

THE QUIET EPIDEMIC

Gay-baiting as Right-wing Tactic

Gay-baiting is new in Southern politics. There is reason to believe that it will replace racism and anti-communism on the top of the bag of tricks of conservative Southern politicians.



The Music
Brought Us



Teachers
on Strike



Sick Chickens
... and more

FEATURES

- 17 GAY-BAITING: THE QUIET EPIDEMIC**
17 GAY-BAITING IN SOUTHERN POLITICS Right-wing tactic for the '80s, *by Joe Herzenberg*
- 20 ANATOMY OF AN ELECTION** Gay-baiting in a Senate race, *by Mab Segrest*
- 26 VEIL OF HURT** Richmond survey reveals impact of homophobia, *by Edward Peebles, Jr., Walter W. Tunstall, and Everett Eberhardt*
- 28 THE MUSIC BROUGHT US** Cajun music, *by Barry Jean Ancelet*
- 33 TEACHERS ON STRIKE**
33 THE BATTLE OF ST. JOHN Upsetting a small town's plantation economy, *by Lance Hill*
- 38 THE FINAL CARD** The 1985 Mississippi teachers' strike, *by Trella Laughlin*
- 40 MIXED MARRIAGE** A short story, *by Chap Reaver*
- 42 HONORING THE ANCESTORS** Kongo American graves, *by Elizabeth Fenn*
- 48 SICK CHICKENS** Strikers win big benefits for consumers, *by George Green and Jim McClellan*
- 56 POSTCARD POEM and UNDER THE KNIFE** Poetry, *by Judith Ortiz Cofer*
-

DEPARTMENTS

- 2 LETTERS FROM OUR READERS** Homing in on Homer
- 3 READERS CORNER** Private journal, *by Mary Ellen Fuess*
- 4 SOUTHERN NEWS ROUNDUP** Toxic waste dumps, terrorist training, Georgia workers organize, Boy Scout religion, and more
- 11 FACING SOUTH** Rebels in Law, *by Lincoln Bates*
- 12 RESOURCES** Films on labor, stereotypes, alternative views
- 13 VOICES OF OUR NEIGHBORS** India: The South's Bhopal Connection
- 58 REVIEWS** Wobbly poet, Klan people
- 63 BULLETIN BOARD OF THE SOUTH**
- 64 VOICES FROM THE PAST** This great profession, *by Jesse Stuart*

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

Homing in on Homer

Dear S.E.,

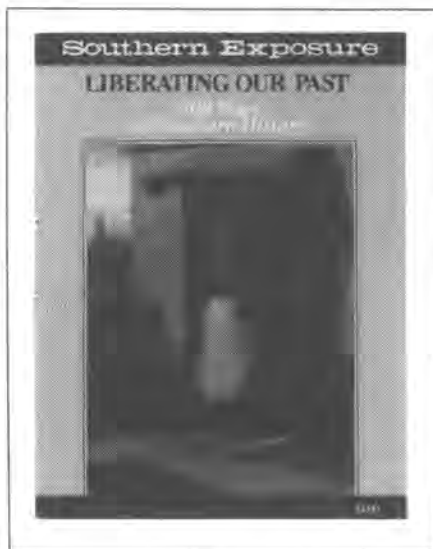
I am writing to you concerning your commentary that accompanies the reproduction of Winslow Homer's *At the Cabin Door* on the cover of the [November/December 1984] issue of *Southern Exposure*.

I am not sure where you received the information concerning the history of the painting, but there are several inaccuracies and misrepresentations. This painting was "discovered" in the attic of one of the Kellog/Corbin family member's New Jersey house in the early 1960s. At that time it apparently bore no title and was given *Captured Liberators* by an antiques dealer called in to appraise the painting. Before donating the painting to the museum in 1966, the Corbin family had it authenticated by Lloyd Goodrich, then director of the Whitney Museum of American Art and the acknowledged authority on Homer's work. He accepted the painting as by Homer but felt that *Captured Liberators* "seems strangely inappropriate for Winslow Homer." At that time Mr. Goodrich noted that he had been unable to find any record of a "lost" Homer of this period with a title or description that would fit the painting. (Almost 20 years later this remains true.) Mr. Goodrich's own suggestion was *At the Cabin Door*, a more generalized title that focuses on the predominant figure in the painting. It should be emphasized that the painting had no title written on it and there was no family tradition for calling it *Captured Liberators*.

When the museum first received the painting in late 1966, it was almost immediately put on exhibition and published as *Captured Liberators* in our press releases and the several newspaper articles concerning the gift. It was only in the course of further cataloguing and research on the paint-

ing conducted in early 1967 that the museum was given a copy of Mr. Goodrich's report on the painting. The museum decided to adopt the title, *At the Cabin Door*, not to undercut the meaning of the painting but to reflect the most reliable scholarly opinion.

The interpretation of any work of art



— its meaning to the artist, his or her public and to present viewers — is always open to change and is the kind of activity that the Newark Museum has always encouraged. However, by misrepresenting the painting's history and emphasizing a title that Homer himself did not give it, *Southern Exposure* has given a mistaken and distorted view of this important and very meaningful work of art.

— Gary Reynolds, *The Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey*

Editors' reply: We are grateful to the Newark Museum for allowing us to use Homer's painting on the cover of "Liberating Our Past." With or without title, it proved an appropriate image for the threshold of our history issue, and we have received numerous compliments. But we'll stand by our commentary and raise the ante. The name change mentioned in our caption and outlined in detail by Mr. Reynolds did

have the effect, whatever the intention, of obscuring the drama of the picture and undercutting its meaning. Perhaps this is why Gordon Hendricks, in *The Life and Work of Winslow Homer* (New York: Abrams, 1979, p. 304) said of Lloyd Goodrich's recommendation of a new title, "I am not sure I agree that the later title is the better."

Certainly Mr. Goodrich has long been a major Homer expert, indeed the acknowledged authority in the sense of still having sole rights to many of the artist's papers. But there are now numerous competent Homer scholars, and, as Mr. Reynolds points out, interpretations continue to change. Only recently have some academics begun to pay closer attention to the numerous blacks in Homer's works. See, for example, Sidney Kaplan, "The Negro in the Art of Homer and Eakins," *Massachusetts Review* 7 (Winter 1966); Michael Quick, "Homer in Virginia," *Los Angeles County Museum of Art Bulletin* 24 (1978); Mary Ann Calo, "Winslow Homer's Visits to Virginia During Reconstruction," *American Art Journal* 12 (Winter 1980); Peter H. Wood, "Waiting in Limbo: A Reconsideration of Winslow Homer's *The Gulf Stream*," in Walter J. Fraser, Jr., and Winfred B. Moore, Jr., eds., *The Southern Enigma: Essays in Race, Class, and Folk Culture* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1983); or the forthcoming volume of *The Image of the Black in Western Art* by Hugh Honour.

Incidentally, we were tempted to use an unusual oil sketch entitled "The Shackled Slave," signed by Homer. But alas, the picture is in the private collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, and we are informed that when Lloyd Goodrich was asked to examine the picture he pronounced it a probable forgery. Perhaps it is, but few others have been allowed to evaluate it. With art, as with history, it is rarely easy to say whose views are mistaken and distorted.

Private Journal

— by Mary Ellen Fuess

“**T**he Survivors” by Sarah Wilkerson (see *S.E.*, Nov./Dec. 1982), reminded me of a brief journal I kept under similar circumstances (as a sibling, though, not a wife). My brother Robert was killed in Vietnam.

SUNDAY NIGHT

It's been a long day. I'm not even sure if it's still *today*, really; I've no conception of time, now.

It is painful to write, to think, to remember, but I want to remember because it is somehow sacred, in spite of the agony. Nothing is right. It is so bad, it is not true.

TUESDAY

I still ache all over. I cannot leave your room, Robert, or I'll never return again, I know.

Mother is taking it pretty well. She has tried gently to comfort me, but I am cold. My blood is frozen in my veins and I can no more eat, or speak, or sleep, than fly. I will not. All I can do is write; it is all I could ever do.

WEDNESDAY

I think, now, the truth has only hit me, slapped me in the face, hollered its obscenities in my aching ear. But I heard it. And I am forced to believe it.

Sunday morning I walked home from church alone. It was a beautiful, sunny day. It smelled like Easter. I was in a happy mood, but not giddy, and the idea of a picnic occupied my mind. I considered the possibilities of approaches to use to Daddy, to present the enthusiasm to the other kids before he could decline.

I never got the chance.

I don't remember whether or not there was a car parked in front or not, but doesn't it seem that there *must* have been? In all the stories, in all the articles, you read about the strange car in

front, the strange silence from within, the sensing of tragedy.

I don't know. I don't care. I don't know.

I came tripping in the side door, because I knew if David was already there, he'd be in the den. (“Robert, you remember David, he's my best friend, remember? Sure you do, Robert!”)

But David wasn't there and Denny wasn't either. No one was, and there were hushed voices from the living room. “That must be her. Take it easy, now, this'll be the hardest,” I think I heard a man say. I came tiptoeing in, because if Daddy had another insurance man in there, I'd have to make a hasty retreat.

I peered around the corner and two men, in full uniform, stood up. One held out his hand and I cautiously approached. Terri was sort of . . . well, what? She was kind of “quiet.” Momma left the room and I could tell Daddy was mad. Furious. So I didn't say anything.

The officers were nice; nice enough. I liked their flashy medals but now they only repulse me. An award for murder? I'm glad you only wore ribbons, Robert.

THURSDAY AFTERNOON

. . . And today was the worst, so far! Today it was in the paper. the *Houston newspaper!* (And damn it, I didn't want anyone to know, and now everyone will! Well, it's a lie, that's all: a lie.)

The *newspaper*.

Oh, God.

(A person can't even keep his death a private thing, anymore. Now probably people we don't even know will be sending us letters about their poor sons and brothers and sweethearts that were killed “in this senseless war!” Well, if they do, I'll just tear them up, that's all: tear them up and spit all over them and return them to the old biddies who have nothing better to do all day than mimeograph sympathy letters to people. Oh, God.)

His picture was good. (Oh, Robert, you're so cute. I love you so much; I

sure do miss you.) But he was always handsome. From Daddy's side, though. Casanova, even, at seven years. The kids weren't named, fortunately: It only said “Surviving are his parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Q. Public, three brothers, three sisters, all younger.” (Of course it said our last name, but what difference?)

This evening I feel better. A queer sort of calm has settled over me; I feel that I am living in a cloud. Tomorrow I will go away. I will go to school. I will go to David's. I will get away.

Oh, God. Did I fall asleep? It is dark; I am sick. I saw you, Robert. I saw you mad. Remember the Pattons? I saw you happy. I saw you relieved, understanding, believing. I relived all the summer. All summer long.

I must be sick. Pain is wracking my head, I am tense. My hands are cool, my mouth is dry. I want to cry, but the only sound is the rasping of my voice, an interference with the predominating silence of his room. Robert's own room.

My brain asks questions that my mind cannot answer. It is frustrating, nerve-wracking.

The pain is stronger, now; beating, slaying.

I think of tomorrow, the kids at school. What will they say, how will they act? I am afraid to see them, terrified. I feel as if *I* have hurt *them*, and now will be hurt.

Why, God?

Oh, God. □



INFANTRY TRAINING

photo courtesy U.S. Army

The South's Link to the Real Terrorists

The South continues to be an important link to U.S.-sponsored terror, covert and subversive wars against sovereign nations, and liberation movements throughout the world. Alabama may be emerging as a key link in this chain of politically motivated, unofficial acts of aggression and terror.

The latest chapter in this ongoing story took an interesting twist in July when reports emerged in the mainstream press that a mercenary training camp in Alabama was linked to two terrorist bombings. The irony is that at about the same time, President Reagan came before the American Bar Association with his major policy statement accusing Cuba, Nicaragua, Libya, and North Korea as forming "a new international version of Murder Inc." Said Reagan, the U.S. is "not going to tolerate these attacks from outlaw states run by the strangest collection of misfits, looney tunes, and squalid criminals since the advent of the Third Reich."

Several of the countries assailed by Reagan pointed up U.S. "state organized terrorism" as mainly directed against "nationalist and progressive movements" and "nations unfavorable to" U.S. policy. Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega commented, "No amount of incendiary rhetoric will hide the fact that the U.S. administration promotes the systematic use of terrorism against the Nicaraguan people."

The attention focused on the Alabama training camp in June supports Ortega's charges. A small group of Indian Sikhs — under investigation by the FBI for an alleged plot to assassinate India's prime minister Rajiv Gandhi during his recent visit to the U.S. — were also reported to be involved in the crash of an Air India jumbo jet off the coast of Ireland and an airline baggage explo-



A U.S. MERCENARY SALVAGING SPARE PARTS IN NACARAGUA

sion in Japan. Two people were killed in the baggage explosion, and 329 died in the plane crash. The Sikhs had been trained in terror in a Dolomite, Alabama, mercenary school, U.S. officials said. And, as a further twist in this sundry episode, the Sikhs had reportedly been infiltrated by the FBI before they arrived for training at the camp.

Sikhs, engaged in an independence movement against India, seek to separate the state of Punjab, where they constitute the majority population. Sikh nationalists were also responsible for the October 31, 1984, assassination of Indira Gandhi.

The infiltration of the Sikhs by the FBI supposedly contributed to the arrest of those involved in the assassination plot against Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. But statements by India's press secretary Deepak Vohra expressed concern "about opportunities for training terrorists in Alabama. . . . We value our relations with all countries but we cannot compromise when it comes to terrorism," he said. "It is unfortunate if the United States took an extreme legalistic view on the issue by allowing such terrorist training camps to operate freely." Vohra also complained that the mercenary school in Dolomite is

"not conducive to bilateral relations" between India and the United States.

Thirty-eight-year-old Vietnam veteran Frank Camper runs the Mercenary School, as it is called, and his school had generally maintained a low profile until the Sikh story broke. Once the story came to light, however, Camper revealed the extent of the school's international impact. "We've got guys [graduates] working in every major conflict now," Camper reportedly said. "But they do this on their own. We don't hire them out," he stated. Camper's wife, Mavis was also quoted as saying that she and her husband started the school "because we don't like communism. . . . Americans are very naive when it comes to what's going on."

Several news reports reveal a connection between the Mercenary School, Camper, and school students with various U.S. government agencies including the CIA, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), and the FBI. "We've worked with a number of federal agencies, including the FBI," Camper said.

One of the school's instructors, 41-year-old Paul Johnson, has said that he consults with federal agencies after his mercenary missions. "Don't think

I don't have CIA dealings," Johnson said. "When I go down there, I report to the CIA, the DEA," CIA and DEA spokespeople don't confirm or deny these charges. In any case, Camper has been an FBI informant or witness on several occasions since 1981 when the school opened, including his cooperation with the agency in the Sikh incident.

One question remaining is: considering the involvement of federal agents, was the training of the Sikhs a snafu or a scam?

The Mercenary School is located about 10 miles west of Birmingham, on a heavily wooded 77-acre site in west Jefferson County along the Warrior River. The two-week training courses cost \$350 per student and are held about seven times a year. Students (including lawyers, doctors, plumbers, painters, policemen, investigators, and reporters) who attend the sessions are taught the use of automatic weapons, Israeli Mossad assassination techniques, explosives, and hand-to-hand combat.

The Sikhs who attended the school were specifically trained in explosives. Describing the training the Sikhs received, Mavis Camper stated, "We tell them what to look for in the elements of construction of a bomb . . . what the components are and how they're made, but there's no instruction in making them." The explosives section of the course was "a small part, not even a day," she said.

Despite public knowledge of the school and its relationship to "international terrorism," the school remains open and apparently is under little pressure. It operates under a Jefferson County business license and is advertised in *Soldier of Fortune* magazine. The news reports also state that Camper has a federal license to own automatic weapons and to operate as an international weapons dealer.

Congressional legislators are said to be looking for ways to eliminate the Campers' school along with about 15 other survival and mercenary camps known to exist in the U.S. So far, however, law enforcement agencies claim there have been no violations of the federal Neutrality Act or any other laws by the school's organizers and teachers.

Kentucky Citizens vs. Toxic Waste

Toxic substances and hazardous waste have been the target of opposition both locally and nationally. In June members of the Sloans Valley Concerned Citizens (SVCC) in Sloans Valley, Kentucky, discovered a spill of suspected toxic substances that were being taken illegally into the community's controversial landfill. The material was traced to a fiber glass manufacturing plant and when state officials finally tested the spill material, it was found to contain a number of hazardous substances.

SVCC subsequently called for the closing of the landfill pending a full investigation of the dumping practices allowed there. The state has yet to respond and the dump site continues to operate without a permit.

In Lawrence County, Kentucky, members of the Lawrence County Concerned Citizens are fighting to keep a hazardous waste incinerator out of their community. The proposed PyroChem plant would burn methylisocyanate (MIC). MIC is the substance that escaped from a Union Carbide plant into the surrounding neighborhoods in Bhopal, India (see p. 13).

While these citizens' groups were fighting hazardous waste in their communities, labor and environmental leaders called upon Congress to strengthen the Superfund for the cleanup of toxic waste dumps and pass a new job disease bill to protect millions of workers from exposure to hazardous substances.

This challenge to Congress was issued at the third annual convention of the OSHA/Environmental Network. The convention was attended by leaders of labor and environmental groups such as the Machinists union, the AFL-CIO, the Wilderness Society, and the Sierra Club.

AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer Thomas R. Donahue praised the coalition for uniting previously separated forces toward a common goal. "All of us," he said, "workers and environmentalists, are aware that many of the dangers com-

munities face from unclean air, unclean water, and unclean land have their origins in the workplace."

Citing the example of the Bhopal tragedy, Donahue said, "Most people have a short attention span, and they have already put Bhopal out of their minds. They . . . wrote the whole thing off as though it were somehow unique to the developing countries around the globe. Unfortunately, that is not true. Had that particular chemical plant been located in the United States rather than India, none of the conditions which led to the disaster would have violated any specific standards which currently exist in this country. The point is, it can happen here."

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has designated 540 National Priorities List (NPL) sites for cleanup under the federal Superfund program, including 95 in Southern states. The NPL list is composed of hazardous waste sites that pose the greatest potential long-term threat to human health

TOXIC WASTE SITES MARCH 1985

| | NPL Sites | Proposed Sites |
|----------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Alabama | 4 | 8 |
| Arkansas | 6 | 1 |
| Florida | 29 | 8 |
| Georgia | 3 | 2 |
| Kentucky | 7 | 2 |
| Louisiana | 5 | 1 |
| Mississippi | 1 | 1 |
| North Carolina | 3 | 5 |
| South Carolina | 10 | 0 |
| Tennessee | 6 | 2 |
| Texas | 10 | 16 |
| Virginia | 4 | 8 |
| West Virginia | 4 | 2 |
| South | 95 | 56 |
| U.S. | 540 | 272 |

Source: EPA/Environmental Action

and the environment. In addition, states have proposed another 272 sites to be added to the NPL list.

However, in the five years since the Superfund was established, only six sites have been cleaned. And, according to a study by the National Campaign Against Toxic Hazards, the cleanup at most of these sites was insufficient. One of the six sites is Luminous Process,



Inc. in Athens, Georgia. The plant, at which radioactive watch dials were made, was closed in 1978. The cleanup of radiocative contamination at Luminous, begun in 1979, was only done in earnest after it was classified as a Superfund site in 1982. EPA declared its task finished in July 1982, after 15,000 cubic feet of soil had been hauled away to a storage dump in Richmond, Washington; but in October 1984, the National Campaign Against Toxic Hazards listed several major deficiencies in the cleanup. Among these were the lack of tests for groundwater contamination and the failure to test Luminous workers or cleanup workers for exposure to radiation.

