In the introduction to *In Search of the Blues: A Journey to the Soul of Black Texas*, Bill Minutaglio quotes one of his editors when he was a newspaperman: “You know what people say about you? Wherever there are two Black people, you’ll find Bill Minutaglio.” There is no doubt that this book was written by someone who has immersed himself professionally and personally into the African-American community of Texas for over 30 years. Minutaglio takes us on a journey that intertwines social and cultural history with the music and soul of black neighborhoods throughout Texas.

A Renaissance Man of Texas letters, Bill Minutaglio spent over 30 years as a journalist. He has authored several books, including biographies of George W. Bush, Alberto Gonzales, and Molly Ivins, and today is a journalism professor at the University of Texas at Austin. *In Search of the Blues* draws from 15 articles he wrote for Texas newspapers beginning in the 1980s. Portraits of people and their neighborhoods appear through Minutaglio’s literary lens of oral history, ethnic studies, urban demographics, and musicology.

The articles are organized into three themes—people, communities, and music. Minutaglio establishes the common thread in his subtitle, *A Journey to the Soul of Black Texas*. The first theme profiles football legend Ray Rhodes from Mexia, black activist Fathim Minkah from Oak Cliff in Dallas, and San Antonio businessman Percy Sutton. Minutaglio’s narratives portray these powerful stories of individual achievement within the broader context of family and community. These articles—personal histories rich with detail—were written in the 1990s and serve not only as excellent primary sources for the historian but also sources of inspiration and interest for any reader.

Part Two is titled “Community.” These five eclectic pieces capture the spirit of Minutaglio’s journey. The approach is a unique one for a journalist, particularly a white writer covering Dallas neighborhoods that in most cases are still segregated. Minutaglio creates door-to-door histories that span three generations. He addresses the ravages of poverty and segregation, but the reader is left with a positive message that affirms the resilience and strength of the people. Minutaglio takes us to Congo Street, a small alley and street near Fair Park in Dallas. For 70 years this “island” of black culture has survived and evolved. Examples of urban politics comprise the articles on Oak Cliff, with its past and future dependent on the “Bottomland” of the Trinity River. Minutaglio also takes the reader to the “Hole” in South Dallas, an abandoned building where he warmed his hands with the locals over a fire in a barrel.

The last part of the book profiles several legendary Texas blues performers, as well as some not so famous artists. Minutaglio begins with Alex Moore, described as “a gateway to the musical history of Texas. He embodied several traditions that could be traced back to the influential Deep Ellum area.” Often known as Whistlin’ Alex Moore, he was one of the first barrelhouse blues pianists to have a substantial impact on later boogie-woogie and R&B styles.

Minutaglio looks at T-Bone Walker and the Dallas blues club scene, as well as Doris Standifer, the “Queen of the Blues” and the “Number 1 Lady of Song in Texas” during the 1940s. Portraits of Zuzu Bollin and Robert Ealey complement the accounts of clubs such as Wellington’s, Sadler’s Corner, and The Bluebird in Fort Worth. An article on Henry Qualls and his rise to critical acclaim in the blues world from Texas to Europe illustrates Minutaglio’s skills as a musicologist as he explores the roots of country blues.

Finally, the author examines Houston with a brief bio of Sam “Lightnin’” Hopkins. Minutaglio describes Hopkins as “the poet laureate of the streets, and the oral historian, in his way, of all those things and people that flowed from East Texas into the big city.” Other portraits from Houston’s Fourth Ward include R&B legend Amos Milburn and barrelhouse pianists Robert Shaw and Dr. Hepcat (Lavada Durst). Shaw once gave the author a lesson on blues variations played in the road sides (Black clubs) featuring the Louisiana style, the Mississippi style, and the Fourth Ward style.

The last article, “Zydeco Blues,” describes the Louisiana—meets-Texas blues of Gatemouth Brown, Clifton Chenier, and Buckwheat Zydeco. Again, Minutaglio’s prose moves from clubs to kitchens to church to outdoor festival—with the music always at center stage.

For the music lover, the major criticism of this book is that one is left wanting more—more artist portraits, more clubs, more personal stories. The author’s commitment to the blues tradition and the community of its origin is infectious and transcends the stereotypical image of a “white guy trying to discover the blues.” Ethnicity is irrelevant in understanding and embracing a culture as long as there is respect and passion—and Bill Minutaglio certainly meets that standard.

For the historian, this book is a superb oral history that celebrates neighborhood values and generational triumphs.

*Larry Willoughby*