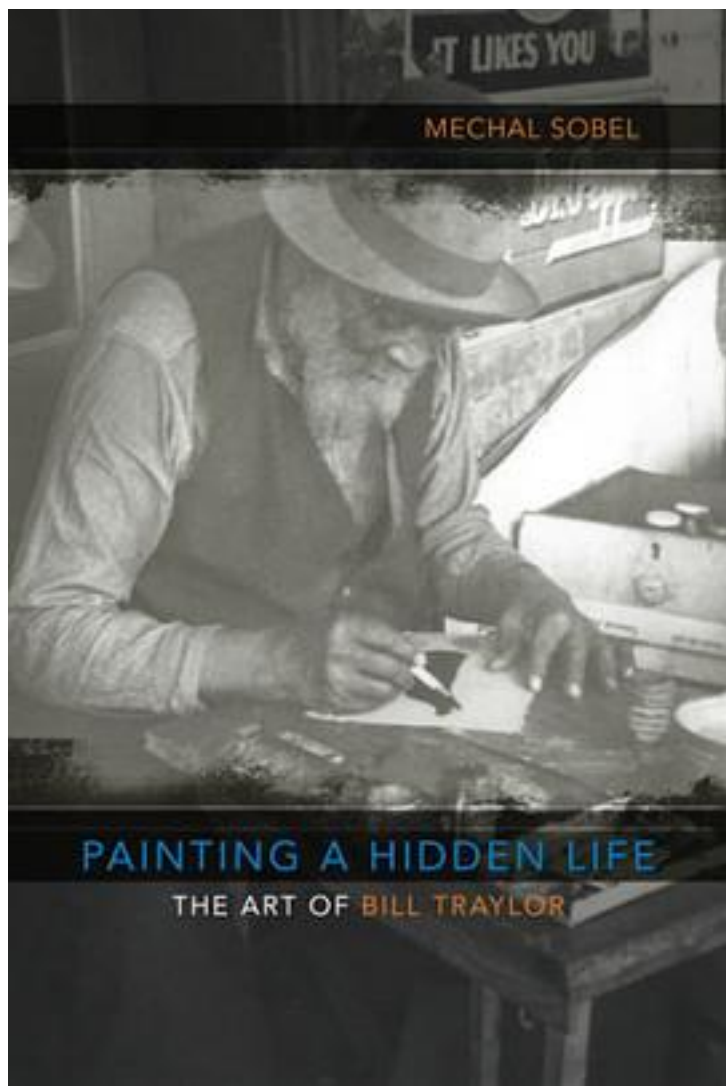


Painting a Hidden Life



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Born into slavery on an Alabama plantation in 1853, Bill Traylor worked as a sharecropper for most of his life. But in 1928 he moved to Montgomery and changed his life, becoming a self-taught lyric painter of extraordinary ability and power. From 1936 to 1946, he sat on a street corner old, ill, and homeless and created well over 1,200 paintings. Collected and later promoted by Charles Shannon, a young Montgomery artist, his work received star placement in the Corcoran Gallery's 1982 exhibition "Black Folk Art in America." From then on, the spare and powerful "radical modernity" of Traylor's work helped place him among the rising stars of twentieth-century American artists. Most critics and art historians who analyze Traylor's paintings emphasize his extraordinary form and evaluate the content as either simple or enigmatic narratives of black life. In PAINTING A HIDDEN LIFE, historian Mechal Sobel's trenchant analysis reveals a previously unrecognized central core of meaning in Traylor

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