New Strategies, Old Battles

In the 10-month-old United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) strike against A.T. Massey Coal Company, reminiscent of the violent union-management battles early in this century, both the union and Massey are employing new tactics. The issue — the responsibility of the company to its workers and to the community — is all too familiar.

The union's new weapon is the "selective strike." In the past, the UMWA conducted exhausting nationwide strikes against the entire coal industry in order to obtain favorable contracts. With a selective strike, a particular company (or companies) is targeted for a strike while work at other

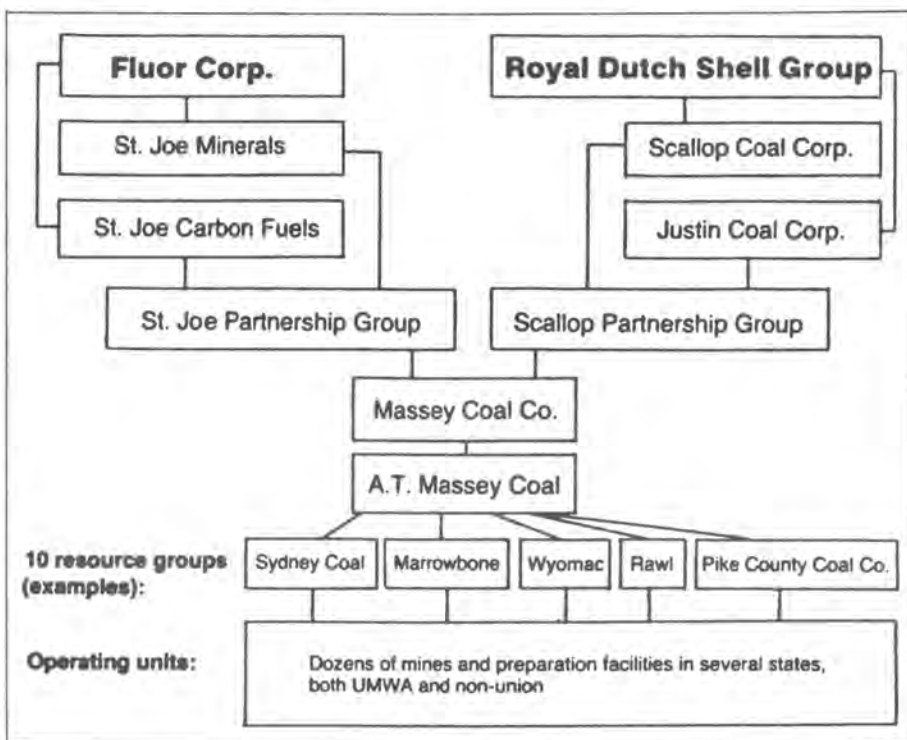
companies continues. By providing benefits to the striking workers from a \$70 million strike fund raised through a union-wide assessment, the union can conduct a selective strike for an indefinite period of time.

Competition within the coal industry is one of the factors the union believes will pressure a company under selective strike to negotiate. Speaking on the efficacy of the selective strike option, UMWA president Richard Trumka said, "I don't know of any coal company that will sacrifice its own profits to protect the rest of the industry when all the other companies are working and making money. These companies will have a lot of incentive to negotiate and get back to work."

In October the UMWA triggered the selective strike against A.T. Massey Coal Company, the nation's sixth largest coal producer, which introduced a new tactic of its own to try to break the union. In 1984 Royal Dutch Shell and Fluor Corporation purchased the company's holdings from E. Morgan Massey and created a "limited partnership." The new owners claim that "limited partnerships" of this kind are exempt from labor laws, and the Reagan-controlled National Labor Relations Board agreed. E. Morgan Massey main-

tains that, because he is not on the committee, he has no power over the company and thus cannot negotiate with the union. He insists that A.T. Massey Coal Company and its two giant owners have no direct control over subsidiary mines. However, in a report to stockholders, the company states that "Massey's network of 21 mining complexes function as a single production entity."

In September 1984 Trumka succeeded in settling with the Bituminous Coal Operators Association (BCOA — the trade association that represents the majority of coal operators in union negotiations) before the expiration of the 1981 contract. This was the first time the union had settled without a strike in 18 years. A few companies, however, Massey among them, refused to sign the non-concessionary BCOA contract. Now, 10 months later, A.T. Massey is the only coal company that has still not settled with the union. E. Morgan Massey insists that the union must negotiate and sign a separate contract with each of Massey's 50-odd mines, an arduous and exhausting task. Says UMWA research director Michael Buckner, "It's a slick way of avoiding legal responsibility." The UMWA demands that the company sign the master



Source: UMWA Journal

agreement negotiated between the union and the BCOA.

Meanwhile, Massey has resumed work at many of its complexes by hiring non-union workers. The company has also hired, at a cost of \$200,000 a month, private guards from out of state for protection and, say union members, to intimidate the strikers. The local and national media have focused on the anger and incidents of violence carried out by the strikers, but have been scant in their coverage of the company's actions, such as crushing strikers' cars, which precipitate such anger.

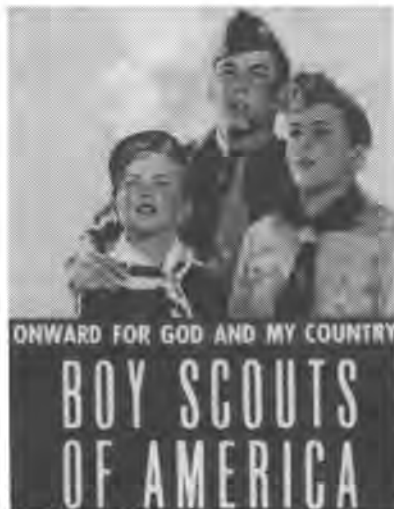
As the action enters its eleventh month, morale among the strikers is high. With the 1,100 strikers receiving benefits from the strike fund, the workers are prepared to hold out until Massey signs the union contract. In addition, the company's first fiscal quarter report for 1985 reported a loss by its mining operations.

The significance of the UMWA-Massey confrontation goes beyond the coal industry, and in August members of the United Auto Workers union will go to West Virginia to lend their support. According to West Virginia UMWA member Mike Burdiss, the issue in the dispute is not simply higher pay for the mine workers. Disputes about wages and benefits were settled in April. At issue is job security for the workers and the responsibility of the company to the community. The union members are concerned that, as coal companies have historically done, Massey will take the coal, make its pile of money and leave. The union wants to ensure that the workers, their families, and their communities, not just the large corporations, receive the benefits of their labor and their land.

— by David Schwartz

A Good Scout Is Hard to Keep

A Boy Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful . . . and believes in God. That's what 15-year-old Paul Trout found out when he was expelled from the Boy Scouts of Ameri-



ca (BSA) after telling a Charlottesville, Virginia, review board that he did not believe in God. Trout was being considered for Life Scout, the second highest ranking, when he told the board he believed in self and self-reliance rather than a supreme being. The board consulted Bill Love, chief BSA executive. Love wrote to Trout's parents that "one of the requirements" for youth and adult members of the BSA "is belief in a Supreme Being." Raoul Chavez, director of communications for the BSA, said that Trout is "a very fine boy" and "a good leader," but he added that "you cannot be a member of this movement if you do not believe in a supreme being." Chavez said that as far as he knew this was the first case of its kind to come up in the BSA.

Mistress of Delay Wins Major Battle

The Mistress of Delay (Florida version) has outwaited Governor Bob Graham, Attorney General Jim Smith, the state legislature, and the Florida bar; and they have given her a law she desperately wanted. Scharlette Holdman — who heads the Florida Clearinghouse on Criminal Justice and was given that nickname by *Newsweek* for her talents in keeping condemned prisoners out of the electric chair by spinning webs of writs, motions, and pleas in state and federal courts — has

been saying since 1977 that the state of Florida should at least give people lawyers before they kill them. In June the legislature passed a bill setting up a unique state agency staffed by lawyers to work full-time representing indigent death row inmates who have lost their direct appeals. Holdman says it's the most significant development in death penalty work in 10 years.

Most death row inhabitants are found in the South, where the history of hostility to federal courts is so ingrained that the idea of funding federal appeals is seldom discussed rationally. Most states provide representation in some form for direct appeals of a conviction to state high courts, but none until now provide an attorney at the time of execution.

Anti-death penalty activists consequently spend most of their time finding, training, and assisting volunteer attorneys. There are only a handful who understand the law of capital appeals — or who want to learn it, since there's no money in it. The volunteer lawyers are under tremendous personal pressure: their client will die if they don't win. And they usually must pay the costs of the appeal out of their own pockets; travel, investigations, expert witnesses, printing, and so forth cost from \$5,000 to \$15,000 per case. None of Florida's major law firms had been willing to help until very recently, so Holdman has been bringing in attorneys from New York, Philadelphia, and anywhere else she can find a willing soul. But volunteer lawyers are increasingly hard to find.

Florida has now broken that barrier. The new agency, to be called the Office of Capital Collateral Representations (OCCR), begins work October 1 with a staff of 11 attorneys and 10 support staff, and a budget of \$838,000. That's not enough, says Holdman, but an excellent beginning.

The law came about because of broad support from an unlikely coalition. Attorney General Smith had once declared he would not have anything more to do with the Florida Clearinghouse — Holdman once baked him a birthday cake decorated with 18 black licorice crosses, one for each outstanding death warrant. But fences have been mended, and Smith, who remains an aggres-



sive defender of the death penalty, hand-carried the bill to the legislature and lobbied for its passage. Holdman says Smith's actions come from a sense of fairness about prisoners not having attorneys, but also from a sense that the system was about to collapse because no executions were taking place.

At one hearing on the bill, someone asked, "Does this mean these murderers can't go attorney-shopping on Wall Street anymore?" While the answer to that is no — prisoners can still be represented by attorneys of their choice if they can find them — it does mean that the Florida Clearinghouse can turn its attention away from the narrow forum of the courtroom to the public arena to begin to change public awareness and public opinion about abolition of the death penalty.

Holdman feels that she and her staff can leave the appeals in the OCCR's hands. That is because the state has hired Florida Civil Liberties Union president Larry Spaulding to head the office, and she has full confidence in the way he will run it.

Job Security Key Issue in Textiles

Twenty-nine Southern textile manufacturing plants closed in 1984. In the first seven months of 1985, 34 more closed. In all, textile employment in the Southeast has dwindled from a high of 656,500 in 1974

to 492,500 today. Job security has become the key issue for textile workers.

On one front, the situation has produced an unusual alliance between textile unions and textile management, traditionally arch enemies in an industry known for its virulent anti-unionism (see *SE*, Jan./Feb. 1985). Controversial joint union-management calls for Congress to enact protective legislation against imports have received the most publicity, but the Amalgamated Textile Workers Union of America (ACTWU) has made a number of independent initiatives to save jobs for workers in this threatened industry.

One target for ACTWU's anger is the K-Mart chain, which has been a leader among retailers who oppose protective legislation. *Labor Unity*, ACTWU's newspaper, reports that more than 200 union members poured into a Knoxville, Tennessee, shopping center with fliers demanding to know "Why won't K-Mart stand up for American Jobs?" They filled every shopping cart they could find with imported apparel items, advanced on the cash registers, and suddenly found they "forgot" to bring their credit cards after the purchases were rung up. Other union members in line behind them left their filled carts in the check out lines and joined the crowd outside chanting "Save Our Jobs."

The dramatic action took place after K-Mart officials refused to meet with local and regional union officers to discuss the retailer's active opposition to the Textile and Apparel Trade Enforcement Act. After leaving the store, the ACTWU members blanketed the area with fliers. The union leaflet charged that "Low wage paying retailers, like K-Mart, are leading the fight to stop the legislation which could save American jobs" and noted that "12,000 Knoxville jobs are on the line right now."

Job security has also become a major issue in organizing drives and contract negotiations. While union members receive the same wages as non-union workers in J.P. Stevens plants, they seem to be better protected from plant closings. A three-year contract, which went into effect in May and which covers the 3,500 ACTWU workers in Stevens's North Carolina plants, features several job security provisions. Recall rights for laid-off workers are extended from 12 months to 24 months, allowing workers to return to work with full seniority. In addition, severance pay provisions in the event of permanent job loss were improved.

Perhaps most importantly, while textile plants are closing, some unionized plants are actually hiring back laid-off workers. In Roanoke Rapids, the focus of the union's drive to organize Stevens, only 100 of the 350 people who lost their jobs when a plant was closed a year ago are still laid off. Employees at Stevens's union plants are currently working five to seven days a week.

The reason lies in activism as much as contract protection. Beginning in the early 1970s, organizers both within the union and in independent organizations such as the Brown Lung Association pressured Stevens and other companies to improve health and safety conditions in the textile mills. As a result, money to modernize often went to those mills where organizing was strongest. The Roanoke Rapids plants are now among the most technologically advanced in



the industry; therefore they are the mills most competitive in the fight against imports.

However, the import problems are so overwhelming that even the most modern plants are not immune. A prime example is the non-union United Merchants and Manufacturing Plant in Bath, South Carolina, which closed earlier this year despite its state-of-the-art machinery.

— thanks to Labor Unity

State Employees Organize in Georgia

As jobs disappear in manufacturing industries such as textiles, other sectors of the economy are becoming more important. Unions representing public employees have become the focus of several organizing drives in the South. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) re-

cently scored a major victory in Georgia when the 2,000-member Georgia State Employees Association (GSEA) voted to affiliate with SEIU as Local 1985. Says Ronald Masters, president of GSEA, "It's the first time state workers in Georgia have been unionized."

In voting to affiliate with SEIU, the Georgia association kept the "no-strike" provision of its own constitution since public employee strikes are illegal in the state, as they are in most Southern states. The inability to bargain collectively has been a major block to organizing public employees, but the move by GSEA focused on issues beyond bargaining, such as the employees' grievance system. GSEA's 64-year-old executive director Hila Stonebreaker says of the current system set up by the state merit board, "It stinks." Even if an employee wins a grievance, it can be appealed to the state personnel board, which has no union representatives on it. Not surprisingly, "80 percent of the appeals are won by the state," says Stonebreaker.

GSEA's decision to join a union grew



out of other concerns as well. The association had to file a lawsuit to stop the abuse of their pension fund by state officials, and health insurance benefits were recently slashed. Stonebreaker says the decision to unionize was "a matter of dignity. . . . They [managers] treat state employees as second-class citizens."

Many of the non-GSEA state employees belong to various associations set up soon after GSEA was formed in 1975. Stonebreaker believes these were established as part of a divide-and-conquer strategy to keep workers from joining a large association that could be effective. Indeed, GSEA finances were so low before the decision to form an SEIU local that the association had to suspend production of its newsletter. Now, reports Stonebreaker, the initial response has been enthusiastic. She notes that a worker in one department asked for 100 membership applications, and called back a few days later to get 100 more.

SEIU already had 3,000 Georgia members in the private sector, primarily in nursing homes and in building maintenance. The union hopes that with the GSEA decision, "SEIU has a real foothold from which we can make a difference in the Deep South," according to national president John Sweeney. Since 45,000 state workers are eligible to join the union, there is a lot of organizing to do — and a lot of potential for SEIU and GSEA to establish themselves, says Stonebreaker, "as a strong voice for employees at every level of state government." She adds, "Very frankly, this is what we needed several years ago."

— thanks to Service Employee

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Workers' School in the Black Belt

From February to June of this year, organizers of the Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ) sponsored a unique and vital educational activity in the black belt of eastern North Carolina. The uniqueness of the Workers' School, as the program was called, lay in its approach and goals, says Gordon Dillahunt, one of the school's organizers. "Normally, when we think of education for workers today, we think of some type of training associated with job related skills. As a rule this training is provided by the employer largely for the benefit of the company and production. But the Workers' School was developed in the tradition of militant rank-and-file trade unionism with its objective of placing workers in a better position to resist wage cuts, speed-ups and increasingly worse health and safety conditions," says Dillahunt.

More than 50 workers attended. Support for the school came from a number of groups throughout the state, including the Carolina Community Project, which offered both technical assistance and resources. Instruction for the classes was provided by several black activists and organizers from around the country, including Don Stone, a former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee organizer. Films were also a part of the curricu-

lum, including *Fundi* about veteran black organizer Ella Baker and *Finally Got the News* about Detroit's League of Revolutionary Black Workers trade union movement in the late '60s. According to Naeema Muhammed, chairperson of the school curriculum committee, the school produced a number of important gains for the Black Workers for Justice program. She stated, "The school gave people confidence and direction in going back to the community to organize. . . . The curriculum was based on the work that the BWFJ was already engaged in such as the [anti-discrimination] K-Mart struggle of 1981, or the CP&L anti-discrimination organizing going on currently. Most of our focus has centered around discrimination, unsafe working conditions, sexual harrassment, and building stronger trade unions."

BWFJ organizers say the structure of the school combined nuts-and-bolts practical problems with the theoretical/historical underpinnings of workers' lives on and off the job. "Poor organization or the lack of any organization, the production of leaflets, developing a union shop, and methods of conducting effective meetings were among the practical problems tackled," said Dillahunt. "But the school also posed and provided views on questions such as: How did Afro-American people become an oppressed nation in the black belt South? Why are the black freedom movement and the labor movement natural allies in spite of historical and

current problems? How and why can the black freedom movement give leadership to all the movements for social change in this country?"

Dillahunt concluded, "Many people anticipate that the school will help organizing in this area take a qualitative leap in the coming years."

— thanks to Gordon Dillahunt

Co-op Housing as Alternative in Austin

In Austin, Texas, affordable housing is a key issue. As one solution, reports *Building Economic Alternatives*, the Austin Community Neighborhood Chest recently purchased a mobile park and will develop it as a limited equity housing co-op. The people living there will collectively own their homes. The Neighborhood Chest is a spinoff of College Houses and the Intercooperative Council, two groups begun by University of Texas students.

According to College Houses executive director Francie Ferguson, the Neighborhood Chest now owns two properties in town, and co-op housing is an accepted part of the city's development strategy. The local chamber of commerce mentioned co-op housing in a recent report, she says, and in the last city council election, a slate that included some environmentalists and "slow-growers" triumphed in this city plagued by a number of problems associated with extremely fast growth. "We're finally hitting critical mass," she says.

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photo courtesy Black Workers for Justice



A SESSION AT THE WORKERS' SCHOOL

Rebels in Law

— by Lincoln Bates

Two years ago, Laurie Fowler and Vicki Bremen, then recent graduates of the University of Georgia Law School, knocked on doors of Atlanta law firms. What they wanted was shingle space for a practice in the emerging field of environmental law. "You don't want to be with us," they were told. "We're on the other side. We represent the defendants."

Fowler and Bremen were determined to use their legal skills on behalf of the environment, not industry. They saw a need for legal assistance to those confronting Georgia's environmental problems — a result of the state's rapid growth. In-state population increased 20 percent between 1972 and 1982, while the city of Atlanta witnessed some \$3.7 billion worth of new construction projects in the first half of 1984 alone. With Georgia already ranked 20th nationally in generating hazardous waste, Bremen and Fowler decided it was time to do something: they opened a Georgia branch of the Legal Environmental Assistance Foundation, or LEAF.

