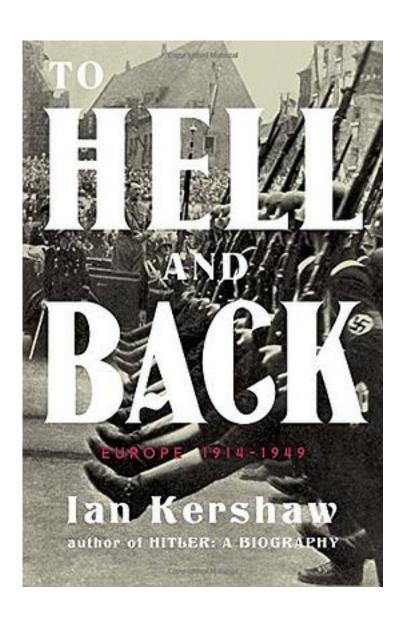
## To Hell and Back



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著者:Abernathy, Jeff

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This study of the construction of race in American culture takes its title from a central story thread in Mark Twain's "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." Huck, who resolves to "go to hell" rather than turn over the runaway slave Jim, in time betrays his companion. Jeff Abernathy assesses cross-racial pairings in American literature following Huckleberry Finn to show that this pattern of engagement and betrayal appears repeatedly in our fiction--notably southern fiction--just as it appears throughout American history and culture. He contends that such stories of companionship and rejection express opposing tenets of American culture: a persistent vision of democracy and the racial hierarchy that undermines it. Abernathy traces this pattern through works by William Faulkner, Carson McCullers, Harper Lee, Kaye Gibbons, Sara Flanigan, Elizabeth Spencer, Padgett Powell, Ellen Douglas, and Glasgow Phillips. He then demonstrates how African American writers pointedly contest the pattern. The works of Ralph Ellison, Alice Walker, and Richard Wright, for example, "portray autonomous black characters and white characters who must earn their own salvation, or gain it not at all."

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