlighted in the 4th annual New York Times portfolio review.

Alison Morley is a photo editor, consultant, and educator. She has been the chair of the documentary photography and photo-journalism program at the International Center of Photography in New York since 2000.

Jardine Libaire is an American writer based in Austin, TX. Her most recent novel *White Fur* is forthcoming from Hogarth in May 2017. She was a winner of the Hopwood Award and the Glascock Poetry Prize. She volunteers for Truth Be Told, a writing program for incarcerated women in Texas.

Patricia Fabricant is an award-winning book designer, specializing in art books and cookbooks.

Riggin'

Mississippi River. Sugar and rice. Cotton & indigo. Steamers like tiered wedding cakes. Appalachian coal. Timber.

The heavy rains started in the summer of 1926. The river swelled over the levees in early '27, in 145 places. Devastation. Ruin.

He broke all his rigs. He started smoking it. That's why he lost his voice. I'd rather him be smoking the shit than shooting it up. Usually when you shoot up, you never come back. I'm really proud of him.

Delta natives say they fear God, and the river. Photos from 1927 of people and livestock crowded onto train tracks, a high point, as water surged on both sides. Someone's car driven onto the porch of a house to save it, giant white flowers blooming out of the waves.

The Word says Satan's after you even in the womb. He studies us — he knows every weakness that we have. He brings about situations that encourage that weakness.

The river rose in 2011. A deer was found trying to get into the hospital. People put mothballs in their houses to keep snakes out. You can't ever tell if the levee will hold.

(Poem by Jardine Libaire from *Gravity Is Stronger Here*, quotes from subjects in italics)

Outsiders

Up North, they read Walker Percy and Eudora Welty in college and dream of pale blue humid mornings on porches, and bourbon punch, and jasmine, and manners. They deride the Confederate flag, and the plantation legacy. They collect records by Son House and Charley Patton. They shake the Delta like a snow globe, watch the majesty and pain as it glitters in their hands, falling gently like a bedtime story.

(Poem by Jardine Libaire from *Gravity Is Stronger Here*)

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