Originating in Birmingham, Alabama in 1979, LEAF is the South's only regional public interest environmental law firm. It was founded in response to the Sunbelt's burgeoning environmental problems — water pollution, waste disposal, and energy use, all part and parcel of the region's rapid expansion. The LEAF chapters — located in Tallahassee, Florida; Knoxville, Tennessee; Birmingham, Alabama; and Atlanta — share a common board of directors, regional grant money, and some projects. But each office raises most of its own funds, has its own members, and chooses its own cases, focusing primarily on local problems.

Thirteen-year Georgia resident Vicki Bremen was a registered nurse when, at age 40, she decided, "I wanted to refocus my career" on health-

related environmental issues. The Sierra Club veteran saw law school as the best way to get involved. There she met 25-year-old Laurie Fowler. Finding a close match between their philosophies and aims, they decided to team up to tackle environmental law.

Fowler and Bremen see Georgia LEAF as a watchdog, ensuring compliance with federal, state, and local codes. But, says Fowler, it's not easy to get public and private sectors to work together unless they are "prodded with a stick." That's what we sometimes have to do, she adds.

Little more than a year after its founding, Georgia LEAF has one staff attorney (Bremen), an office manager, more than 200 paying members, and a lot of volunteer help. The chapter's organizational members include such groups as the Atlanta Sierra Club, which pays a set fee for legal consultation and representation. And the two attorneys have been very, very busy:

- Georgia LEAF helped North Georgia residents win a temporary restraining order against the federal Drug Enforcement Administration's program of spraying the controversial pesticide paraquat on marijuana crops. The DEA must now produce an environmental impact statement.

- In response to complaints about the spraying of two potent herbicides, tordon and velpar, by the U.S. Forest Service on northern Georgia, LEAF produced a citizens' manual on pesticide regulation in order to provide Georgia residents with information on their legal options.

- Representing a citizens' group in White County, Georgia, LEAF won a court verdict preventing Oglethorpe Power Company from stringing high voltage lines across a scenic and historic stretch of the Sautee Valley.

- Georgia LEAF furthered the campaign to deny an operating license to Georgia Power Company — the state's largest utility — for its Vogtle nuclear power plant on the Savannah River by raising unresolved health and safety



Illustration by Frank Holyfield

problems and excessive rate hikes before the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

- LEAF recently drafted strengthening language for a weak Right to Know bill already introduced in the Georgia legislature.

In addition, Bremen drafted a report on the 50 municipal waste sites in Georgia that appear on the U.S. Superfund inventory. "The purpose," she says, "is to highlight the problems for the state legislature." The group has also been involved in controversies surrounding soil erosion and sedimentation, utility construction financing, and acid rain.

Has all this activity had any effect? "Georgia Power must now think before acting," Bremen and Fowler assert, "and the state environmental protection division knows we won't go away." Robert Kerr, director of the Georgia Conservancy, calls LEAF "a catalyst" and an "excellent" concept, but feels it's too soon to foresee LEAF's impact. "They are taking on some controversial issues," Kerr says, "and there's a place for that in Georgia."

"One thing about the Southeast," says Bremen, "there's still time to make a difference." □

LEAF can be contacted at: 1102 Healey Building, 57 Forsyth Street, Atlanta, GA 30303; (404)688-3299.

Lincoln Bates has contributed environmental pieces to *Oceans*, *Westways*, *Coastal Journal* and others. This article previously appeared in *Environmental Action* magazine, 1525 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

Films on Labor ...

The cameras have been whirring away of late, and news of interesting documentaries arrives regularly in our mailbox. First Run Features, for example, has two new films on labor issues. *The Great Weirton Steel* concerns the controversial employee buy-out of the Weirton Steel Company in the company town of Weirton, West Virginia, where workers were told that by taking severe pay cuts and borrowing large sums, they could save their jobs and town by buying out the mill. The film follows the story by letting the people speak for themselves, probing the big questions about such plans. Are employee stock ownership plans just one more way of extracting concessions from workers? Or can they signal a basic transformation of the workplace? What is the relationship between ownership and control? Produced by Robert Machover, directed by Catherine Pozzo di Borgo; 58 minutes.

The Work I've Done depicts the emotional and psychological effects of retirement for blue-collar workers by focusing on one auto worker who is about to retire and on several others who already have. The significance of work in our lives, and how we define ourselves after we've stopped working, are explored. Produced and directed by Ken Fink; 56 minutes. Both features are available in 16mm film or videocassette and are distributed by First Run Features, 153 Waverly Place, New York, NY 10014; ☎ (212) 243-0600.

Sarah Ogan Gunning lived through the coalfield wars of the 1930s and wrote and sang songs whose fighting spirit inspired union miners and their people. Over the past 50 years she came often to the Highlander Center for workshops on the life and culture of coalmining communities, continuing to inspire, until her death in 1983. The center has now produced *Always Sing My Songs*, a 29-minute videotape of Gunning at Highlander over her last 10 years. It includes seven songs and a

good deal of talking about Gunning's early life, the conditions that led to the songs, and what concerned her in the 1970s and '80s. Highlander also has many other tapes documenting its educational and cultural work for rent or purchase. Send for a catalogue: Route 3, Box 370, New Market, TN 37820; ☎ (615) 933-3443.



... and on Stereotypes

Among the numerous filmstrips produced by the Council on Interracial Books for Children are three on "un-learning stereotypes," geared to elementary and junior high school audiences. The three deal, respectively, with Indians, Asian-Americans, and Chicanos and Puerto Ricans. Each features children of the ethnic background under discussion; the children talk about their culture and the harm done them and their families by experiences grounded in ethnic stereotypes. Each filmstrip comes with a teacher's guide full of ideas for discussion, classroom activities, role-plays, historical information, statistics, and so forth. For a catalogue, write CIBC, 1841 Broadway, New York, NY 10023; ☎ (212) 757-5339.

... and Alternative Views

Media activists in many cities successfully lobbied their city governments to require cable TV franchises to provide free access to a channel for shows produced by and for local viewers — public access television. For several years now, people in Austin, Texas, have been privy to one of its most creative uses — a weekly public affairs program that its founders see as a precursor to a "left television net-

work." Called "Alternative Views," it offers locally produced interviews and documentaries and sometimes broadcasts films from outside Texas that are never aired on the networks. The good news for non-Austinites is that most of their shows are on videotape for use on other cities' public access stations. The *Alternative Views Program Catalog* and its updates list 200 shows that have aired, most of which are available for purchase. There are interviews with numerous local activists, as well as nationally known figures lured into the studio while visiting Austin. And there are issue-oriented shows on nearly every topic recently of interest to progressives. Get the catalogue from the Alternative Information Network, P.O. Box 7279, Austin, TX 78712; ☎ (512) 453-4894.

The Media Network, an information center on alternative media, has some resources of interest. The *Guide to Community Media* recommends and annotates films, videotapes, and slide shows about organizing campaigns, mostly in urban communities, where



people have fought to better their social conditions. Topics include economic development, racial conflict, housing displacement, and environmental hazards. *A Guide to Films on Reproductive Rights* offers lengthy, critical annotations of dozens of films — it covers abortion, birth control, sexuality, sterilization, health care, and other subjects. *Mobilizing Media* is a report on creative uses the peace movement has made of film for grassroots organizing and education, and there is also a new update to the *Guide to Disarmament Media*. Each guide costs \$2.00 plus 50 cents postage. Media Network, 208 West 13th Street, New York, NY 10011; ☎ (212) 620-0877.

VOICES OF OUR NEIGHBORS

INDIA

The South's Bhopal Connection

In December 1984, methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas leaked from a Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, India, killing thousands of people and affecting hundreds of thousands. John Gaventa and Juliet Merrifield of Tennessee's Highlander Center had been working in India earlier in that year, at the invitation of the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), an education and research group. Among other things, they had been taking part in PRIA's program on occupational health. When the Bhopal disaster happened, a joint project developed between the two groups, including information exchange, publication of a report on Bhopal, and the planning of a visit to the U.S. by activists who had been responding to the tragedy in India. In June 1985 four Indian labor activists traveled through the Southeastern U.S. on this jointly sponsored visit.

The purpose of the tour was to share experiences and to develop links with community and labor groups facing environmental and occupational health problems in the U.S., and to inform Americans about the continuing tragedy at Bhopal. In the South, the tour connected with many groups affected by Union Carbide operations. In Institute, West Virginia, they met with workers from Carbide's only other MIC facility and with members of the community group, People Concerned About MIC. At Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, they joined with the North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Project and the East Coast Farmworker Support Network to demand information from Carbide's agricultural chemical research facility there. In Woodbine, Georgia, they met with the International Chemical Workers Union local, which passed a resolution in support of Bhopal workers and



RAJESH TANDON, LEFT, AND GANESH PANDEY AT INSTITUTE, WEST VIRGINIA.

filed a demand for a union health and safety inspection at their own Carbide plant. In Lawrence County, Kentucky, they met with a group concerned about plans to incinerate MIC and other toxic chemicals in that rural community.

They found common links not only with people affected by MIC and Union Carbide, but also with those involved in broader health and safety struggles: for Right to Know legislation; against strip mining and land destruction; for protection from PCB contamination; for prevention of black lung disease, brown lung, and tendonitis. At a meeting at Highlander following the Southern portion of the tour, the delegation shared their concerns about Bhopal and their responses to what they had seen here.

GANESH PANDEY: WHAT HAPPENED AT BHOPAL

Ganesh Pandey is a labor organizer and educator from Kanpur, a major textile center. He has been traveling around India, helping to mobilize response to Bhopal among labor unions.

Union Carbide's pesticide factory in Bhopal was set up in the 1970s. Some 650 workers are employed there, and another 350 work on the contract labor system. In early 1981 they started

production of MIC. This is the chemical which it is said leaked from their storage tanks, some 40 tons, on the nights of December 2nd and 3rd. It caused this disaster in which about 5,000 or more people died. (Nobody will ever be able to know what was the real number.)

Bhopal has a population of 800,000. It is the state capital, a very fast-growing and densely populated city. Almost a quarter of the population was affected by the gas. And out of that, some 60,000 people are still affected. For the rest of their lives, they are going to live a very inferior kind of existence. They have serious headaches and loss of memory; many have eyesight problems; they also have problems of nose, throat, and breathlessness. Most of the people affected are very poor people, those who were living on the periphery of the factory. For their survival, for their basic existence, they were dependent on their manual labor. Many of them were cart-pullers; many were vendors; many were domestic servants. Now it is not possible for them to exert physical labor.

We feel that the accident was avoidable. Union Carbide was storing a deadly chemical without taking appropriate precautions. They were not observing the safety devices that were necessary. There are three main devices there for safety: the scrubber, the water curtain, and the flare tower. None of these three safety devices were working. Even if they had been working, the design of the plant was so defective that they would not have taken care of such a runaway reaction and massive leak.

It was cold that winter night, and people were sleeping when the gas entered their homes. Thousands and thousands of people started running from their houses. Those who had cars ran away in cars; those who had scooters and motorcycles tried to run away on scooters and motorcycles. But many people did not have these things, and they were running on foot.

VOICES OF OUR NEIGHBORS

People in the thousands started running to city hospitals. But the hospitals were not in a position to deal with such a big calamity. They started asking the company management and the company doctors, "What is this chemical? What are its effects? What are the antidotes?" The company people were not willing to reveal any information. Originally they said the reaction would be very short-lived: "There is no need for panic. This gas is not going to be more serious than ordinary tear gas." They were making this kind of statement when people were already dying on the street. If, even at that time, some information had been revealed, many, many lives could have been saved. But they continued to die; they died in Bhopal and they died in the place they

had run to. And those who remained, those who could not die, were more unfortunate.

In India, we have people who are very angry. We had this feeling that they do such things to us, but they may not be doing such things in their own country. But coming here was an astonishing experience. These multinational companies are only interested in the almighty dollar. We have seen for ourselves that they are not interested in the health and safety of their own people. We have seen how the work and living is hazardous even in Institute, West Virginia.

It has been a very emotional experience for us to discover that wherever we have gone on this tour, we have found people concerned about

Bhopal. They wanted to know more, and many people told us that they had cried when they had seen the news about Bhopal on television or read about it in the newspapers.

RAJESH TANDON: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE SOUTH

Rajesh Tandon is coordinator of PRIA.

Over the last couple of weeks of this tour, a set of myths we held about the land of gold and plenty have been shattered. Traveling in this part of the Appalachian region we have seen poverty, we have seen deprivation, we have seen powerlessness. We have seen the uncivil, almost barbaric, character of your society, which we in the Third World are normally accused of by the First World. You have a Third World

NO PLACE TO RUN: UNION CARBIDE'S SOUTHERN PRESENCE

Communities and workers in several parts of the South have a special connection with the Bhopal tragedy. Institute, West Virginia, is the only other place in the world where Union Carbide makes MIC, the chemical that killed in Bhopal. MIC was routinely shipped from Institute down interstates and railroads to other chemical plants in the South: to Woodbine, Georgia, to be made into the toxic pesticide Temik; to La Porte, Texas, to be made into similar Du Pont pesticides. Other Carbide operations scattered across the South range from chemical plants in Texas City, Texas, and Taft, Louisiana, to nuclear weapons components in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. A look at the health and safety record of these operations shows a range of threats to workers' and neighbors' health and lives.

Institute, West Virginia

The first Union Carbide plant at Institute was built in 1941 to make synthetic rubber for the war effort. Now the plant uses a deadly item from the inventory of chemical warfare, phosgene, to make the intermediate chemical MIC; from MIC the pesti-

cides Sevin, Larvin, and Methomyl are made.

Residents in this small, predominantly black town which crowds close to the plant remember frightening incidents, including an explosion and evacuation of the community in 1954. Workers recall a series of fires, explosions, and leaks, and their own exposures to MIC and other toxic gases. After Bhopal, the federal Environmental Protection Agency found there had been a series of small leaks of MIC from the Institute plant. Toxic chemicals, including known and suspected carcinogens, are also routinely emitted into the air from the plant's process vents.

Carbide has other plants in the Kanawha Valley, and is the largest of the chemical company employers in the area. At its South Charleston plant, it makes a large range of chemicals. Residents of North Charleston, downwind from the plant, were found by the West Virginia Health Department to suffer cancer at twice the national rate. Yet who can prove connections between the chemicals in the air and the cancer cases?

Workers, too, are experiencing increased rates of certain diseases. Among vinyl chloride workers at South Charleston were found six of the 63 cases identified worldwide of angiosarcoma, a rare cancer associat-



ed with vinyl chloride. They also have four times the expected rate of leukemia and twice the expected rate of brain cancer. Yet three years after this 1976 study, one of Carbide's medical directors was quoted in the local newspaper as saying, "to my knowledge there is no evidence on the face of the earth to link incidences of brain tumors to vinyl chloride."

Texas City, Texas

A worker in Carbide's huge chemical complex here developed brain cancer in 1978 and noticed an unusual number of fellow workers with the disease. He alerted the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Three years later NIOSH announced that it had found 22 cases of brain cancer among 20-year workers at the plant, a rate three times the national average. The company denied that a problem existed.

VOICES OF OUR NEIGHBORS

within your First World.

We have seen the superficial character of democracy in this country. We have seen how company towns operate, how without the company's uttering a word, people in the Kanawha Valley, West Virginia, are scared of the chemical giants there. Carbide doesn't need to bring out an ad in the paper, but you feel it; you feel it in terms of the power of the corporation; you feel it in terms of people unwilling even to talk about pollution. People are really scared.

We have also seen how systematically and subtly information, knowledge, and the media are used in your country to control the minds and thoughts and actions of people. We held a press conference in West Virginia to release *No Place to Run*, a joint publication

brought out by us and Highlander Center (see sidebar). One reporter got up and said, "Is this objective?" And one of us asked, "Have you ever raised that question of Union Carbide?" "No." So the information put out from Union Carbide and the likes of Union Carbide in this country is the "truth"; and the experience of the workers and the experience of the citizens are all "biased." That is control of the media.

We have also seen the divisions that exist in this country — divisions around color, around race, around sex, around region. We always heard that India was a society of diversity, of divisions based on castes, creeds. A very few of us down in India have heard about *your* caste system. And let me tell you, yours is as rigid as ours, if not worse. Our



working class is divided around caste and religion and region. Your working class is divided among whites and blacks and men and women. So we have

Pesticides: Temik

Temik, a pesticide made from MIC, is probably the most toxic pesticide on the market in the U.S. today. Union Carbide started marketing it in the 1970s to fight nematodes, tiny worms which attack the roots of plants. Temik works on humans in much the same way that it works on nematodes: by affecting nerve transmission and causing muscles and glands to fail. By 1983 Temik was being used on fruit and vegetable crops in 38 states and exported to 60 nations.

Carbide claimed that Temik was short-lived in the soil, and could not migrate into drinking water supplies and threaten human health or the environment. In 1982 Temik was found in drinking water aquifers in Florida. The pesticide was banned for a year on citrus crops there, then reinstated after lobbying by powerful citrus growers. Since then Temik has been found in drinking water — and banned — in several other states.

Oak Ridge, Tennessee

One of the worst examples of Union Carbide's health and safety record has been in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. For over 40 years from the Manhattan Project of World War II, Union Carbide operated a nuclear weapons component facility for the U.S. government. Carbide's Oak Ridge

operations were subject to little government monitoring, and almost no outside scrutiny. "National security" was used as a screen for the indiscriminate dumping of toxic chemicals and radioactive materials into streams, unlined pits, ponds, and soils, and for the contamination of workers.

Mercury is one of the worst examples of chemical contamination at Oak Ridge. During the 1950s and '60s, one-third of all the known mercury in the world was brought to Oak Ridge for use in separating lithium-6, a vital ingredient in making hydrogen bombs. A huge quantity of mercury was lost: some 2.4 million pounds is unaccounted for, and most probably lies underneath the plant building. Some 475,000 pounds are known to have been spilled into a creek, and some 30,000 pounds are thought to have escaped into the air.

Meanwhile, workers were being exposed to very high concentrations of mercury vapor. In 1955 close to 50 percent of the workers in one section had mercury in their urine at levels above the 0.2 milligrams per liter which is considered dangerous. Although they were probably the best tested workers in industry at the time, they were not told of the results of these tests — or of the hazards to which they were exposed.

Taft, Louisiana

If a Bhopal were to happen in the United States, it might have occurred in the pouring rain of the middle of the night of December 11, 1982, in Taft, Louisiana. A tank containing acrolein at the Union Carbide plant exploded, blowing out windows a mile and a half upriver. Acrolein can be fatal when absorbed through the skin, inhaled, or swallowed. Union Carbide did not inform local emergency officials for four hours after the blast, but at last did call and recommend an evacuation out of fear that other tanks could blow. Within three hours, 17,000 people had been evacuated — an evacuation plan had been developed fortuitously for a nearby nuclear plant. Such evacuation plans are neither mandatory nor common around chemical plants. Now Union Carbide faces scores of negligence suits for damages resulting from exposure to the gas. □

This information comes from the newly published report, No Place to Run: Local Realities and Global Issues of the Bhopal Tragedy. Published jointly by the Highlander Center and The Society for Participatory Research in Asia, the report is available from Highlander, Rt. 3, Box 370, New Market, TN 37820. Price: \$5, plus \$1 postage and handling.

VOICES OF OUR NEIGHBORS

learned about the difficulty in bringing together solidarity across the poor and oppressed, because systematically the poor and oppressed are kept divided.

