Excerpt from *All Over But the Shoutin’* – Rick Bragg

“It was a place where gray mists hid the tops of low, deep-green mountains, where redbone and bluetick hounds flashed through the pines as they chased possums into the sacks of old men in frayed overalls, where old women in bonnets dipped Bruton snuff and hummed "Faded Love and Winter Roses" as they shelled purple hulls, canned peaches and made biscuits too good for this world. It was a place where playing the church piano loud was near as important as playing it right, where fearless young men steered long, black Buicks loaded with yellow whiskey down roads the color of dried blood, where the first frost meant hog killin' time and the mouthwatering smell of cracklin's would drift for acres from giant, bubbling pots. It was a place where the screams of panthers, like a woman's anguished cry, still haunted the most remote ridges and hollows in the dead of night, where children believed they could choke off the cries of night birds by circling one wrist with a thumb and forefinger and squeezing tight, and where the cotton blew off the wagons and hung like scraps of cloud in the branches of trees.

It was about 120 miles west of Atlanta, about 100 miles east of Birmingham, close to nothin' but that dull red ground. Life here between the meandering dirt roads and skinny blacktop was full, rich, original and real, but harsh, hard, mean as a damn snake. My parents grew up in the 1940s and 1950s in the poor, upland South, a million miles from the Mississippi Delta and the Black Belt and the jasmine-scented verandas of what most people came to know as the Old South. My ancestors never saw a mint julep, but they sipped five-day-old likker out of ceramic jugs and Bell jars until they could not remember their Christian names.”