

Mr. Jimmy from Around the Way

Jeffrey Blount

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Modest generosity is used to combat multigenerational poverty and racial prejudice in the rural South in Jeffrey Blount's novel *Mr. Jimmy from Around the Way*.

"No good deed goes unpunished," thinks Jimmy, a disgraced billionaire whose wife, Rebecca, withdrew from intimacy, prompting Jimmy to go a prostitute; the affair was leaked to the news. Thus, Jimmy retreats from the public eye, going to rural Ham, Mississippi. There, he encounters a primarily Black neighborhood where people live in extreme poverty, seated deep in a racist county. With the media and the wealthy white locals try to twist Jimmy's actions to further damage his reputation, Jimmy begins to put his money and time toward fixing up the neighborhood and teaching the local children to read.

Though Jimmy faces a few adversaries throughout the novel, his primary conflict is with media, represented on the page in newspaper clippings and social media posts. The media response to the affair, not Rebecca's, drives Jimmy to Ham in the first place; he must win over media to succeed in his goal of revitalizing his new neighborhood. This ongoing conflict, along with the steady theme of generosity, pulls the novel into a cohesive unit throughout Jimmy's various projects and setbacks.

Despite his magnanimity being a focal point of the novel, Jimmy is a flawed hero. His adultery kicks the novel's events into motion; several times, he weighs his desire to help the neighborhood against his own desire for peace and isolation. But it's precisely these flaws that make Jimmy's generosity not only believable but meaningful.

In the novel *Mr. Jimmy from Around the Way*, a disgraced man models open, unrelenting kindness in the face of the worst conditions and treatment the US has to offer.

EMILY GAINES (January / February 2024)

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