In India we have been struggling on occupational and environmental health issues for a couple of years. We always come up against this issue of high unemployment; workers understandably are willing to take any kind of job, irrespective of safety considerations, because they are hungry. But we have seen that the jobs and safety dichotomy is being used in this country, too. If people raise an issue about health and safety, corporations and politicians say, "Well, you might lose your jobs." That's unfair. We should have jobs and we should have safety.

We have seen examples of the systematic perpetuation of underdevelopment in the Appalachian region. We have seen the extent of corporate power and control. We have seen how difficult it has been for a textile union to unionize Hanes workers in Galax, Virginia. That has brought home to us the essential commonality of the forces we are dealing with. They may take different forms, but they are essentially the same in terms of the way they affect the poor and the deprived in your country and ours.

We have seen that we alone do not suffer from lack of information. We have seen that despite your Freedom of Information Act, and despite concerted efforts to acquire Right to Know legislation about hazardous chemicals in your country, people in Institute, West Virginia, don't know what's going on in the Carbide plant there. And people in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, did not know whether MIC was stored in Carbide's research facility until the company was forced to answer questions while we were there.

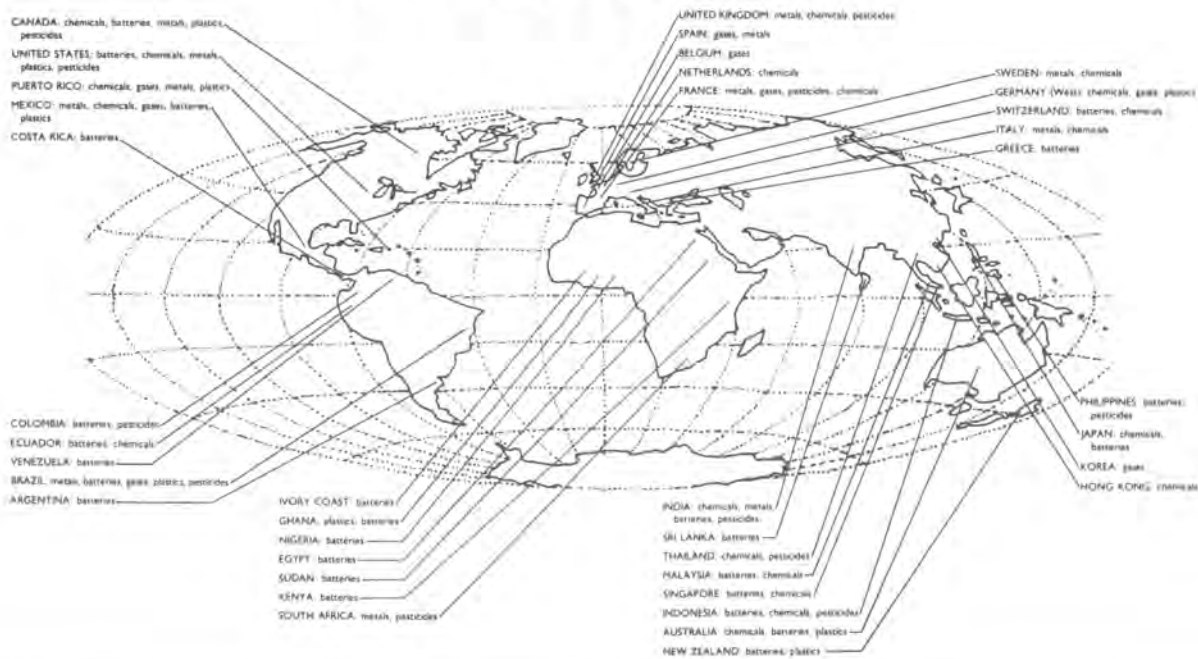
This tour has given us a sense of the kind of struggles that are being waged in your country, the kind of efforts that citizens collectively, workers collectively, are making to deal with these strong, powerful forces of oppression and control. Those struggles have given us inspiration and hope for our country. We have always believed that for us to tackle the forces of American control and hegemony in our context, we have to have people in this country who challenge that force as well. Without that, we will not succeed. Therefore, learning about the struggle around Right to Know, learning about the struggle around unionizing a new group, learning about the struggle of mineworkers, learning about the strug-

gle of farm labor, has given us both inspiration and hope.

We have begun to recognize something we had known a little, but which has been strengthened: the almost desperate need for international linkage, collaboration, and solidarity. Working on the booklet *No Place to Run* with Highlander has exposed us to the poor, almost deplorable health and safety record of Union Carbide worldwide, including in this country. That has been powerful information in our struggle with Union Carbide in India — understanding that Bhopal was not an isolated incident; it is part of the pattern. It can happen in Institute, it can happen anywhere down the line.

Observing the response of American workers to Bhopal through the videotape that Highlander made and sent to us also gave us the hope that there is a possibility of building working class solidarity across the borders, that there is a possibility of linking up people who are concerned about similar issues. People struggling in your country and we in our country can begin to share information about problems and solutions. Without developing international perspectives, I think we in our different worlds are only going to fight losing battles. □

UNION CARBIDE OPERATIONS: COUNTRIES AND PRINCIPAL PRODUCTS



Illustrations courtesy Highlander Center



Gay-baiting in Southern Politics

BY JOE HERZENBERG

Gay-baiting is new in Southern politics. There is reason to believe that gay-baiting will replace black-baiting as the meanest article in the bag of tricks for conservative Southern politicians. Certainly the white Southern electorate, considerably less provincial and less prejudiced against blacks than before the Civil Rights Movement, and the increasing participation of blacks in regional politics, means that any black-baiting today, especially in a statewide campaign, must be far subtler than before. This is hardly the case with gay-baiting.

MISSISSIPPI 1983

In Mississippi the gubernatorial campaign in the fall of 1983 had been quiet. Attorney General Bill Allain, the Democratic candidate, was way ahead in all the polls. No one predicted a Republican victory in this state whose last GOP governor was chased out of office in 1875 at the end of Reconstruction.

Less than two weeks before the election, all hell broke loose when three black drag queens in the state capital of Jackson produced sworn statements, supported by results from lie detector tests, charging Allain had frequently paid them for sexual relations over several years. Allain immediately denied the charges as "damnably vi-

cious, malicious lies." Outgoing Governor William Winter said he "couldn't recall a race of such vicious attempted character assassination and personal attack."

Nightly appearances on statewide television by the drag queens in question made their accusation the principal issue, or at least incident, of the campaign. Sworn statements by Jackson police officers saying they had seen Allain cruising in areas frequented by black male prostitutes provided additional evidence that the attorney general had crossed racial as well as gender lines in his sex life. Allain, divorced since 1970, had never remarried, while Leon Bramlett, the Republican candidate, had been campaigning all along as "a family man."

The voters of Mississippi were confused over what and whom to believe. Allain had been a popular attorney general, noted especially for his advocacy for consumers. The charges against him were powerful stuff — "real gutter politics . . . can't get much gutterier," according to one longtime observer of Mississippi politics. But the role of Concerned Citizens for Responsible Government, a group organized by top Bramlett supporters, in locating the drag queens and then paying their expenses during several days of overwhelming media attention to

this incident not only raised serious doubts about the truth of the charges but also stirred up some backlash against Bramlett. Hinds County (Jackson) supervisor Bennie Thompson, a black Democrat, said at the time that most voters saw the incident as "a desperate roll of the dice on behalf of the Republicans." Concerned Citizens for Responsible Government replied that they were trying to spare Mississippi the embarrassment it had suffered only a few years earlier over the career of Congressman Jon Hinson. Elected to Congress in 1980 after denying allegations of homosexuality, Hinson, a Republican, was later forced to resign after his arrest for attempted sodomy in a House office building men's room in Washington.

On election day, Mississippi voters elected Bill Allain their next governor. He won easily, but not by the 20-point margin predicted before the emergence of the three black drag queens. But what to make of the effect of gay-baiting on this election in Mississippi? The consensus, according to Kirk Phillips, chair of the Democratic Caucus of the Mississippi Gay Alliance, is that the charges of sex with black men lost Allain some votes, but not many: "A lot of people couldn't fathom it at all. A lot of people didn't believe the accusations or didn't want to believe them, and a lot of members of the local gay community think the charges were probably true."

TEXAS 1984

Gay-baiting erupted into attention in Mississippi in 1983. In Texas in 1984 it mainly simmered. The office in question was a United States Senate seat open by retirement of the incumbent; and the object of the gay-baiting, from the spring primary campaign through the November general election, was Lloyd Doggett, a liberal Democrat.

It started during the last two weeks before the May primary. Kent Hance, the most conservative of the Democratic candidates, who has since switched to the Republicans, pointed out on a number of occasions that Doggett had the endorsements of the gay political caucuses of Houston, Austin, and Dallas, and also that of Lesbian and Gay Democrats of Texas. (These four gay groups had indeed endorsed Doggett.) In the general elec-

tion campaign, from early summer on, Republican candidate Phil Gramm, a congressman who had himself first run as a conservative Democrat before switching parties, picked up Hance's themes that Doggett was soft on homosexuality, labor unions, and military matters.

It was an incident from back in May that turned up the heat on gay-baiting in Texas. The Alamo Human Rights Committee, a gay organization in San Antonio, gave Doggett a \$604 contribution, \$354 of which had been raised at a male strip show. Doggett later returned the contribution when he learned how it had been raised and when it began to surface as a campaign issue.

Months later, in August, the Gramm organization ran a saturation radio advertisement campaign using a tape in which a woman announces she is going to talk about "gay rights, male strip shows, traditional family values, and the Texas Senate race. And gay rights. Lloyd Doggett actively sought and received the endorsement of gay and lesbian groups and supports the gay rights bill which would give homosexuals special status before the law. It would also make them eligible for a hiring program previously reserved only for minorities. Homosexual groups in San Antonio even had the poor taste to hold an all-male strip show to raise money for Doggett." Following up on the radio campaign, Gramm accused Doggett of "undermining family values" and "pandering to homosexuals."

In what one observer described as "an unusually negative campaign, even for Texas, where cactus and barbed wire are as common in politics as on the plains," gay-baiting was only one of several points of the attack Gramm made on Doggett. But it seemed to be the charge that threw Doggett most off balance. The Democrat's usual response was that he was not for special status for gays, but didn't plan to engage in a campaign of hate against them and supported the idea of protecting them against job discrimination. "Given the choice between a candidate who opposes job discrimination for gays and one who supports cuts in Social Security, I think I know where Texans will be anytime," Doggett argued.



photos courtesy Texas Observer

PHIL GRAMM, LEFT, IN HIS CAMPAIGN FOR SENATE ACCUSED LLOYD DOGGETT OF "UNDERMINING FAMILY VALUES" AND "PANDERING TO HOMOSEXUALS."

Lloyd Doggett was mistaken. Phil Gramm, along with Ronald Reagan and a horde of fellow Republicans, won in Texas. Many observers say the effect of the gay-baiting on the outcome of the election was, as in Mississippi, hardly decisive. According to Janna Zumbun, founding co-chair of Lesbian and Gay Democrats of Texas, gay-baiting "was a factor and hurt Doggett, but, considering the Gramm landslide, it was only one of several factors accounting for his loss."

In the wake of November's conservative victory in Texas came a decided defeat for gay politics in Houston. In January 1985, conservatives forced a referendum on a city ordinance prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in municipal employment practices. (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, whose 1975 personnel ordinance prohibits job discrimination on the basis of "affectional preference," is the only Southern jurisdiction with such gay rights legislation in place.) After a strong campaign by Republicans and business interests and a low turnout by progressive and even gay voters, the anti-discrimination ordinance was repealed by a vote of 82 percent to 18 percent. Lee Harrington, past president of the Houston Gay Political Caucus, reports that the Houston referendum fight lacked the "real intentional meanness" of the Gramm campaign against Doggett. Harrington believes that the defeat in

Houston, a city with a reputation more progressive than it deserves, stemmed from the prevalence of more misinformation than could be combated and reveals the extensiveness of the gay educational, as well as political, agenda.

The referendum raises questions about the future of progressive as well as gay politics in Houston. Annise Parker, current chair of the Gay Political Caucus, reports increasing death and bomb threats left on the telephone answering machines of gay and lesbian activists. She also reports some distancing occurring between local straight politicians and the gay community. But she believes that, despite the referendum results, the gay community still has lots of friends and the progressive electorate is still strong. Former Gay Political Caucus chair Larry Bagneris anticipates a tight battle between Mayor Kathy Whitmire, a leading advocate of gay rights, and her conservative opposition in the city elections in November 1985. Annise Parker agrees that the campaign will be rough, but notes that Houston voters are fairly sophisticated: "Whitmire has been gay-baited in the past, both times when she has run. And both times she has won." □

Joe Herzenberg is a gay political activist and former town council member in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.



Anatomy of an Election

BY MAB SEGREST

"The invective used by the right has produced a mentality that says that gays are less than people — and therefore one can treat them as less than people. I'm at a loss to understand why it has gone on for so long, and why so few people have taken issue with it. They have not only made us victims in their direct-mail pieces, but they have gotten rich doing it."

— Virginia Apuzzo, director, of the National Gay Task Force

The 1984 election in the United States saw the widespread use of gay-baiting by the New Right. On the whole it was not a tactic that Democrats or progressives knew how to counter. We experienced these tactics in North Carolina most personally, with the Congressional Club based here and the Moral Majority based next door in Virginia.

Nowhere was gay-baiting more virulent than in North Carolina, but the phenomenon occurred nationwide:

- In Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley, Jane Wells Schooley, a former National Organization of Women (NOW) vice-president who was running as a Democratic candidate for Congress, came under attack for supporting gays. She lost.

- In Iowa, liberal congressman Tom Harkin was portrayed as a puppet of big labor, NOW, and radical lesbians. Harkin ran against New Right incumbent Roger Jepsen. Harkin won.

- In California, conservative state

senator Bill Richardson was so impressed by the calls and letters he received protesting a bill in the state legislature to ban job discrimination against gays and lesbians that he began talking about changing from gun activism to building a new organization dedicated to attacking gays. He wants to organize 600,000 Christian fundamentalists in California into a voting bloc.

- The Republican parties of Texas, Minnesota, Nevada, and North Carolina went on record as favoring a ban on homosexuality.

- Richard Viguerie, the New Right's direct-mail wizard, said of his plans to send out 50 million letters in 1984 on behalf of conservative groups: "We'll hit two issues. Democrats' courting of the gay vote and liberals being soft on Communism."

"In the current race, homosexuals have supplanted communists." That was the comment of Claude Sitton, editor of the *Raleigh News and Observer* about North Carolina's 1984 Senate race between Republican incumbent Jesse Helms and then-Governor Jim Hunt. That campaign and others in 1984 left me with many specific questions: What is the relationship between rabid homophobes and politicians who coordinate their election strategies with the hatemongers? What arguments are offered by the New Right and how can we counter them? How do we show the

relationship between homophobic language and homophobic violence? How do gay people work with political party officials and hierarchies and also continue other forms of grassroots organizing? How do heterosexuals realize the importance of dealing with homophobia?

What happened in North Carolina in 1984 was a classic example of the manner in which the advances of any movement create a backlash. Homosexuals had gained significant political victories in North Carolina that year. The Lesbian and Gay Democrats managed its gay rights plank through nearly 100 precincts and five county conventions, educating party members and gaining support. On June 2, district conventions convened; the Fourth District passed the gay resolution and elected Joe Herzenberg as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in San Francisco. A gay activist and ex-Chapel Hill town council member, Herzenberg also had the backing of the state AFL-CIO, the North Carolina Association of Educators, and the state NOW. The state convention saw another surprising and dramatic victory: the inclusion of a gay rights statement in the North Carolina Democratic Party Platform.

The victory at the state convention also illustrated a major question underlying increased activity for homosexuals in party politics. The statement endorsed by the convention added "sexual orientation" to the section of the platform advocating "fair representation for all citizens." It was a victory to get any positive language on sexual orientation into the platform, but the Democrats equivocated. When accused of having endorsed gay rights, a member of the platform committee explained, "If indeed the convention had endorsed 'gay rights,' any such amendment would have been included in the section 'V. HUMAN RIGHTS.'" Since the Republican platform later expressed "disgust" at the Democrats' "embrace" of gay rights, the Democrats might as well have taken the strong stand for which they got the credit/vilification.

As always, fear and violence were at work behind the backlash. In the last half of 1983, *The Front Page*, a newspaper serving the gay and lesbian communities in the Carolinas, carried

Faggots Dominate Fourth Congressional District Convention

The faggots worked the crowd like magicians in a master plan. They had their ducks in a row for the second time and the so-called Gay Rights Resolution passed. It was no surprise. It was lead by the Orange County delegation where fags have been elected to the Chapel Hill Town Council, appointed to the Planning Board and elected precinct officers. The elections and selection of delegates to the national convention and the passing of all the other Resolutions for the Peaceniks, Feminists, Freeriders and others passed without fanfare.

David Price, Chairman of the Democratic party made a very moving speech. Just as soon as he started two-thirds of the audience walked out and milled around the base and outside on the grounds near the concession stand. Occasionally someone would come in, peep in the auditorium and say, "Is he still at it?" The last item on the agenda was reported out by the Resolutions Committee without recommendation. None of them were willing to go on the record in favor of the Gay Rights Resolution. When this resolution was brought up Lightning Brown sauntered up to the mike with his pretty little ear lob on. It is a baby blue-colored lightning bolt. I heard he wore his diamond ear lob to the Jefferson Jackson Day Dinner. He told of some Republican paper in the district that had scared him he called him a faggot. I



Faggot Lightning Brown

N&P Editor Clyde Sitton

Faggot Joe Herzenberg

THE LANDMARK, JUNE 7, 1984

stories reporting three attacks on gay men:

July 1983, Brunswick County, North Carolina — After luring a gay man out onto a deserted side road, four men attacked him. One of them pointed a gun through the windshield and said, "Faggot, you have taken your last ride." He pulled the trigger as the victim floored his car, avoiding the bullet by inches. His car crashed into an embankment, and the men pulled him out and beat him until he ran away and hid in a tree for the rest of the night.

August 29, Brunswick County, North Carolina — In a similar incident, a 23-year-old gay man was invited to a party, then led to a deserted road where he was shot at, struck in the head, beaten unconscious, and robbed.

November 4, Norfolk, Virginia — A well-known and well-respected member of the gay community was beaten to death with a blunt instrument, and his body inflicted with multiple stab wounds.

Perhaps not knowing of this continuing violence against lesbian and gay people — or not caring — North Carolina's Republican chair David Flaherty in March 1984 announced his party's campaign strategy. The *Wilmington Star* quoted him on March 12:

One of the things we're going to make an issue [off] to get people to vote for us this year . . . is to establish that, hey, who's supporting the Democrats? We'll show the Jesse Jacksons, we'll show the gay rights,

we'll show the Bella Abzugs, and we'll show the special interest groups . . . you see, the Democrats can't run an ad against our special interest groups — pro-prayer, pro-life, Moral Majority. You can't throw rocks at those. We can throw rocks at the gays, at the liberals, at the labor unions.

While the state Republican chair advocated "throwing rocks" at gay people, there were four attacks on North Carolina gay men that spring, three of them murders, two of the victims black men.

The chief rock-thrower and notorious dynamo behind the Republican homophobic crusade was Bob Windsor, editor of *The Landmark*, a gutter tabloid. Windsor, whose violent opposition to gay rights was known from the first, began publishing gay-baiting articles in January 1984, never shying away from the most vulgar language and ignorant stereotypes regarding homosexuality.

