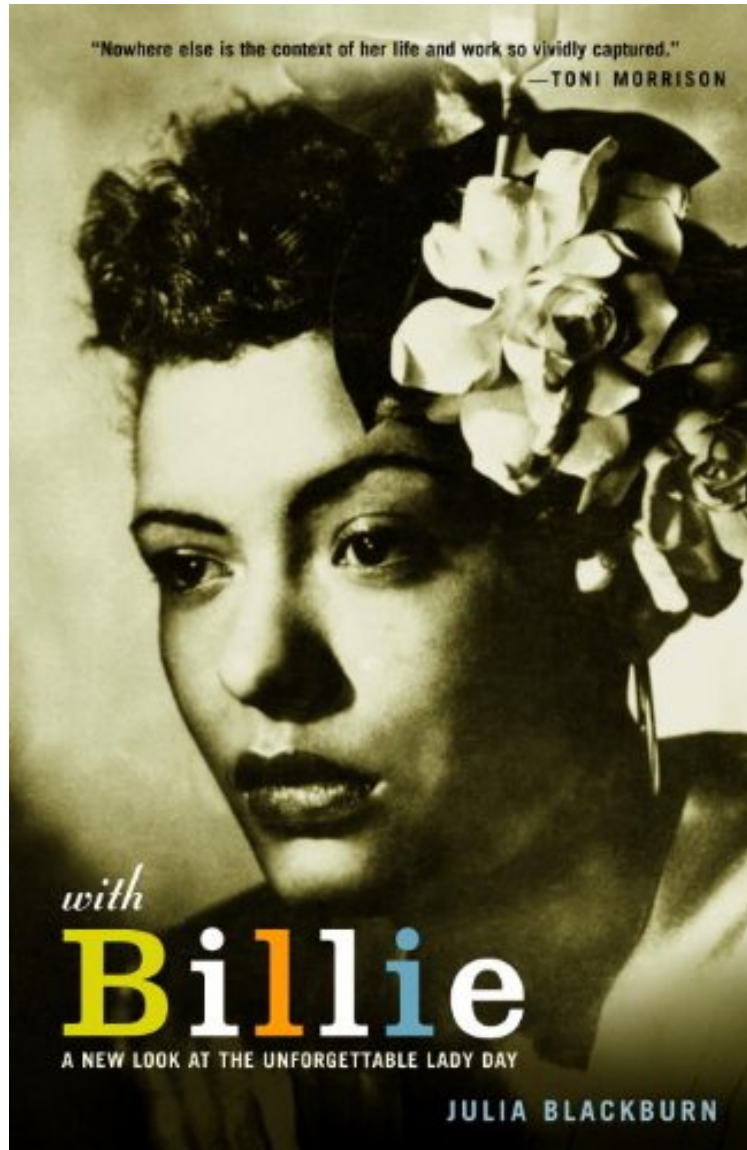


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With Billie: A New Look at the Unforgettable Lady Day

Julia Blackburn

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Julia Blackburn : With Billie: A New Look at the Unforgettable Lady Day before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised With Billie: A New Look at the Unforgettable Lady Day:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Very interestingBy American ExpressStill wondering what the complete truth of Billie Holiday and her the men in her life. Seems everyone remembers the same thing different.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four StarsBy Nina LaQuinoWhat a tragic life, but an unforgettable voice.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Not a biography per se; but a good read.By Sterling SunleyI found that there was quite a bit of repetition and a lot of unsubstantiated hear-say about Lady Day. It's not a biography

(nor was it intended to be), but as an oral history it does include some new information.

From Julia Blackburn, an author whose ability to conjure lives from other times and places is so vivid that one suspects she sees ghosts, here is a portrait of a woman whose voice continues to haunt anyone who hears it. Billie Holiday's life is inseparable from an account of her troubles, her addictions, her arrests, and the scandals that would repeatedly put her name in the tabloid headlines of the 1940s and 1950s. Those who knew her learned never to be surprised by what she might do. Her moods and faces were so various that she could seem to be a different woman from one moment to the next. Volatile, unpredictable, Billie Holiday remained, even to her friends, an elusive and perplexing figure. In *With Billie*, we hear the voices of those people—piano players and dancers, pimps and junkies, lovers and narcs, producers and critics, each recalling intimate stories of the Billie they knew. What emerges is a portrait of a complex, contradictory, enthralling woman, a woman who knew what really mattered to her. Reading *With Billie*, one is convinced that she has only just left the room but will return shortly.

