



MR. PRUITT'S POSSUM TOWN

Trouble and Resilience in the American South

A TRAVELING EXHIBITION | CURATED BY BERKLEY HUDSON, PH.D.

“A national treasure”

William Ferris
National Endowment for the Humanities
Chairman, 1997-2001

Curated by Berkley Hudson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, University of Missouri School of Journalism

The traveling exhibition *Mr. Pruitt's Possum Town: Trouble and Resilience in the American South* reveals life between 1915-1960 in Columbus, Mississippi—a town, according to curator Berkley Hudson, “shaped in the crucible of slavery and cotton and the Civil War.” Built around the collection of photographer Otis Noel Pruitt, a white man in the racially-segregated South, the exhibition explores race relations and issues of class, gender, and religion.

Pruitt's work is distinguished by a passion to prolifically and diligently document the customs, lives, joys, and sorrows of people in his hometown. His pictures provide a candid and ultimately disturbing visual history of the inequality of that era in the Jim Crow American South, and serve as an invaluable resource for those interested in civil rights, photography, and American history.

This project aims to place in context Pruitt's life-long work of documenting Southern culture. His photographs are representative of small towns in the American South at critical and tumultuous times in our nation's history. Images include family picnics, river baptisms, carnivals, parades, fires, tornadoes, and even two of Mississippi's last public executions by hanging—as well as the 1935 lynching of two African American farmers.

This exhibition—comprised of images, film, period Mississippi music, and spoken word—provides extensive access to these important images, and the stories behind them. The work of O.N. Pruitt, alongside the work of other artists past and contemporary, can encourage conversations within our own communities today as we continue to strive for equality and deeper understandings of the role of culture and history in 21st century America.

Photographic Works and Supplementary Materials

- 100 photographic prints (framed 11” x 14” to 30” x 40”)
- Archival film footage and contemporary video
- Archival and contemporary audio and oral histories
- Original news clippings

Sponsors

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Cover: O.N. Pruitt: Lambuth (son), Jim (brother), and O.N. Pruitt

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O.N. Pruitt: Tent Revival, 1955

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O.N. Pruitt: Men in cornfield, Circa 1940s



O.N. Pruitt: Men with an Airplane



O.N. Pruitt: Grocery store (unidentified), circa 1940s

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O.N. Pruitt: Circa 1930s

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O.N. Pruitt: Circa 1930s



O.N. Pruitt: Circa 1930s



O.N. Pruitt: Man and Woman in Office

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O.N. Pruitt: Tombigbee River Baptisms, Circa 1940s

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O.N. Pruitt: Boy With a Bloodied Nose, Circa 1930s



O.N. Pruitt: Wedding Reception



O.N. Pruitt: Family Portrait

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O.N. Pruitt: Oscar West, circa 1930

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O.N. Pruitt: Circa 1930s

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These images can tell important narratives about ethnicity, gender, and class. Those stories can provide a crucial context for understanding not only that era but for understanding the 21st Century and beyond.

– Deborah Willis, Ph.D.

MacArthur and Guggenheim Fellow, and
Chair of the Department of Photography & Imaging
at the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University



O.N. Pruitt: Circa 1930s

Engaging with this history in this way moves us all one step closer to building a society where equal for all is fully realized.

– Bryan Stevenson, Founder, Equal Justice Initiative,
MacArthur Fellow, and clinical professor at the
New York University School of Law

An exhibition touring to museums is being organized by Curatorial Exhibitions, a nonprofit organization that provides exhibitions and exhibition management services. CATE has toured more than 400 exhibitions to over 850 art venues worldwide including the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York.