As the Hunt-Helms campaign accelerated, Windsor's positions became more and more extreme, and his stories increasingly often based on lies and fantasy. Early, he advocated mandatory incarceration and mental treatment of gays as a remedy for AIDS. Soon after, he announced a homosexual plot to murder him. Later, he invented the founding of a chapter of North American Man-Boy Love in Chapel Hill and described its meetings. He printed interviews with Lightning Brown and Joe Herzenberg, two Democratic Party and gay activists from Chapel Hill whom he alleged to

be cofounders of the controversial pedophile organization although it had no Chapel Hill chapter. The interviews were obtained under false pretenses: the interviewer claimed to be writing for the *New York City News*, a gay paper.

None of the Republican candidates or officials in North Carolina would match his rantings, but they used him even as they disowned his activities. From January to November 1984, the homophobic sewage he pumped from *The Landmark* was increasingly adopted by the mainstream of the Republican Party.

"Compared to Helms's diatribes on some other topics, homosexuality has gotten off easily," reported Michael Schwartz in *The Front Page* early in the spring. But in June the Republican strategy began to unfold. Flaherty held a press conference on June 7 accusing Hunt of a "gay connection": U.S. Senator Paul Tsongas, chief sponsor of the Senate gay rights bill, had sponsored a fundraising dinner for Hunt in Boston; gay people had reportedly bought 100 of the 700 tickets to a Hunt fundraiser in New York; and Hunt had yet to state his position on reform of the North Carolina Crimes Against Nature law which gay and lesbian activists sought to have repealed. Apparently, any participation by gay people in the political process — lobbying, contributing money, or working in a party — was subject to attack.

The next day a wealthy, right-wing Democrat placed a large ad in the *News and Observer* carrying a replica of a January story from Windsor's *Landmark* under a headline asking "Governor Hunt, Did you, or Did you not, accept a \$79,000 contribution from Gay Activists?" In fact, although the much-repeated stories of large gay donations to Hunt were false, Hunt's campaign never denied them. Instead, the campaign took the position that all support was welcome and that donors were not pre-screened for sexual preference.

On the other hand, Hunt's aides "reacted sharply," reported the *News and Observer*, to press questions that his campaign was "tied to homosexual advocacy groups." His campaign co-

director called the tactic "guilt by association," never clarifying exactly where the guilt originated. Likewise, when Windsor later accused Hunt in flagrantly homophobic language of being "effeminate," Democratic leaders rushed to defend him from the "scurrilous," "derogatory," and "despicable" charges, but never stated that the bigotry was the despicable thing, not the possibility that the governor was not 100 percent macho or heterosexual. When the Human Rights Fund held a press conference to protest that there was no guilt in being gay, the *News and Observer* ran it as a small story buried

on a back page.

Flaherty had said that Hunt could not "throw rocks" at his Moral Majority constituency. But by summer Hunt's campaign had found a target for its own rock-throwing — in Roberto D'Aubuisson, an alleged leader of the Salvadoran death squads that have killed more than 30,000 civilians. The *Albuquerque Journal* had reported that aides from Helms's office had traveled to San Salvador in 1981 to help set up D'Aubuisson's ARENA Party, modeling it on the Republican Party in the U.S. Hunt set out to picture Helms as a leader of the Radical Right more in-

terested in his own extremist agenda than in the people or problems of North Carolina.

At this crucial point in the election campaign, *Landmark* editor Windsor made his most sensational move. He accused Hunt not just of gay support but of having had a lover who "was a pretty young boy." In typically wild language, Windsor attacked Hunt's heterosexual manhood: "Is Jim Hunt homosexual? Is Jim Hunt bisexual? Is he AC or DC? Has he kept a deep dark secret in his political closet all of his adult life? . . . He has a preoccupation with dress and appearances. He has

MYTHS ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

The homophobia underlying both anti-gay legislation and violence arises from ignorance and myths about homosexuality.

MYTH 1: Homosexuality is a free choice for lesbians and gay men.

Most scientific studies indicate that sexual orientation is an innate — not chosen — part of an individual's personality. Experts such as Dr. John Money of Johns Hopkins University agree that a person's sexual orientation is established very early, possibly as early as age two or three. Given these assumptions, sexuality — whether homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual — is more an identity than a choice. The choice for gay people becomes whether or not to lie and hide. The idea of choosing one's sexuality is also behind the homophobic fear that the gay movement "recruits" children to expand its ranks, rather than that it works for a world in which gay children will grow up freer people. Studies show that most child molesting occurs when girls are molested by men — and much of it occurs within the nuclear family.

MYTH 2: Homosexuality leads to the breakdown of the family.

Jesse Helms expressed the fear in his 1984 Senate campaign that homosexuality threatens "the ability of our population to reproduce itself

. . . jeopardizing the very survival of the nation." Such fears assume that without the repression of homosexuality, most of the population would be gay (and no gay people would have children). It assumes heterosexuality motivated by will — families out of duty — rather than by pleasure and love.

According to the Kinsey Report and subsequent studies by the Institute for Sex Research, approximately 10 percent of people have had predominantly homosexual relationships over at least a two-year period during their adulthood. Fears that if gay people were not repressed everyone would become homosexual seem to be founded not so much in fact as in Puritan suspicions of sexuality.

As to homosexuals bearing the responsibility for the breakdown of the family, homosexuals *are* members of families — daughters, sons, brothers, sisters, parents — and bigotry against them damages family units. When Anita Bryant launched her anti-gay "Save the Children" campaign, the National Gay Task Force responded with its own campaign: "We *Are* Your Children." The National Gay Task Force indicates that one-third of the gay people surveyed had been verbally abused by relatives because of their sexual orientation; 7 percent had been physically abused. These statistics indicate an alarming threat — from bigotry — to millions of American families.

MYTH 3: Gay people are not a legitimate minority in a class with

other minorities that seek civil rights.

It is hard to know what makes a minority "legitimate" if discrimination in jobs, housing, immigration, and the military — as well as a history of repression and subjection to bigoted violence — do not. "They portray themselves as victims simply because the American majority does not accept their lifestyle," wrote one Republican in North Carolina in 1984. But the litmus test of democracy has been its ability to protect minorities from the assaults of majority prejudices.

MYTH 4: Homosexuality is un-Christian.

There is a vigorous dispute among theologians and lay people of all religions and persuasions concerning the morality of homosexuality, as well as that of divorce, birth control, abortion, capital punishment, and so forth. Current Biblical/political disputes seem to divide along lines of those who stress justice and love (or the social gospel, or liberation theology) and those who stress righteousness as avoiding a whole series of specific activities various passages of the Bible name as "sin" (fundamentalism). Gay people generally come out better in the former camp. The Reverend William Sloane Coffin observes, "The New Testament tells me to 'love my neighbor,' and the homosexual is my neighbor." Many gay Christians add that working for gay liberation is an exercise in self-love.



photos by Jenny Labaline/North Carolina Independent

IN TELEVISION DEBATES DURING THE 1984 SENATE RACE, JESSE HELMS, LEFT, TWICE MENTIONED JIM HUNT'S SUPPORT FROM GAY ACTIVISTS.

the prettiest manicured fingernails you have ever seen."

Windsor raved on for paragraphs, asking why Hunt had never served in the military and declaring that the governor was not Windsor's "kind of a man." (Apparently Helms was: the page carried a picture of Helms with his arm around Windsor and the caption, "Jesse Helms is Mighty Good Hugging.")

When Hunt threatened to sue, Windsor said that he had consulted God and decided to retract. He explained that the story had been his reaction to Hunt's ads about death squads; that he had been so upset, lost so much sleep, that he decided to write a story just as "unfounded."

When the *News and Observer* and other papers played up the story, Helms repudiated Windsor's "girlish" allegations against Hunt as "preposterous" and "repugnant and unfair" to a family man, and announced that he was withdrawing advertising from the *Landmark* (the issue under consideration had carried one-and-a-half pages). But Helms did not repudiate Windsor's support, while Flaherty said he preferred the *Landmark* to the *News and Observer*. Other Republicans continued to carry ads in Wind-

son's paper. Regardless of the fiscal relationship between the *Landmark* and the Republicans, Windsor had succeeded in generating suggestions Helms would later use to draw blood in his television debates with Hunt.

By September, Helms had brought his anti-gay attacks out of his poor-mouthing fundraising appeals and more directly into his campaign. When responding to the inquiry of a Lumberton minister about his stand on homosexuality, Helms responded in the *Landmark*, affirming that he agreed with the "religious and legal tradition" which viewed it as a "perversion and a crime." He described the homosexual movement as a "threat to the morals of our young people" and to "the ability of our population to reproduce itself . . . jeopardizing the very survival of the nation."

In the four televised debates between Hunt and Helms during the fall, gay issues lurked beneath the surface. Twice Helms mentioned Hunt's support from "Lightning Brown, Joe Herzenberg, and Virginia Apuzzo" in response to criticism of Helms's out-of-state fundraising. In the third debate the sharpest exchange came when Helms taunted Hunt, "What war did you fight in?" Hunt reacted with visi-

ble anger, saying that Helms had "questioned his patriotism." Helms's question echoed some of the same implications that Windsor had played on in calling Hunt "effeminate." Media experts and pollsters concluded that Helms won the third debate, and that Hunt had generally lost the momentum from his strong performance in the first contest as Helms went on the attack.

Republican chair Flaherty had begun the strategy of "throwing rocks at gay people"; Windsor had retaliated with the gay issue when Hunt threw rocks at Helms's right-wing connections. Even if this was not a coordinated strategy, the Helms campaign continued to make the connection. By mid-October Helms's press spokesperson Claude Allen replied to the charges of the senator's support for fascists by saying, "We could do the same with queers [and the Democrats]." The Democrats could have pointed out that gay people in North Carolina were being killed, while death squads in El Salvador were also killing people. But none of the Democrats or straight progressives knew how or wanted to make that point.

The Democrats at the state level

never named the anti-gay bigotry for what it was, or countered it in any way, apparently hoping to make it through the election without rocking the boat. But the Democrats' boat sank anyway. (Helms's use of the abortion issue did receive more upfront opposition, and Helms's race-baiting was challenged by Hunt, other Democrats, and even by some Republicans.)

"Where do you stand, Jim?" was Helms's most telling campaign slogan, and with gay rights as with other issues, Hunt gave him plenty of ambivalent material. Steve Schewel, publisher of the *North Carolina Independent*, a progressive statewide bi-weekly, commented, "When [Hunt] does take a stand that might have political liabilities, he often qualifies it until there's barely any position left at all." Without speaking out clearly for gay rights, Schewel remarked, Hunt left the voters "empty-handed." The closest Hunt ever actually came to support for gay rights were general comments on "kindness" and "fairness."

In response to questions raised by Republican Flaherty in his June press conference about Hunt's support for equal employment for homosexuals, Hunt replied, "Everybody ought to be treated fairly." But in September and October as the campaign entered its final, heated phase, the Religious Right pushed Hunt — by forcing the issue, by a whisper campaign, and by questioning his manhood — to articulate his opposition to gay issues. In a letter to the *Robesonian*, newspaper of rural Robeson County, Hunt "set the record straight" (so to speak) in response to a "whisper campaign in local churches":

I do not support, and have never supported, granting minority status to homosexuals. I oppose S. 430 [a bill in the U.S. Senate to give gay people federally protected civil rights] and, indeed, any other legislation pending before Congress which would give special status to homosexuals. I believe such efforts to be unwarranted federal intrusions into matters best left to communities to decide. I do not support any planks in the Democratic platform, state or national, which might result in giving special privileges and rights to homosexuals. As a Chris-

tian and a parent I cannot condone homosexuality.

The gay and lesbian community in North Carolina responded to the backlash in various ways. In an atmosphere charged with big bucks, high political stakes, and the religious fervor of the New Right, we took the brunt of scapegoating and were unprepared for its intensity. Different strategies emerged in an atmosphere of growing concern.

Brown and Herzenberg, with the highest profiles as Democratic Party activists and as targets for the backlash, stressed working closely with the Democratic hierarchy. As a member of the 300-person Democratic State Executive Committee, Brown described his strategy as educating people by his presence in a party process which was more "quilting bee than debating society." Within this context and presented with a chance to make a choice for gay rights, party workers often did so. When Brown spoke for gay issues at each level of the party process he did so as a Democrat to other Democrats, explaining why gay rights was important to the party. He refused to let the Republicans have the "family theme."

There was a price for this "insiderness": the lack of response to the most strident gay-baiting. Brown later clarified what had been an underlying ambivalence throughout the campaign: "There's the idea by both heterosexuals and gay people that gay support will be the 'kiss of death' for candidates." This kiss-of-death fear put gay activists in a double bind. They could organize up to a point, but when the backlash escalated the advice they got even from allies was "don't rock the boat."

Two other strategies, not necessarily incompatible with the insider strategy, also emerged. The editor of *The Front Page* and planners of a statewide Lesbian/Gay Conference set about organizing gay Republicans. The purpose was to show that gay rights was not a partisan issue, that the gay vote was not monolithic, and that, at the time this strategy was being pushed, neither party had a strong record on homosexual rights. A third group (of which I was a part) argued that gay people needed to define gay

issues ourselves, outside of either party. We considered sponsoring, for instance, a press conference or a petition campaign against bigotry in the elections.

On November 7, the morning after the election, the Democratic Party in the state and the nation woke to shambles, and many looked around to fix blame. A Hunt aide decided not enough blacks had come out to vote. Lieutenant Governor-elect Bob Jordan, the highest-ranking Democrat left in the state, blamed the liberalism of the national ticket for his party's defeats and declared that "Southerners should have more of a say in future national elections." Tim Valentine, Congressman from North Carolina's Second District, decried the "furious fringes" which had taken the Democratic Party over to such issues as sexual preference — a rather remarkable lapse of memory as to which side had been "furious" in the election.

How Democrats locally and nationally treat gay and lesbian efforts at party politics will indicate a good bit about the future direction of the Democratic Party. While some Democratic politicians obviously fear that open gay and lesbian organizing within the party will be the "kiss of death," the real kiss of death for the Democrats — and for hopes for genuine democracy — comes when bigotry runs rampant as it did in North



THIS BUTTON WAS FOUND DISCARDED IN CHAPEL HILL, NC

Carolina during the 1984 election. Brown and Herzenberg were subjected to more than a dozen separate incidents of intimidation, vandalism, and harassment — even threats to their lives — for their work within the Democratic Party. Brown was advised by a lawyer that he could not sue for libel because he is gay and thus is a felon under the Crimes Against Nature law. When gays, or labor, or women, or black people and other ethnic minorities, can be labeled successfully as “special interest groups” and scapegoated for a failing economy or troubles within the nuclear family, we are in trouble indeed.

Democrats, progressives, gay men, and lesbians were all in many ways too cautious, I believe, in the 1984 election; afraid of rocking the boat, we did not answer homophobic attacks as openly as they were made, thus giving Republican candidates the field. Brown commented perceptively on the Democrats’ silence, “It takes a while to acquire a vocabulary about gay issues without stumbling all over yourself. It is linguistically loaded because the language has been preempted by jokes and insults. Many people in the Democratic Party had a willingness but the inability to [respond]. Few people except gay people knew how to answer.”

Gay people and progressive heterosexuals need urgently to find the language to counter homophobic bigotry and thus to neutralize it as a reactionary strategy. Too much “don’t rock the boat” means that the boat rots beneath us. And gay/lesbian activists need to commit ourselves unambivalently to our own power — our “kiss of life” — whether within electoral party politics or beyond it. Ours is a liberation movement, and our fate will not be separate from the fate of other people striving for liberation in this century. □

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Earlier versions of this article appeared in Gay Community News and The Front Page.



The Veil of Hurt

BY EDWARD PEEPLES, JR., WALTER W. TUNSTALL,
AND EVERETT EBERHARDT

I had completed all of the requirements for the Ph.D. at one of Virginia's state universities, including a first draft of a dissertation. The first two readers of the paper thought that the second chapter was particularly good, and was probably publishable as an article in one of the scholarly journals; needless to say, I changed that chapter hardly at all in the next draft. Between the time that the professors read the first and second draft, they came to believe that I was a homosexual.

My whole graduate program collapsed at that point. The chapter previously thought publishable was savaged. The paper was not good enough — could not be revised. Although the professors did not directly confront me with their prejudices, they conveyed their sentiments through indirect comments and incongruous criticisms of the paper itself. I was cold-shouldered, blacklisted, and all but thrown off campus. My adviser strongly resisted writing any kind of reference for me. Finally, he wrote something (insisting that it be confidential): obviously a “He was a student here, but I hardly knew him” kind of letter that could not possibly be of any value to me professionally. Having spent many years preparing for a professional career, but with no faculty support for my aspirations, I am now all but unemployable. I do not have any significant prior work experience.

I finally found a job as a clerk in a local department store. It did not take the spying and inquiring store detective long to reach the belated conclusion of the professors. He quickly spread his suspicions among other store employees. Young employees were told to avoid talking to me. I became the subject of vicious and unrelenting gossip. Insulting stage-whispered remarks were made for my benefit. Although the job wouldn't tax the intellect of a junior high student, I found that I couldn't cut it. Fearing for my sanity, I quit after two months.

I have now been unemployable for many months. Leaving aside the issue of homosexuality, no one wants to hire an applicant with advanced graduate training for an unskilled position.

I have now developed a love-hate feeling for Richmond and the Commonwealth. The many virtues of our area are all but cancelled out for me by the narrow-minded, self-righteous, mean-spirited, intolerance of all to many of our people.

— anonymous letter to the Richmond City Commission on Human Relations

Like the citizens of most American communities, particularly in the South, most proper Richmonders pretend that homosexuals could not possibly be native to their charming and innocent city, and that in

the unlikely event that such people were to find themselves in our community, they would be treated like all visitors, with the most charitable of Southern civility.

According to a survey of the views of homosexuals in Richmond, Virginia, which we conducted in 1984, nothing could be further from the truth. In conjunction with the Richmond City Commission on Human Relations, we sampled opinions from 508 diverse individuals living or working in Richmond who identified themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Our questionnaire asked for a variety of information about their personal characteristics; their encounters with discrimination, harassment, and abuse; their confidence and trust in sundry community services and institutions; and the extent to which they publicly disclose their sexual orientation. Eighty-two percent of the respondents were white.*

The results of our study, like the words of our anonymous letter writer, suggest that many gays and lesbians see life in Richmond as anything but charitable and civil.

One of the key items of the questionnaire asked each respondent to summarize his or her experience with mistreatment in various aspects of Richmond life. The answers indicate that discrimination occurs with astonishing frequency (see table 1).**

It is important that the highest number of complaints occurred in basic areas of life: public accommodations, employment-seeking services, routine health care, educational institutions, and opportunities for religious counseling. Finding and keeping housing proved to be the most substantial problem for many homosexuals.

Thirty-two percent reported discrimination in getting and/or holding rental housing as individuals, followed by 23 percent who reported discrimination when they tried to rent housing with a roommate of the same sex. In almost every instance, white homosexuals reported more problems attributable to their sexual orientation than did black homosexuals. The small number of people reporting problems with lending institutions is due principally to the fact that few had sought loans from such institutions.

