



Swinging in Place: Porch Life in Southern Culture

By Jocelyn Hazelwood Donlon

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The front porch evokes cherished memories from across a lifetime for many southerners--recollections of childhood games, courtship, family visits, gossip with neighbors. In this book, Jocelyn Hazelwood Donlon offers an original appreciation of the significance of the porch to everyday life in the South. The porch, she reveals, is not a simple place after all, but a stage for many social dramas. She uses literature, folklore, oral histories, and photographs to show how southerners have used the porch to negotiate public and private boundaries--in ways so embedded in custom that they often go unrecognized. Her sources include writings by Dorothy Allison, William Faulkner, Ernest Gaines, Gloria Naylor, Zora Neale Hurston, and Lee Smith, as well as oral histories that provide varying racial, gender, class, and regional perspectives.

Originally derived from a number of ethnic traditions, the porch evolved in America into something both structurally and culturally unique. In this, the first serious study of the subject, Donlon shows how porch use and porch culture cross ethnic and cultural lines and discusses the transitional quality of the porch space--how it shifts back and forth, by need and function, between a place that is sometimes interior to the house, sometimes exterior.

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