From Publishers Weekly Piecing together interviews with more than 150 people who knew Billie Holiday, Blackburn creates a biography that at times surges with energy. These interviews, which were conducted in the 1970s but never published, offer readers a unique glimpse into Holiday's life as those close to the legendary jazz singer recall the sometimes touching, often brutal events that formed her resilient character. Blackburn, author of several books, including *Old Man Goya*, begins by recalling her first experience with Holiday's music, but quickly steps aside, allowing the interviewees' stories to speak for themselves. Each person offers a unique perspective of Holiday, from girls who attended reform school with her to fellow musicians and boyfriends who chronicle the world of prostitution and drug use in which Holiday was immersed. Unfortunately, Blackburn makes little attempt to weave together these different voices, which makes for a disjointed read. But the anecdotes are nonetheless fascinating, covering Holiday's troubled childhood in Baltimore through her years of acclaim and hardship: "In that era all the female vocalists had to have a man who'll beat on them and take their money sic," recalls her bass player John Levy. Described alternately as a "shy girl" and a boisterous woman who loved to laugh, someone comfortable in the slums but also "a person with a lot of pride," Holiday emerges as a multifaceted figure. The one thing agreed upon by all the interviewees, though, is the mesmerizing quality of her voice, and fans will cherish this book as an attempt to reveal the complexities of the woman behind that extraordinary talent. Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist *Starred * Blackburn (*Old Man Goya*, 2002) picked up the loose ends of a previous effort by biographer Linda Kuehl to chronicle the life of Billie Holiday, an effort that yielded 150 interviews with people who knew the jazz singer. Among those sharing remembrances are her godfather, friends, lovers, fellow musicians, producers, and critics. A woman recalls watching over Holiday in the House of Good Shephard reform school in New York. A black narcotics agent tells of being haunted by the harassment and harsh treatment of Holiday. Friends recall the strained relationship with her musician father, who, out of vanity, wouldn't acknowledge her. Others relate the genesis of Holiday's signature song, "Strange Fruit," and her belief that it provoked the wrath of the government. Included are poignant remembrances of her relationships—troubled and nurturing—with pimps, socialites, musicians, and actors, including Lester Young and Tallulah Bankhead. They speak of Holiday's drug abuse and sexual proclivities, her amazing talent and generous spirit, and her early death, at age 44. This is a much deeper and grittier look at Holiday's life than was rendered in her autobiography, the admittedly prettified *Lady Sings the Blues*. Fans will love Blackburn's honest portrait of the enormously talented singer. Vanessa Bush Copyright copy; American Library Association. All rights reserved. "Nowhere else is the context of her life so vividly captured." —Toni Morrison "With *Billie* paints a sympathetic and incisive portrait of the profoundly gifted, charismatic singer known as Lady Day." —Francine Prose, *O Magazine* "Blackburn nicely evokes the players around Holiday. Their often self-serving stories are fascinating for their ordinariness." —The New York Times Book Review "Essential reading for those who are curious about the woman behind the voice." —St. Louis Post-Dispatch "A marvelous web of characters and tales, full of vigor and color, in which Billie Holiday emerges in all her independent, awkward, variegated glory. . . . Moving, revealing and quite unforgettable." —The Economist "This addition to the tide of Billie Holiday books is extremely welcome. Nowhere else is the context of her life and work so vividly captured." —Toni Morrison "At last, a portrait of the artist and person called Billie Holiday. This extraordinary book completes her story." —Mike Figgis "Billie Holiday was — and is — a singer who stays in the mind of everyone who heard her. Like all jazz musicians, she sang about who she was at the moment and during all that preceded that moment. Julia Blackburn's *With Billie* tells Billie's own stories of that life and this book becomes part of the music." —Nat Hentoff