Discrimination in the workplace

was the second major item of concern listed by our respondents (see table 2). Almost one-third — 31 percent — reported they were not treated as equal among heterosexual co-workers. Twenty-eight percent said they were harassed by co-workers and 25 percent reported being harassed by supervisors. There were seven specific forms of on-the-job discrimination, harassment, or intimidation in which 15 percent or more of the respondents reported incidents.

Perhaps the most alarming finding in our study was the extent of violence against gays, lesbians, and bisexuals (see table 3). A third of the sample — 156 people — said that they had been physically attacked or intimidated by heterosexuals in some fashion at least once because of their sexual orientation.

Because of the reported prevalence of discrimination and violence, the attitudes of the local government as a protector of civil rights are especially

important in this study. Unfortunately, the respondents to the survey expressed extreme dissatisfaction with their treatment by public officials in Richmond (see table 4). Eighty-seven percent thought their concerns were never or rarely addressed adequately by city government. Similarly, 84 percent felt that they are treated unfairly under existing laws, and 78 percent said they receive less than equal treatment from local law enforcement officials.

The study also shows a disturbing degree of alienation and distrust for the law, local government, and the heterosexual community. It should come as no surprise that 16 percent of the sample said they were very alienated from Richmond's heterosexual community, and 70 percent felt at least some alienation. When asked to compare the quality of life in Richmond with that in other cities, just over half of our respondents rated Richmond in some degree unfavorably.

Table 1. Percent Reporting Discrimination in Selected Community Spheres

| | Total % | Race | |
|---|------------|------------|------------|
| | | White % | Black % |
| Private Rental | 32 | 34 | 25 |
| Renting with Same-Sex Mate | 23 | 24 | 13 |
| Restaurant Services | 23 | 24 | 18 |
| Employment Services | 21 | 23 | 19 |
| Routine Health Care | 18 | 18 | 17 |
| Education/Schools | 18 | 18 | 13 |
| Hotel/Motel Accommodations | 18 | 18 | 15 |
| Buying a Home | 15 | 19 | 1 |
| Religious Counseling | 17 | 19 | 4 |
| Mental Health Services | 14 | 15 | 12 |
| Public Housing | 11 | 5 | 11 |
| Transportation (taxi, plane, bus, train, etc.) | 10 | 10 | 7 |
| Emergency Health Services | 6 | 5 | 6 |
| Banks/Savings and Loan | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| Funeral/Burial Arrangements | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| Food Stamps | 4 | * | * |
| Rape Counseling | 3 | * | * |
| Welfare/Public Assistance | 3 | * | * |
| Credit Card Companies | 4 | * | * |
| Mortgage Companies/ Private Lending Institutions | 3 | * | * |

* Percent of those reporting discrimination is less than 5%

We consider one finding of our study especially disappointing. Among those institutions the respondents singled out as culpable are two in which anti-discrimination statutes are unlikely to have any measurable effect: religious institutions and the families of gays and lesbians. How can we expect fair and compassionate standards of treatment from government if justice is withheld by the very fountainheads of moral law?

The study gave no explanation for one surprising finding. Black people consistently reported lower percentages of mistreatment based on their homosexuality. We have three possible explanations. First, black gays and lesbians may attribute some discrimination to their race instead of their sexual orientation. The survey did not ask questions which could separate the two forms of discrimination clearly. Second, whites may be more aware of discriminatory acts based on their homosexuality because they have higher expectations of democratic pluralism in the community. Third, the white community as a whole may be less tolerant of homosexuality and therefore more prone to engage in or permit discrimination.

Faced with discrimination, the vast majority of the respondents to the survey reported that they find it necessary to modify their behavior to avoid unfavorable reaction from the larger community (see table 5). Even when dealing with financial institutions, three-fifths said they changed the way they behave to try to avoid discrimination. Four-fifths said they had to alter their behavior in their family or workplace.

Since 1983, three similar studies have been conducted elsewhere, and all lend credence to our findings. The first, conducted by the Alexandria, Virginia, Human Rights Commission and the Alexandria Community Gay Association, used a questionnaire adapted from the one used in Richmond. The results were astonishingly similar (see table 6). The other two comparable studies are one undertaken in 1984 by the National Gay Task Force, which combined data from 1,420 gays and 654 lesbians in seven cities; and "the Boston Project," a survey of 1,340 gays and lesbians in Boston. One parallel between the

Table 2. Percent Reporting Selected Types of Discrimination in the Workplace

| | Total % | Race | |
|--|------------|------------|------------|
| | | White % | Black % |
| Not treated as equal among heterosexual co-workers | 31 | 34 | 17 |
| Harassed by co-workers | 28 | 28 | 28 |
| Harassed by supervisors or superiors | 25 | 25 | 25 |
| Didn't get a job you were qualified for | 24 | 25 | 23 |
| Difficulty maintaining job security | 22 | 17 | 23 |
| Didn't get a promotion you deserved | 21 | 21 | 21 |
| Fear for your physical safety | 18 | 17 | 21 |
| Fired or asked to resign | 14 | 14 | 14 |
| Lost customers or clients | 14 | 14 | 12 |
| Received poor work performance evaluations | 14 | 14 | 11 |
| Received unfavorable job references | 13 | 13 | 12 |
| Difficulty getting a desired transfer | 11 | 9 | 12 |
| Barred from practicing your trade or profession | 7 | 6 | 9 |

Table 3. Percent Reporting Being Attacked or Abused

| | Total % | Sex | | Race | |
|--------------------|------------|-----------|-------------|------------|------------|
| | | Male % | Female % | White % | Black % |
| Ever Been Attacked | 33 | 35 | 28 | 33 | 30 |

Table 4. Perception of Treatment by Local Government

| | Total % | Race | |
|--|------------|------------|------------|
| | | White % | Black % |
| Gay/Lesbian Issues Never or Rarely Adequately Addressed by City Government | 87 | 88 | 80 |
| Receive Less Than Equal Protection Under Current Law | 84 | 87 | 73 |
| Receive Less Than Equal Treatment From City Police | 78 | 78 | 76 |

Table 5.
Percent Reporting They Alter
Their Behavior In Order To Avoid
Negative Reactions

| | Total % |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Family | 79 |
| Workplace | 79 |
| Religious Institutions | 76 |
| Public Accommodations | 76 |
| Educational Institutions | 75 |
| Recreation | 73 |
| Neighborhood | 72 |
| Retail Services | 71 |
| Legal Services, Courts | 66 |
| Government Services | 65 |
| Health Services | 63 |
| Housing | 62 |
| Financial Institutions | 61 |

Richmond study and the surveys of other cities was the shocking rate of violence reported against gays and lesbians. In Richmond, 35 percent of males and 28 percent of females reported being attacked because of their homosexuality; in Boston, the figure was 25 percent overall; in the study of seven cities, 28 percent of males and 36 percent of females reported being the victims of violence.

Striking as the results of the Richmond survey are, it is likely that many of the numbers presented here underestimate the actual magnitude of

the problem for at least two reasons. First, only 21 percent of our sample said that they reveal their sexual identity publicly, and the rest consequently may escape some malevolence at the hands of heterosexuals. For example, our survey showed that those who are openly gay at work have more than twice the risk of being attacked physically or verbally. Second, many victims of discrimination repress their memories of insulting or painful episodes.

The report to the Richmond City Commission on Human Rights concludes with recommendations of a number of steps that should be taken to bring unqualified citizenship to sexual minorities. The responsibilities entailed in meeting these recommendations fall to government, commerce and industry, the media, health care providers, educational institutions, labor unions, professional associations, religious institutions, family members, and gays and lesbians themselves.

First and foremost, we must have federal and state human rights laws which protect everyone, including homosexuals. Next, we need to repeal all present laws which single out homosexuals for disadvantageous differential treatment and those laws which seek to regulate private sexual behavior among consenting adults.

Essential too is that we offer realistic sex education to children, including the facts about homosexuality. Similarly, we must educate and train our



police and other human-services workers so that they may carry out their responsibilities in a more equitable manner. Also essential is establishing local working committees of homosexual leaders with the police, housing industry, religious institutions, and so forth. And there is a crying need to create the means to control violence perpetrated against the homosexual community.

Finally, we must in more imaginative ways encourage the families of homosexuals to assume responsibility for finding out more of the facts about homosexuality, renouncing the myths and prejudices about gays and lesbians, and attempting to offer greater understanding and support to their homosexual family members.

Whatever the flaws of this particular inquiry, our fondest hope is that it and studies like it elsewhere will serve our communities by stimulating informed dialogue. Our further wish is that this dialogue may lead us closer to freedom for those who have been excluded, with no diminution of the liberties of others. □

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** The findings presented here are excerpted from the original 106-page report presented in April 1985 to the Richmond Commission on Human Relations.*

*** Percentages throughout this article are based on the numbers of people who gave answers to given questions. Inapplicable or missing data are excluded.*

Table 6. Comparison of Reported Discrimination In
Richmond and Alexandria

| | Richmond % | Alexandria % |
|--|---------------|-----------------|
| Not Treated As Equal Among Heterosexual Co-workers | 31 | 30 |
| Harassed By Co-Workers | 28 | 29 |
| Harassed By Supervisors or Superiors | 25 | 29 |
| Discouraged From Renting with Same-Sex Roommate | 23 | 19 |
| Restaurant Services | 23 | 20 |
| Disclose Their Sexual Orientation to Everyone at Work | 21 | 16 |
| Hotel/Motel Accommodations | 18 | 20 |
| Routine Health Care | 18 | 20 |

French-speaking Louisiana is involved in an exciting cultural and linguistic renaissance as Cajuns and Creoles, once dangerously close to complete acculturation, begin to reclaim their heritage. The Western world as a whole has found it difficult to avoid the homogenizing influence of American culture, yet America has failed to reduce its own diverse ethnic and cultural heritages to pabulum, largely because of the resiliency of the individual cultures. This failure, however, must also be credited in part to the deliberate, concerted efforts of visionaries who foresaw that the trend toward a bland, standardized society would one day break down and prepared for a time when America would recognize the value of its highly seasoned cultural stew. As early as the 1930s, Louisiana French society was encouraged to maintain itself as an example of cultural and linguistic tenacity. The ideal vehicle for this effort, expressing both language and culture, was Cajun music.

Most of Louisiana's French population descend from the Acadians, the French colonists who began settling in eastern Canada at Port Royal, Acadia, in 1604. Very quickly, they came to see themselves as different from their European forebears, and for a century thrived in their new homeland. In 1713

England gained possession of the colony and renamed it Nova Scotia, and in 1755 the British Crown deported the Acadians. After 10 years of wandering, many Acadians began to arrive in the French colony of Louisiana, determined to recreate the cohesive society they had known in Acadia. Within a generation, these exiles had so firmly reestablished themselves as a people that they became the dominant culture in south Louisiana and absorbed the other ethnic groups around them, with a cross-cultural exchange that produced a new community, the Cajuns.

It is doubtful that the Acadian exiles and earliest French settlers brought musical instruments with them to colonial Louisiana. Melodies came with them, but instruments of any kind were rare on the early frontier. However, even with houses to be built, fields to be planted, and the monumental task of reestablishing a society, families would gather after a day's work to sing *complaintes*, the long, unaccompanied story songs of their French heritage. They adapted old songs and created new ones to reflect the Louisiana experience. They sang children's songs, drinking songs, and lullabies in the appropriate settings and developed play-party ditties for square and round dancing. These songs expressed the joys and sorrows of life on the frontier. They told of heady affairs and ancient wars, of wayward husbands and heartless wives; they filled the loneliest nights in the simplest cabins with wisdom and art.

By 1780 musical instruments began to appear. The violin was relatively simple and, played in open tuning with a double string bowing technique, achieved the conspicuous, self-accompanying drone which characterized much of traditional western French style. Soon fiddlers were playing for *bals de maison*, traditional dances held in private homes where furniture was cleared to make room for crowds of visiting relatives and neighbors. The most popular musicians were those who could be heard, so fiddlers bore down hard with their bows and singers sang in shrill, strident voices to pierce through the din of the dancers. Some fiddlers began playing together and developed a distinct twin fiddling style in which the first played the lead and the other accompanied

The Music Brought Us

by Barry Jean Ancelet

with percussive bass second or a harmony below the line. From their Anglo-American neighbors they learned jigs, hoedowns, and Virginia reels to enrich their growing repertoire which already included polkas and *contredanses*, *varsoviennes*, and *valse a deux temps*. Transformation in fiddle and dance styles reflected social changes simmering in Louisiana's cultural gumbo.

In the mid- to late-1800s, the diatonic accordion, invented in Vienna in 1828, entered south Louisiana by way of Texas and its German settlers; it quickly transformed the music played by the Cajuns. This loud and durable instrument became immediately popular. Even with half of its 40 metal reeds broken, it made enough noise for dancing. When fiddlers and accordionists began playing together, the accordion dominated the music by virtue of its sheer volume, an important feature in the days before electrical amplification. Limited in its number of available notes and keys, it tended to restrict and simplify tunes. Musicians adapted old songs and created new ones to feature its sound. Black Creole musicians played an important role during the formative period at the turn of this century, contributing a highly syncopated accordion style and the blues to Cajun music.

Eventually, dance bands were built around the accordion and fiddle, with a triangle, washboard, or spoons added for percussion. Some groups added a Spanish box guitar for rhythm. They performed for house dances and later in public dance halls. By the late 1920s, musicians had developed much of the core repertoire now associated with Cajun music.

At this point, the unself-conscious pursuit of cultural and social rebuilding was jarred off its course by a series of events that brought Cajuns and Creoles into closer contact with the rest of the world: the discovery of oil in their homeland, World War I, the advent of mass media, and improved transportation. State and local school board policy began imposing compulsory English-language education and banned French from the elementary schools. In south Louisiana, French culture and language were slag to be discarded in the rush to join the American mainstream.

Class distinctions which had appeared early in Louisiana society were heightened by Americanization and the Great Depression. The upwardly mobile Cajuns offered little or no resistance to what seemed a move in the right direction. Money and education were hailed as the way up and out of the mire. Being "French"

became a stigma placed upon the less socially and economically ambitious Cajuns who had maintained their language and culture in self-sufficient isolation. The very word "Cajun" and its harsh new counterpart "coonass" became ethnic slurs synonymous with poverty and ignorance and amounted to an accusation of cultural senility.

The Cajun music scene in the mid-1930s reflected the social changes. Musicians abandoned the traditional style in favor of new sounds heavily influenced by hillbilly music and Western swing. The once dominant accordion disappeared abruptly, a victim of the newly Americanized French population's growing distaste for the old ways. Freed from the limitations imposed by the accordion, string bands readily absorbed various outside influences. Then the advent of electrical amplification made it unnecessary for fiddlers to bear down with the bow in order to be heard, and they developed a lighter, lilting touch, moving away from the soulful intensity of earlier styles.

By the late 1940s, commercially recorded Cajun music was unmistakably sliding toward Americanization. Then in 1948 Iry Lejeune recorded "La Valse du Pont d'Amour." He went against the grain to perform in the old, traditional style long forced under-



ground. Some said the young singer from rural Acadia Parish didn't know better, but crowds rushed to hear his highly emotional music. His unexpected popular success focused attention on cultural values that Cajuns and Creoles had begun to fear losing.

Iry Lejeune became a pivotal figure in the revitalization of Cajun music; his untimely death in 1955 only added to his legendary stature. Following his lead, musicians like Joe Falcon, Lawrence Walker, Austin Pitre, and Nathan Abshire dusted off long-abandoned accordions to perform and record traditional-style Cajun music. Local music store owners pioneered a local recording industry that took up the slack left by the national record companies which had abandoned regional and ethnic music in favor of a broader, national base of appeal.

The effects of revitalization were immediate but varied. Cajun music was stubbornly making a comeback, but not without changes brought on by outside influences superimposed during the previous decade. To remain a legitimate expression of Louisiana French society, Cajun music would need to revitalize its roots. Yet tradition is not a product but a process. The rugged individualism which characterized frontier life has been translated into modern terms, yet its underlying spirit persists. The momentum of recent developments will carry traditional Cajun music to the next generation. Meanwhile, a steady stream of new songs shows the culture to be alive again with creative energy. Fiddler Dewey Balfa is prominent among the current generation of musicians who want the culture and music to breathe and grow — but also to stay clearly within the parameters of tradition. Balfa and his brothers have been an influential force in the Cajun music renaissance.



BOIS-SEC ARDOIN AT HOME

The Balfa Brotherhood

Every school day, a few dozen children from the countryside around Basile, Louisiana, pile into a school-bus driven by one of the most respected folk musicians in America. Since the early 1960s, Dewey Balfa has been an important figure in the movement to preserve the traditional ethnic and regional cultures. He and his brothers formed the core of the Balfa Brothers

Band which brought Cajun music to folk festivals all across America. Their sense of tradition was based on a rich musical heritage which ran in the family. Balfa says, "My father, grandfather, great-grandfather, they all played the fiddle, and you see, through my music, I feel they are still alive."

Balfa's father, Charles, was a sharecropper on Bayou Grand Louis in rural Evangeline Parish near Mamou. He inspired his children with his great love of life and of music. Will, Burkeman, Dewey, Harry, and Rodney grew up making music for their own entertainment in the days before television. Unlike some other traditional musicians, who learned to play in spite of their parents, the Balfa brothers did

not have to sneak to the barn to play the accordion or unravel window screen wire for makeshift cigar-box fiddles. The Balfa household swelled with music after the day's work, and children were encouraged to participate with anything they wanted to try to play. Spoons, triangles, and fiddlesticks were important first steps to teach rhythm. Fiddles, however, took time to master.

When I was little, as far back as I can remember, I always loved music. Of course, we didn't always have instruments around, but I would take sticks and rub them together pretending to play the fiddle and I'd sing. So my late father said to my mother, "I want to buy a fiddle for Will because he's always pretending to play with those sticks." We had an old neighbor who had a fiddle that he didn't play much. So one day my father traded him a pig for the fiddle. And that was the first fiddle I had. Later, when I had learned well enough to play dances, I ordered another one from the Spiegel catalog. I paid nine dollars for that one.

— Will Bolfa [his preferred spelling]

The Balfa Brothers Band came much later.

Dewey was younger than me. When he started playing, in fact, he learned on my fiddle. Then, when I got married, I took my fiddle with me, so he bought himself one and continued to play. One day in 1945 or 1946, he came to my house with a fellow named Hicks. He was the one who owned the Wagon Wheel Club, and he lived next to my father, who came with them. They came with a flask of whiskey, and I had given up drinking and music in those days. They had me take a drink with them. I didn't know what they were after. We talked a little. Later, he said, "Get your fiddle." I said, "My fiddle? But I'm out of practice." Hicks said, "Get your fiddle. I want to hear you and Dewey play together." And that was the beginning of the Balfa Brothers Band. If it hadn't been for that, I would have left my fiddle in the closet.

I found my fiddle and took another drink to warm up. We played two or three songs and Hicks said, "You're going to come play for me next Saturday night." I said, "Oh, no, I can't go." I just had my old Model A, and the

club was on the other side of Ville Platte from here. He said, "Yes, you all come, you and Dewey." That was before he made his big club. So we started going, Dewey and I and one of our friends who played guitar with us. We were three. Two fiddles and a guitar. We would go every Saturday night to play until midnight for five dollars apiece. Sometimes, when it was time to stop, they would pass the hat and pick up more than we had already made, so we played on until near dawn. We played for some time like that. We had no amplifiers. We just played acoustic. Dewey was working offshore, and he said, "We're going to get together a real band." He went out and bought a set of amplifiers. Then we were really set up. — Will Bolfa

In 1964, Dewey Balfa served as a last-minute replacement on guitar to accompany Gladius Thibodeaux on accordion and Louis "Vinesse" Lejeune to the Newport Folk Festival. An editorial in the local newspaper commented condescendingly on the notion of festival talent scouts finding talent among Cajun musicians, and predicted embarrassing consequences if indeed Louisiana was so represented in Newport.

