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*Song of My Life: A Biography of Margaret Walker* by Carolyn  
J. Brown (review)

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achieve universal meaning” (xiii), and Rivera’s novel certainly fits this bill.

*Rough South, Rural South* enriches our study of Rough South fiction both by surveying the genre’s history and by prodding us to envision new possibilities for its future.

*University of Alabama*

*Jolene Hubbs*

*Song of My Life: A Biography of Margaret Walker*, by Carolyn J. Brown, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014. 144 pp. \$20.00 cloth.

MARGARET WALKER, A LONG-TIME RESIDENT OF JACKSON AND PROFESSOR of English at Jackson State College (now University), is the subject of Carolyn J. Brown’s biography, published in 2014. Having recently completed a biography of fellow Jackson resident Eudora Welty, Brown discloses in her “Author’s Note” that she discovered Walker through casual reading concerning Mississippi writers. It is in this mode that Brown continued her exploration of Walker’s life through her writing, friendships, and professional accomplishments. This book fills a particular niche in the area of academic research because it is written as an introduction to a writer rather than as a critical assessment of that writer’s merits. Readership is addressed explicitly when Brown writes that her biography is “targeting middle-school and high-school-age students as well as the general reader” (xii). The book certainly fulfills its promise to promote a worthy author, as Brown states that she “hope[s] that I have done her story justice. . . . [and] introduce[d] her to a new generation of readers” (xiii).

Arranged chronologically, the ten short chapters chronicle Walker’s journey through life by relying heavily on an unpublished manuscript of Walker’s autobiography and the repository of her papers housed in the Center that bears her name at Jackson State. Each chapter is liberally sprinkled with photographs, some of which seem to be stock images while others are clearly intimate snapshots from Walker’s own collection. Scholar Maryemma Graham, University of Kansas, provided ample material as well, and is generously (and appropriately) thanked for doing so. Graham’s biography on Walker is forthcoming and will contain more critical discussion of Walker’s life and work.

Appendices devoted to Walker's life, major published works, major honors and awards, and the general milieu of her accomplishments provide useful reference guides. Frequent quotations from Walker's poetry, prose, and manuscripts also round out the depiction of Walker's major insights and the influences on her writing. Perhaps for the uninformed reader, a brief summary of her novel, *Jubilee*, and major poetry editions would have been helpful.

This biography just touches on the events surrounding Walker's life—enough that the reader will want to more fully explore her writings. Walker's accomplishments are indeed astounding. For example, she attended The University of Iowa's MFA program in its earliest stages, returning to complete her doctorate years later and to finish her dissertation, which would eventually be her most famous work, *Jubilee*. Her civil rights work began in the late 1960s; when two student protestors were killed by police at Jackson State in 1970, Walker was called to testify before the President's Commission on Campus Unrest. She would go on to become a leading Democratic voice in state and national politics. Walker also established one of the country's first African American studies programs at Jackson State at her Institute for the Study of the History, Life, and Culture of Black People in 1968, which twenty-one years later would be renamed in her honor. Finally, Walker's commitment to African American women's writing, through the groundbreaking conference on Phillis Wheatley's life and legacy in 1973, is in and of itself a legacy worth exploring. Walker's own poetry commemorates this event, which a who's who of African American women writers attended.

Quoting Nikki Giovanni, Brown successfully fulfills the mission that she set out to accomplish by publicizing "the most famous person nobody knows" (xi) through this biography. Let's hope that it whets the appetite to read, not just *Jubilee* and Walker's poetry, but the myriad of African American writers, particularly African American women writers, who are also part of her "Song."