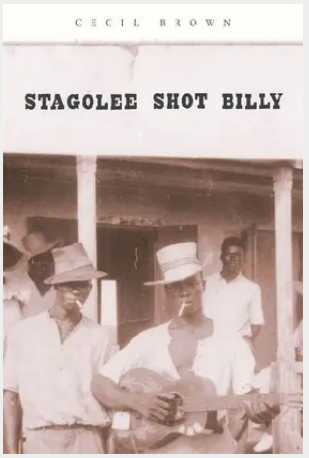
Brown

Stagolee Shot Billy



Although his story has been told countless times--by performers from Ma Rainey, Cab Calloway, and the Isley Brothers to Ike and Tina Turner, James Brown, and Taj Mahal--no one seems to know who Stagolee really is. Stack Lee? Stagger Lee? He has gone by all these names in the ballad that has kept his exploits before us for over a century. Delving into a subculture of St. Louis known as "Deep Morgan," Cecil Brown emerges with the facts behind the legend to unfold the mystery of Stack Lee and the incident that led to murder in 1895. How the legend grew is a story in itself, and Brown tracks it through variants of the song "Stack Lee"--from early ragtime versions of the '20s, to Mississippi John Hurt's rendition in the '30s, to John Lomax's 1940s prison versions, to interpretations by Lloyd Price, James Brown, and Wilson Pickett, right up to the hip-hop renderings of the '90s. Drawing upon the works of James Baldwin, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison, Brown describes the powerful influence of a legend bigger than literature, one whose transformation reflects changing views of black musical forms, and African Americans' altered attitudes toward black male identity, gender, and police brutality. This book takes you to the heart of America, into the soul and circumstances of a legend that has conveyed a painful and elusive truth about our culture.

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