I had no idea what a festival was. They were talking about workshops, about concerts, and I didn't have the slightest idea what those were. I've always loved to play music as a

pastime. I've always looked on music as a universal language. You can communicate with one, you can communicate with a whole audience at one time. But then, here I was going to Newport, Rhode Island, for a festival. I had played in house dances, family gatherings, maybe a dance hall where you might have seen as many as 200 people at once. In fact, I doubt that I had ever seen 200 people at once. And in Newport, there were 17,000. Seventeen thousand people who wouldn't let us get off stage. — Dewey Balfa

In 1967, Dewey told Newport fieldworker Ralph Rinzler that he felt it important to present his own family's musical tradition. That was when the Balfa Brothers Band was first invited to perform at the Newport Folk Festival. The brothers, who had not played together for some years, were a little rusty, but they quickly got a great deal of practice at festivals all over America, Canada, and eventually France. The group — composed of Dewey and Will on fiddles, Rodney on guitar, Rodney's son Tony on drums or bass, occasionally Harry or Burkeman on triangle, and accompanied by various friends like Nathan Abshire, Marc Savoy, Hadley Fontenot, Robert Jardell, or Ally Young on accordion — became known in folk circles far and wide as proud representatives of their native culture. More important, they brought this renewed pride back home



DEWEY BALFA AND WILL BOLFA AT THE HOMAGE A LA MUSIQUE ACADIENNE, LAFAYETTE, 1977.



DEWEY BALFA ADDRESSES THE FESTIVAL OF AMERICAN FOLKLIFE, WASHINGTON, DC, 1977.

to Louisiana, to their people who had carried the stigma of sociolinguistic inferiority for years.

When we first started going to the festivals, I can remember people saying, "They're going out there to get laughed at." But when the echo came back, I think it brought a message to the people, that there were great efforts being made by people who were interested in preserving the culture on the outside. But a lot of people don't realize that they have a good cornbread on the table until somebody tells them.

— Dewey Balfa

Dewey's timing could not have been better. The creation of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) in 1968 testified to a changed cultural climate. CODOFIL chair James Domengeaux focused initially on political maneuvers and language education but soon became convinced of the importance of the culture in preserving the language.

The first Tribute to Cajun Music festival, presented March 26, 1974, and sponsored by CODOFIL in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution, was deliberately planned to capture the local audience in an unconventional setting to call attention to the music that they had come to take for granted in smoke-filled dance halls. As a participant, Dewey had other motives.

It was a festival for the people. It was a lesson for the cultural authorities. At the time, I wanted for those people who hold the reins of the culture to be exposed to the Cajun music experience so that they could see what the people felt about their own music when presented in such a prestigious setting. I wasn't worried about the audience, because I had been in front of audiences before. I knew what the

reaction would be out there. You can feel the response of the people when you're playing. But the people who have the power of decision-making, I could never get them to see what music means to the people. I could never get in front of them to play, so we got them to stand backstage, and I think that festival did it.

— Dewey Balfa

The festival has made cultural heroes of its performers and, in the same motion, placed them within easy reach of the people, offering alternative role models for young musicians. The importance of this alternative to music imported from the outside was the basis for Dewey's message.

I can remember doing workshops away from home. People were so amazed by the music, and when I'd tell them about the culture, they just couldn't believe it. And the question would always come up: do you think that this music, language, and culture will survive? And I had my doubts because there was nobody who would work in the fields and come back and sit on the porch or sit by the fireplace and play their instruments and tell stories from grandmother and grandfather. Instead, kids would come back from school and do their homework as fast as they could and then watch television. A lot of artificial things, instead of the real, down-to-earth values. And I thought that the only way it would survive, could survive, was to bring this music into the schools for the children. I never thought it would happen, but I kept pounding and pounding at the door until finally I got a grant [a Folk Artist in the Schools grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, sponsored by the Southern Folk Revival project in Atlanta]. I feel that the program has done a lot of good. It has alerted a lot of children that this is not just so-called 'chanky-chank' music. It's a music of the people, played by the people for the people.

— Dewey Balfa

In spite of their tremendous influence on the national scene during the 1970's, the Balfas lived quite ordinary lives back home in Louisiana. Their popularity had little effect on their everyday lives. Will operated a bulldozer for Evangeline Parish, Rodney and Tony laid bricks, and Dewey still drives a schoolbus and has a discount furniture store.

I've been playing music for over 40 years and I've been married for 38 years, and I'm still with the same woman, still play the same music. I've always loved music, but I always played my music and came home. There are some musicians who like to drink and run around, and I like to drink a bit, but then I like to come home. I've always been like that. I would go out and make my music, make my money, and go home. I love my wife, my children, my grandchildren. Those are what I live for.

— Will Balfa

In 1978, Dewey's brothers Will and Rodney were killed in an automobile accident in Avoyelles Parish near Bunkie while on a family visit. In 1980, his wife, Hilda, who had always provided him with a secure home base from which to work, died of trichinosis. Though these personal tragedies in Dewey's life affected him very deeply, after a period of mourning for each he resumed his work, marked by a certain feeling of urgency about preserving the ground they had gained together. In recognition for his musicianship, as well as his eloquent spokespersonship in behalf of the traditional arts and cultural equity over the years, Dewey was awarded the National Heritage Award in 1982 by the National Endowment for the Arts. He carries the spirit of the Balfa Brothers with Rodney's son Tony and a family of friends who help lighten the load.

Mr. Rinzler asked me at a festival one time, "Do you realize how many lives, how many people the Balfa Brothers have affected through the years of music?" I said no. And I really had no idea. We were promoting the group. We were promoting the culture. We never thought that we were bringing the music to different people and different places. We always thought that the music was bringing us.

— Dewey Balfa

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TEACHERS
ON STRIKE

The Battle of St. John

BY LANCE HILL

"Power and authority are not the same. Those who hold the power to control people may not have the authority to do so. . . ."

The quotation was neatly taped to the cover of the scrapbook Wilhelmina Armour had just pushed across the table to me. The insurgent concept, couched in calm, reasonable terms, seemed to fit Armour perfectly. Here was a stern black woman who chose her words carefully and diplomatically, yet had become the center of a stormy education workers' strike in the heart of the South.

Armour is the president of the St. John Association of Educators (SJAЕ), an organization which pulled the sleepy Louisiana parish of St. John the Baptist into the twentieth century. In a region of America where unions are scarce and strikes as frequent as August snow, the St. John teachers' strike generated amazing public support and changed the political dynamics of the parish forever.

PETROL ON THE BAYOU

St. John the Baptist Parish is a strip of land that hugs the Mississippi as the river winds its way through Louisiana

spilling into the warm Gulf waters. Its rich delta soil and steamy summer heat made it productive sugar cane terrain for over a century. For years the lives of its inhabitants were shaped by the plantation economy, with most people finding themselves tied to the endless misery of cane production. Black laborers chopped cane in the subtropical heat until the long wooden handles of the cane knives were worn smooth.

During the 1950s several dramatic changes began to occur in the economic and political structure of the parish. Petrochemical corporations such as Du Pont began to construct gleaming plants along the river's banks, taking advantage of the proximity to oil and gas sources, cheap labor, and the river's transportation and dumping potentials. This process was hastened by a state government eager to overlook the pollution of the river in exchange for modern work for their constituents, as well as an occasional bribe. These factors, accompanied by the mechanization of agriculture, shifted the economic and, ultimately, the political life of the parish.

By 1980 the livelihood of St. John residents had been radically transformed. As early as 1960 over 30 percent of the parish's workers were engaged in farm and food production, mostly in the low-wage sugar industry. By 1980 this had dwindled to only 8 percent with less than 2 percent of the workforce directly employed in agriculture.

This shift in occupations was matched by the construction during the 1970s of an imposing elevated interstate highway through the vast swamp separating New Orleans from St. John. The highway contributed to the migration of many whites to the

cities of Reserve and LaPlace on the east bank of the river.

These economic changes began to alter the racial and income contours of the parish. Twenty-five years ago St. John had a slight majority of blacks. By 1980 whites had grown to 62 percent of a total population of 32,000. The median income spiraled to more than \$20,000 annually, a figure twice as high as that of many neighboring parishes. This prosperity was shared by a segment of the black population which found employment in the higher paying chemical industry, although one out of four black families in the parish still has an income below the federal poverty level.

RIVER LORDS AND VASSALS

For decades the government apparatus was dominated by the Montague family of St. John, which presided over its plantation and sugar refinery in customary Southern aristocratic fashion. At the head of the Montague oligarchy was J. Oswald Montague, superintendent of schools. Some St. John residents took to calling him "Cape Longue," translated from Creole as "Long Coat," an allusion to his alleged practice of filling his coat with silver coins to purchase favors. Over the years he had managed to turn the school system into a powerful patronage machine. Wilhelmina Armour recalls, "He ruled everything . . . and many people owed their jobs to the Montagues . . . they controlled the power in the parish." Political opponents of Montague would on occasion find that ballot boxes were being tossed into the river or votes openly purchased. Montague's influence

stretched from the school board to the parish council; his empire embraced all spheres of St. John residents' lives, creating a tightly ordered political structure that resisted grassroots democratic change.

As the economy changed, the plantation and aristocratic form of rule began to erode. Fewer people owed their livelihood to the Montagues and subsequently the Montague influence began to diminish. Yet no single political faction emerged that could exercise the same sweeping power as the old order, and the superintendent's office continued to wield a powerful influence. During the last decade some school board members ran on mild reform platforms, but the board remained more of an appendage to the school superintendent than a governing body. Armour bristles at the suggestion that the appointive superintendent's office was subordinate to the school board. "For years it has been sort of a dictatorship, a political thing," says Armour. "As far back as I can remember the superintendents that I work under just stayed in office until they died." Board member Martin Bonura argues that the present superintendent simply ignores board decisions. "He has the control over the board," says Bonura.

In recent years the board has been split into two factions, referred to by insiders as the "big five" and the "little five." The big five generally served the interests of the present superintendent, Albert Becnel, who has held the position for 21 years. It was the defection of one of the "big five" members to the "little five" side that set the stage for an almost farcical power struggle within the board during the ensuing strike.

THE STRIKE

The St. John teachers' strike began during the sweltering heat of late August 1984, and continued for eight tumultuous weeks. At the center of the battle was the St. John Association of Educators (SJAE), an affiliate of the Louisiana Education Association.

The initial dispute with the board was over a promised wage hike, but soon the right of the SJAE to collective bargaining became paramount. During the summer of 1984 the teachers had joined in a campaign for a tax in-

crease to benefit education, with a commitment from the board that they would receive a 5 percent wage increase, the first in five years. Later that summer it became clear that the superintendent and the board were not going to issue a raise, and soon the strike was on.

Wilhelmina Armour's rise to the presidency of the SJAE was sudden. The previous president had resigned for personal reasons, and Armour was serving as secretary for the group when she volunteered to negotiate with the board prior to the strike. The membership was sufficiently impressed with her leadership that they elected her president immediately. Although the local and national press referred to the strike as a "teachers' strike, in fact less than half of the employees who struck were actually teaching. More than 400 "support workers" — janitors, cafeteria workers, secretaries, and bus drivers — joined the SJAE overnight and went out on strike with the teachers. The support workers were represented on the "crisis committee," the principal executive body of the SJAE, and voted on all issues during daily meetings of the whole organization. While only one-third of the initial SJAE members were black, a majority of the support workers were black, giving the strike strong roots in the black community. Reflecting on the role of the support workers, Armour points out, "The support workers did help the strike in that, had the bus drivers not gone on strike, they would have brought those children to school. Had the secretaries, the cooks, and the janitors not gone on strike, I imagine they would have had some semblance of learning going on."

Community support for the strike astonished everyone in this conservative right-to-work state. The decidedly anti-union *New Orleans Times-Picayune* ran a front page poll that indicated the majority of St. John residents favored collective bargaining for the teachers. Support came from a myriad of parents' groups and labor unions in the parish, as well as teachers' organizations around the state.

The depth of the support was owed to several factors. First, the unwillingness of the school board to enter into



meaningful negotiations created a tremendous amount of bad publicity. Because of the dispute within the board and between factions of the board and the superintendent, board meetings were chaotic and frequently deadlocked. On several occasions the teachers and parent groups attended board meetings, only to have the board go into executive session in order to meet privately. A local ministers' group, state legislators, and even Governor Edwin Edwards offered to negotiate the dispute, only to be rebuffed by the board.

While this kind of behavior has become a hallmark of Louisiana's chicken-coop politics, the new residents were aghast at the open incompetence and corruption of their governing bodies. Board member Bonura claims that the new white arrivals formed the mainstay of teacher support, along with the black population. It became clear that patronage was harming the quality of education. Armour observed that the board had "created a monster that this commu-



photos courtesy Lance Hill

bility of winning collective bargaining might increase. Apparently the current members consider their positions stable. Since the end of the strike they have embarked on a series of school closings and staff layoffs, which have met with sharp community opposition.

AFTERMATH

Whether or not the St. John teachers' strike was a success depends on the criteria used to evaluate it. There were small accomplishments often overlooked by the media's focus on personalities and issues rather than the organizing process. For instance, the strategy of involving all education workers — not just the teachers — in the action played an enormously important role. Aside from doubling the strikers' numbers, the strategy brought in several hundred black workers and their families, providing a solid base of support in the black community. By the end of the strike nearly one out of 20 workers in the parish was directly involved. This approach had repercussions even on a statewide level. For the first time in history the support workers were given full voting rights at the state convention of the Louisiana Association of Educators; and a St. John support worker was promptly elected vice-president of the state organization.

Given the strictly segregated nature of parish life in previous years, the importance of racial unity among education workers cannot be overestimated. For years two education associations existed side by side in the school system, for the most part racially segregated. The strike overcame those differences and undermined prejudices to the point that a predominantly white teachers' group elected a black woman (Armour) as its leader. This new-found unity is already being tested by the board through a series of personnel transfers which resulted in white teachers and administrators being replaced by blacks, exacerbating racial tensions.

In addition, Armour claims that a new generation of leaders emerged through the daily mass meetings of the SJAE where all decisions were debated and voted upon. This experience with direct democracy was the first for

nity has long been disgusted with, but nobody did anything about it." Adding to the board's image difficulties, it hired two notorious anti-union consultants who counseled board members to refuse to allow collective bargaining. The SJAE, on the other hand, came to be recognized as more concerned than the board with education and the welfare of the students. Their demands appeared to be a vehicle for changing an education system anchored in a hopelessly antiquated mode of government.

On October 17 the school board issued an ultimatum: return to work by Friday or face termination. "Of course this frightened a number of them [strikers] and they began to trickle in," says Armour. "What we were afraid of was that as they trickled in this would break the strike."

The board agreed to hold a referendum on collective bargaining for teachers in January, and although the legality of such a referendum was questionable under Louisiana law, the strikers took the offer. "As an alterna-

tive we agreed," says Armour, "but that was not the consensus of all the teachers, including myself. At no point did I try to influence the teachers, until the night before. I felt that many of them had gotten despondent, they were beginning to feel it financially, even though they had gotten loans. Many of these people were the sole support of their homes and they were beginning to feel it."

Unfortunately for the SJAE, the state supreme court later ruled that the referendum was illegal, and the issue of collective bargaining and unionization went back to the board. But during the strike the SJAE devised a strategy to respond to this contingency. They initiated a campaign to recall selected board members, including former SJAE president Martin Bonura.

A sufficient number of signatures was gathered to secure recall elections for six board members; however, a court ruling threw out three of the petitions. Armour believes that if new board members are elected the possi-

WILHELMINA ARMOUR, SECOND FROM RIGHT.



many who had endured decades of powerlessness.

There is evidence that the strike generated a more confrontational attitude in other segments of the community. Recently a group of St. John High

School students staged a walkout, protesting the transfer of school administrators. Similarly, the recent St. Bernard Parish and Mississippi teachers' actions appear to be part of a wave of Southern organizing efforts

sparked in part by the St. John experience.

Finally, Armour insists that the strike was not focused exclusively on collective bargaining. Initially the teachers asked only for their raise and



“Don’t you dare give up.”

Wilhelmina Armour's experience in the St. John education system is one thread in the fabric of racism that enveloped the parish. At the age of 14 Armour finished seventh grade only to find that no high schools existed for blacks in that community. Her father, a militant sugar union worker, joined with other members of “beneficent” associations to petition for a black high school. Functioning as survival networks, the beneficent associations were created by blacks as independent, collective organizations that provided medical care and social ties for members. The associations mirrored the Creole traditions of St. John blacks by bearing names such as “Bienfaisance Benevolent Society” and “Bon Secour.”

Association representatives approached Oswald Montague, the school superintendent and plantation aristocrat, and argued for a black high school to serve not only St. John, but neighboring St. Charles and St. James parishes which also lacked facilities. Montague required that a census be taken to determine the number of black students prepared to attend such a school. Once the census was completed, Montague acquiesced. “So it was then that ‘Dear Uncle Montague,’ ‘father,’ ‘The Great White Father’ . . . opened the high school for us,” recalls Armour with a note of resentment. Since Montague was unwilling to fund a new school building, the black children were forced to start school in an empty dance hall.

In 1946 Armour became one of the first blacks to register to vote, and during the ‘50s she became an NAACP member. Although the Civil

Rights Movement was not as bloody in St. John as in other areas, Armour remembers some troubling events, such as the night that sheriff’s deputies broke up an NAACP fundraising dance. “There were other incidents that I think sometimes I’d just as soon forget.”

Armour recalls her father struggling during an 18-month sugar refinery strike in 1955, a strike that resulted in his being jailed. At 80 years of age he’s as alert and attentive as ever, and Armour points out that he was a great source of encouragement during the teachers’ strike. She says that he was impressed with her as a black person playing a leadership role for white folks. She smiles as she recounts his telling her, “I never thought the day would come when I would see leadership in my own. . . . Don’t you dare give up.”

the reinstatement of some threatened benefits. They were not interested in unionization. The teachers were seeking representation in the decision-making process, says Armour, and their experience with the board convinced them that they needed an agreement in the form of a binding contract. “I often equate this to the American Revolution,” says Armour, “like the colonists that had the position of no taxation without representation. The teachers were doing the same thing . . . we had no say, no input at all.”

Despite the failure to gain collective bargaining, all sides agree that the education workers are a new force in parish politics. Even Bonura, one of the teachers’ recall targets, admits the strike served a progressive role. “In a sense the strike was a good thing,” says Bonura. “It woke up people.”

Understanding the outcome of the strike requires acknowledging that it became substantially more than what appeared on the surface. The transformation of the St. John strike from a modest wage request to a major political upheaval was the result of several factors. Initially, the extensive alteration of the economy eroded the power base of the old autocratic ruling structure, the plantation aristocracy. A

vacuum occurred as the social class of small merchants competed with or battled against the continuing power of the education patronage machine. While the manipulators of this machine assumed it retained its ability to coerce and control the public’s behavior as the Montagues had done, in fact it had lost a great deal of power and outgrown its function. It lacked the economic coercive powers the Montagues had wielded through controlling their plantation, refinery, and government hirelings. Just as the invading petrochemical industry had torn asunder the economy of the parish, the resultant development of new social groups and democratic expectations began to tear asunder the political life of the parish.

