

# Race and Mystery in Cape Cod

NICHOLAS POWERS

Bill Fletcher Jr., *The Man Who Fell from the Sky* (Brooklyn: Hard Ball Press, 2018), 350 pages, \$15, paperback.

It begins with an assassination. In Bill Fletcher Jr.'s first novel, *The Man Who Fell from the Sky*, the sleepy Cape Cod town of Osterville has blood on its hands. In this murder mystery, Fletcher digs through layers of racism in Southern Massachusetts to uncover more than the killer's identity. The novel compellingly exposes the racism of society, turning its victims against each other.

When Margie Smith finds her husband TJ (short for Thomas Julius) shot dead in his car, Detective Vincent Amato and, later, reporter David Gomes try to solve the murder in a town riven with racial tension. Going from door to door, they piece the puzzle together, untangling a knot of relationships going back to the Second World War. TJ's murder is interwoven with the larger conflict between the town's Cape Verdean immigrant community and its African-American community over what "black is."

The subtheme of the fluidity of blackness runs through the novel. In one telling scene, Gomes is at a party where his Uncle Marcelino (who is described as being dark skinned) yells, "Listen, we're Portuguese. Yeah, our family is from Cape Verde, but we're Portuguese. I'm sick of you calling me 'black.' Our ancestors were never slaves!" Later, Gomes speaks with a white detective who, in an expression of nonchalant racism, remarks that he expected "someone Spanish." Gomes explains that his last name ends in an *s* and not a *z*.

Two conflicts drive *The Man Who Fell from the Sky*. The first is the explicit murder mystery. But boiling beneath is a mediation on race. In many ways, the book uses the former to explore the latter, smartly avoiding cliché backdrops like New York or London and instead situating the story in a small, mostly white town that serves as an odd crossroads for the black Atlantic. Both conflicts collide in the finale as Gomes is marched into an empty building with a .45 caliber gun aimed at his back.

*The Man Who Fell from the Sky* is a fast, fun read. And it stands in the tradition of black authors, like Walter Mosley and Chester Himes, who

---

**NICHOLAS POWERS** is a professor, poet, and journalist. He is the author of *The Ground Below Zero: 9/11 to Burning Man, New Orleans to Darfur, Haiti to Occupy Wall Street* (Upset Press, 2015).

have used fiction to investigate race and class, diaspora identity and crime. The book is also a promissory note.

Fletcher is a professional writer, activist, and scholar. Reading the crisp prose, one gets pulled into the dream state of a good story. You forget that you're turning pages and are lost in the world he created. It is a satisfying first novel – so much so that I am left wanting another book. But not another murder mystery. No, instead, I want to see what happens when Fletcher moves beyond the guardrails of genre to expose the complexities of life that flash between the plot devices.

#### Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation (Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

1. Title of publication: MONTHLY REVIEW  
 2. Publication 0036-1520. 3. Date of filing: September 10, 2019. 4. Frequency of issues: Monthly (except July/August when combined). 5. Number of issues published annually; eleven. 6. Annual subscription rate: \$39. Complete mailing address of known office of publication: 134 W. 29TH Street, Suite 706, New York, NY 10001. 8. Complete mailing address of known office of publication: Monthly Review, 134 W. 29TH Street, Suite 706, New York, NY 10001. 9. Full names and complete addresses of publisher, editor, and managing editor: Publisher: Monthly Review Foundation, 134 W. 29TH Street, Suite 706, New York, NY 10001. Editor: John Bellamy Foster, 134 W. 29TH Street, Suite 706, New York, NY 10001. 10. Owner: (if owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereafter the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one percent or more of the total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, its name and address must be stated). Name: Monthly Review Foundation, 134 W. 29TH Street, Suite 706, New York, NY 10001. 11. Known Bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities: None. 12. For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at special rates: The purpose, function, and nonprofit status for federal income tax purposes has not changed during the preceding twelve months. 13. Publication name: Monthly Review. 14. Issue date for circulation data below: September 2019. 15. Extent and nature of circulation: Average number of copies each issue during preceding twelve months; a. Total number of copies (net press run): 4,417. b. Paid and/or requested circulation (1) Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales (not mailed): 215 (2) Paid or requested mail subscriptions (including advertisers' proof copies/exchanged copies): 3,479. c. Total paid and/or requested circulation: 3,694. d. Free distribution by mail (Samples, complementary, and other free): 176. e. Free distribution outside the mail (carriers or other means): None. f. Total free distribution: 176. g. Total distribution: 3,870. h. Copies not distributed: 547. i. Total: 4,417. Percent paid and/or requested circulation: 95%. Actual no. of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: a. Total no. copies (net press run): 4,420. b. Paid and/or requested circulation (1) Paid or requested mail subscriptions (include advertisers' proof/exchange copies): 3,414. (2) Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales not mailed: 209. (2) c. Total paid and/or requested circulation: 3,623. d. Free distribution by mail (samples, complimentary, and other free): 114. e. Free distribution outside the mail (carriers or other means): None. f. Total free distribution: 114. g. Total distribution: 3,737. h. Copies not distributed: 683. i. Total: 4,420. Percent paid and/or requested circulation: 97%. 16. This Statement of Ownership will be printed in November 2019 issue of this publication. 17. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete: Gordon Beeferman, Circulation Manager. Date: 9-10-2019.