At this juncture, a crisis was waiting to happen. The precarious power of the school board was challenged by the growing number of residents impatient with the politicization of education, and by the education workers’ increasing desire for control over the work process. In the ensuing factional dispute between board members and the superintendent, the strikers managed to surface as the most competent leading body. A new economic structure demanded a new decision-making

process, and this demand was at the heart of the strike.

If the gauge for a successful strike is the ability to secure a favorable contract, then the St. John effort was a failure. But if success is gauged by the achievement of the organization in upsetting the old political order, securing changes in government policy, overcoming racial divisions, and uniting diverse groups of workers in preparation for future conflicts, then the strike was a sterling victory. □

Lance Hill is an activist/journalist living in New Orleans.

TEACHERS ON STRIKE The Final Card

BY TRELLA LAUGHLIN

In a dramatic demonstration of militancy, courage, and frustration, Mississippi school teachers went on strike early in 1985 for the first time in that state system's history. The February walkout spread to involve more than 9,000 strikers — over a third of all Mississippi teachers — and 466,000 schoolchildren.

Mississippi's history of entrenched segregation and alleged misuse of school fund tax appropriations — in the face of little allowed response by teachers — left many surprised by the depth and frustration of the strike.

"Yep. The strike was our final card, after years of political abuse, lies, broken promises, threats, low wages, no health insurance, little or poor equipment, and fear," said one striker. "Jones County started it and then we all voted with our feet. I saw a new breed of teacher in Mississippi. People who said they would never do such a thing as strike went out on the picket line."

A sore point in the ongoing struggle

has been the allocation of funds from state appropriations to public education. State officials argue that several attempts have been made to raise revenues for teacher salaries over the years, but teachers argue that they never get the money.

A case in point is the hot debate which raged in 1966 on whether to legalize liquor in the state or to continue the hypocrisy of being a dry state. The legislature legalized liquor, the state became the official bootlegger, and the money from this "sin tax" was to go to teachers. The liquor profits went into a general fund. Reportedly, the teachers never saw a penny.

Similarly, when the sales tax was increased in 1968, income taxes were raised, and a state withholding system was started for the first time. Teachers were to get a \$1,300 raise. Again, strikers argued, these monies ended

up in the general fund and never got to teachers' paychecks.

Under Governor William Winter's administration, the Education Reform Act of 1982 declared that the "commitment of the people of Mississippi to this program has been underlined by the investment of a very substantial additional amount of their taxes. It is our responsibility to ensure that we get our money's worth." This sweeping attempt at reform involved implementing a statewide kindergarten program, a compulsory education law, revised high school graduation requirements, and new teacher certification requirements. It also suggested timidly that "the teachers, to the extent possible, should receive salaries that are at least equal to the average of the salaries received by teachers in the southeastern United States."

This meant that a new teacher entering the system with a bachelor's degree



photo courtesy Trella Laughlin

would make \$11,475 a year. If a teacher pursued a doctorate and continued to teach for 17 years, she or he would be eligible for a top salary of \$19,825. This salary could be supplemented by the local school district; this supplement ranges from \$4,803 in Claiborne County to nothing in Tunica County. The average county supplement is about \$600.

During the next gubernatorial administration, Governor Bill Allain found a loophole in the reform act's suggestion that the raise be "to the extent possible." Allain, who was put into office with the support of teachers, nevertheless claimed that Mississippi was too poor to raise teachers' salaries. Allain contended that continued tax increases would result in an erosion of public support for education and further economic decline in the state. As a result, salary increases were again denied, instigating a stand-off between the governor and the legislature on the one hand, and a majority of the teachers, some parent-supporters, and the Mississippi Association of Educators (MAE) on the other. The teachers and their supporters were especially angry that in the first legislative session of 1985 the lawmakers had voted themselves a \$6,000 pay increase.

Since the beginning of integration, wealthy whites have established private schools or "academies" with student bodies increasing to 20 percent of the school-age population. Legislators are the ruling class, as it were, of the entire state. A majority of their kids are sent to private academies — blatantly racist, all-white, right-wing fundamentalist schools; 60 percent of private academies in the state are not even accredited. Yet these Mississippi "public servants" refuse to fund education for black and poor children.

Judy Barrett, veteran teacher, president of the Bay St. Louis Teachers Association, and first-time striker, calls the legislative action the "Mint Julep Law." In an interview at the Bay St. Louis Pizza Hut (one of many local businesses that supported the teachers' strike), Barrett and Peggy Dutton (communications person for the teachers' group) talked about the strike:

Judy Barrett: "It's more than just a raise in my paycheck. The whole fu-

ture of public education is at stake. If something doesn't happen now, there will not be enough teachers to open school in August. If you were offered \$11,000 here and \$20,000 coming from a surrounding state, which would you take? Dedication does not put meat and potatoes on your table."

Peggy Dutton: "Yes, and I want my profession to be valued. Whether it's a dollar and cents value, an impact on the system, or the fact that I am producing the most important product Mississippi has. I want a dollar and cents value put on my profession. Say, look, you are worth something to me."

Judy Barrett: "We all need more money to get by. But more important, I see this as a move among Mississippi teachers for self-respect. For power."

Peggy Dutton: "We have been a powerless bunch all along. We have been described as docile. This is the first time teachers have moved to gain that kind of power and I think that it is a tremendous advantage to the children we teach. I don't think it's good that kids are being taught by people who feel powerless. The kids see us that way. I think the kids will gain when we go back into the classrooms as a group of people who stood up for what was right and made people do what they should have done a long time ago. We won the day we walked out of the classroom."

On March 12, in the middle of the strike, Alice Harden, a young black woman — a product of Jackson schools, a teacher, and president of the MAE — addressed her colleagues: "Ours is a struggle we cannot and must not lose, and in this struggle we have one advantage, one strength so great and powerful that it means we cannot lose our struggle. We have one another."

In her "Letter to Mississippi Teachers," Harden wrote, "The 20th Century finally caught up with the state of Mississippi and we, the Mississippi Association of Educators, brought it here. . . . The times of passive acquiescence are over. Those times are gone forever — and we will not allow them to come back. We stood up to the Governor and the Legislature, and we said, 'We will have justice. We will not participate in the demeaning of our profession or of the children and communities we

serve.' They said, 'Accept things as they have always been.' We have answered them with strength, unity and determination to change the system forever."

Was the system changed fundamentally? No, even though legislators were forced by the strike and public pressure to vote a \$77.6 million teacher pay and tax plan which amounted to an increase of \$4,400 in teachers' salaries over a three-year period.

The impasse continued as Governor Allain vetoed the pay increase bill. At first the MAE called for upholding the governor's veto because the bill contained a harsh, outrageous, and presumably illegal anti-strike provision that would apply not only to teachers but any civil servant. But when MAE organizers finally pushed the strike forward, Hinds County (Jackson) chancellor Paul G. Alexander found the MAE and its officers in contempt and threatened them with fines and jail sentences for encouraging teacher walkouts.

On March 19, the MAE decided to call off the strike and back the legislature's attempt to override the governor's veto, contending that any pay increase was a victory. The anti-strike language of the law could and would be tested in court, they said.

What, then, did change during this struggle? The teachers themselves. Never again will they be passive or support a governor like Allain who turns his back on them. They have experienced a unity, and an understanding of how racism has hurt everybody, and they built a new degree of self-respect.

What changed was the mindset of the public and definitely of its teachers. No longer will they allow the ruling class legislators to go unchallenged. As Alice Harden reminded MAE members: "United and strong we will return home to fight the current battle and begin to win the long-term struggle in which we are engaged."□

Trella Laughlin is a native of Jackson, Mississippi, and graduated from Central High School its last year as an all-white school. She has been a college professor and is a journalist and activist.

Her greatest pleasure, bless her heart, is watching me eat. Just last week she dropped by the house with some homemade pickles. I opened a jar, sat down in the kitchen, and proceeded to make her happy. My mother-in-law makes great pickles.

"Yum, yum," I said.

She looked at me adoringly and began pattering about the kitchen, closing cabinet doors I had left open. For some reason open cabinet doors make both her and my wife nervous. It's not the only thing they have in common.

I love my mother-in-law. It's un-American I know but I just can't help it. She is such a charming Southern lady and so is my wife, Dixie. They are very much alike. Two black-eyed peas in a pod who have managed to convert me, a yankee, to the Southern way of life.

If only they wouldn't talk.

The English have a saying, a bit of homespun advice given traditionally to young men contemplating marriage: "Take a bloody good look at her mother, lad." Good advice, but I would add: "And take a bloody good listen to her, too."

My mother-in-law is a slow talker. A *Southern* slow talker and that is the worst kind. If the 1988 Olympics have a slow talking competition, you will see her on TV. She will be the lady with the gold medal around her neck singing the national anthem. They will have to slow the music way, way down for her. Otherwise, by the time the music ends she will be somewhere around "the dawn's early light" pronouncing every syllable clearly, distinctly, and s-l-o-w-l-y.

"Good pickles, Mom," I said.

"Thank you, honey," she drawled. She was examining some of the plants and flowers Dixie had everywhere in the kitchen. It's another thing they have in common — plants. They buy them, trade them, transplant them, talk about them, and, as they say in the South, "Smell of them."

"You know," she began, pausing for



a breath, "I — was — just — wondering — about — these — flowers."

"Whaddabout 'em?" I asked.

"Well," she cocked her head and made a sucking sound through her teeth, "they — just — don't — look — like — they — are — doing — very — well."

I bit my tongue, trying desperately not to interrupt.

"So — I — was — thinking," she continued, "that — maybe — they — would — do — better. . ."

"Ifwegavethemsomewater," I blurted out rudely.

"No," she said. "They — seem — to — be — moist — enough. (Pause) What — I — was — thinking — about — was — that — maybe — they — would — do — a — little — better. . ."

It was agony. I could feel the muscles tensing up across my shoulders,

my toes curling inside my shoes.

"... if — they — were — closer — to — the — window. . ."

I leaped to my feet and began moving the plants to the big window sill.

"That — way — they — would. . ."

"Getmorelight," I said, making my third trip.

"... take — advantage — of. . ."

"Morelight," I said, putting down the last plant.

"... the — morning — sunshine."

My pulse was pounding, my forehead beaded with perspiration. These confrontations take a lot out of me. As the years go by she is either talking more slowly or I am becoming less patient. Maybe both.

Unlike her mother, my wife is not a slow talker, but she does have that negative Southern way of asking questions. "Are you not tired?" she will

IAGE



ask. I never know what to say. A simple "yes" or "no" seems to leave the question still in doubt. To prevent confusion I usually answer with a declarative sentence. "I feel rested and well," I respond a bit self-consciously.

We had some friends over for dinner a while back. They used to be friends. Now, I'm not so sure. While Dixie was clearing the dessert dishes she asked, "Who would like coffee?"

Several of our guests said they would. But not me. I had had my quota for the day. As Dixie picked up my dish she asked, "Do you not want coffee?"

"Yes," I answered.

A few moments later Dixie put down a cup of coffee at my place. "I don't care for any, Dixie," I said.

"You said you did."

"No I didn't," I insisted.

"I'm sure you did," she stated.

"She's right," one of our female guests said. "I heard you."

"You heard wrong, my dear," I said, forcing a smile. "Dixie asked, 'Do you not want coffee,' to which I answered 'yes.'"

"So why did you change your mind?" she asked.

"I did not change my mind," I said a little too loudly. The conversation across the table stopped suddenly. I forced another grin. "If Dixie would have asked, 'Do you want coffee?' I would have said 'No.' However, what Dixie did in fact ask was, 'Do you not want coffee' to which I answered 'Yes.'" To my surprise I found myself on my feet, gesticulating wildly.

"Calm down," Dixie whispered.

"I am calm," I sputtered. "Just trying to make a point."

Our guests were deliberately not paying attention to us. I suppose they thought they were witnessing a major marital crisis.

If it had ended there, everything would have been all right. Dixie and I had survived numerous tumbles down "Communications Gap" in the past. We always landed on our feet laughing about it. Not this time. I sat back down and began a conversation with the guest on my left when I noticed Dixie was still standing behind me.

"Do you not want coffee, or what?" she asked.

Something snapped inside me. "No, I do not want coffee," I bellowed. "Or maybe I should say, 'Yes, it is coffee I do not want.' No coffee for me. Yes, on the no coffee question." I was on my feet again pointing to the coffee cup she held in a trembling hand. "I have a negative desire for that."

The evening went downhill after that. People began yawning and looking at their watches. "Would you look at the time." "Where has the evening gone?" "I'll bet the babysitter is wondering about us."

After our guests left, Dixie and I cleaned up in a strained silence. I hummed a few bars of "Yes, We Have No Bananas" but she paid no attention to me.

We went to bed and lay quietly, back to back, for several minutes before I ventured a hand over to her side beneath the sheets. She responded with a squeeze. Good woman. "Would you not like to fool around?" I asked.

She laughed, turned on her side and nuzzled my neck. "Are you not too tired?" she asked. □

Chap Reaver, Jr., is a 50-year-old chiropractor who lives in Marietta, Georgia. When he sent us this story he wrote that he and Dixie have been married for 25 years and are perfectly compatible except for the language barrier. He said, "I don't think I can last much longer unless we get this worked out. Please buy and publish this story. You will be saving a good marriage."

Honoring the ancestors

Kongo-American Graves in the American South

By Elizabeth A. Fenn

In recent years Southern religion has increasingly been stereotyped through proliferating images of conservative, white, Bible-thumping ministers of the Jerry Falwell variety. Yet such images, to which the media seem particularly attached, obscure the great diversity of religious traditions that have contributed to Southern culture. Not all of these traditions are Judeo-Christian in origin. Native Americans adhered to their own distinctive and widely differing religious beliefs long before the first Europeans set foot in the South. And the black slaves forced to accompany these Europeans contributed the classical religions of West Africa to the Southern cultural blend. Through struggle and creativity Afro-Americans have kept important aspects of these religions alive for centuries.¹

Today, one of the most visible manifestations of West African religious thought in the New World can be found in the black cemeteries of the South, where many meaningful and seemingly unusual objects adorn individual graves. Ranging from bed frames and bathroom tiles to car parts and Christmas tinsel, these decorations reveal artistic and philosophical roots in the ancient Kongo civilization of central Africa. That Kongo tradi-



photo by Elizabeth Fenn

WHEEL AND WRENCHES ON A GRAVE IN CUMBERLAND COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

tions remain particularly visible is not surprising. Of the 500,000 West Africans shipped to North America in the course of the slave trade, more came from Kongo and Angolan ports than from any other single area of the West African coast. Captives from these ports were especially prominent among the slaves entering the United States during the trade's final peak period around 1800.²

The Bakongo people constitute the demographic heart of Kongo civilization. Like many West African peoples, the Bakongo and related cultural groups believe in the continuing influence of the dead in this world. But unlike West Africans such as the Yoruba of Nigeria, the Bakongo do not worship a great pantheon of gods. Instead they recognize one almighty god who has given them medicinal powers through the ancestral spirits who constitute the primary spiritual actors in the Kongo cosmos.

The Bakongo believe that we live in a divided world. The world with which most of us are familiar is of course that of the living. But beneath us, according to Kongo tradition, there lies another world — that of the dead. The land of the dead is a world upside down, a world that is in some ways a mirror image of this world. (Hence for the Bakongo death is the inversion of life.) The two worlds are connected by water, and the Bakongo believe that gleaming ancestral spirits can be seen in the flash of the sun's rays off of oceans, lakes, and streams.³

The Bakongo communicate with the dead through charms called *minkisi*. In fact, Kongo *minkisi* are an important source for Afro-American traditions of conjure and charm-making. Among the Bakongo, graves are the ultimate charm, providing a particularly effective medium for communicating with the dead. Hence the Bakongo often cover graves with an array of objects intended to admonish, appease, and instruct ancestral spirits.⁴

In the Afro-American cemeteries of the South, often associated with Christian churches, Kongo decorative traditions remain strong. And although these traditions have in some cases taken on new meanings in the Christian context, revealing the enormous creativity that has long been a hallmark of Afro-American culture, the accounts of early folklorists confirm their West African origins.

Among the objects most frequently placed on Kongo graves are the personal effects of the deceased — things that might continue to be of use in the



map courtesy Africa News

KONGO-INFLUENCED CULTURES CAN BE FOUND IN GABON, CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE (CONGO), ZAIRE, AND ANGOLA.

spirit world. A late nineteenth-century observer noted that the Bakongo “mark the final resting-places of their friends by ornamenting their graves with crockery, empty bottles, old cooking-pots, etc.” By placing such objects on a grave, the Bakongo insured that the spirit would not return to this world in search of favorite or much needed items.⁵

Many Afro-American graves are decorated in a similar fashion. Although her testimony was unfortunately recorded in racist dialect, a Georgia woman interviewed in the 1930s makes this quite clear. “I dohn guess yuh be bodduh much by duh spirits,” she explained, “ef yuh gib em

a good fewnul an put duh tings what belong tuh em on top uh duh grave.” According to Ben Washington from Pine Barrens, Georgia, people placed last-used objects and personal effects on graves because “duh spirits need deze same as duh man. Den duh spirit res an dohn wanduh bout.” Folklorist Elsie Parsons noted similar traditions in the South Carolina Sea Islands early in the twentieth century. “To keep the deceased ‘from frettin’ — goin’ back,” she explained, “the cup and saucer used in the last sickness should be placed on the grave.”⁶

Graves with just such decorations can be found throughout the black South today. At an A. M. E. Zion church in Bladen County, North Carolina, an inverted coffee cup marks the site of one woman's grave. Next to it is a grave decorated with a candy jar and an inverted plastic bowl. A black Baptist church in the same county contains graves marked by jugs, pitchers, ceramic figurines, and an upside-down bowl. Far to the west in Cass County, Texas, empty snuff bottles denote the outlines of another black grave, recreating the *luumbu*, or protective enclosure, that commonly surrounds Kongo graves and royal compounds.⁷

The fact that the items on Afro-American graves are often inverted is also consistent with Kongo tradition. The Bakongo often invert grave goods in symbolic recognition of a spirit world which is itself “upside-down” — the mirror image of the world of the living.⁸

Grave decorations are frequently broken as well. In 1891 E. J. Glave observed that the glass and ceramicware in Kongo cemeteries was “all cracked or perforated with holes.” Some three decades later another European noted the same phenomenon. The objects on Kongo graves, according to John H. Weeks, “are generally broken, *i.e.* killed, that their spirits may go to their former owner in the spirit town.” Other West African cultures adhere to

related beliefs.⁹

In her recent autobiography singer Bessie Jones of the Georgia Sea Islands recalled similar traditions in the Afro-American context. Before Sea Island blacks put objects on graves, she explained, "they'd punch holes in the bottom of the glasses and such." One explanation for this practice comes from Rosa Sallins of Harris Neck, Georgia: "Yuh break duh dishes so dat duh chain will be broke. Yuh see, duh one pusson is dead an ef yuh dohn break duh tings, den, duh udduhs in duh fambly will die too." An explanation closer to that of the Bakongo comes from Texas folklorist Dorothy Jean Michael. Grave goods, she writes, "must be cracked: only in that way can the spirit be released from its porcelain prison to go to the next world and serve the dead owner."¹⁰

Ceramics and glassware are not the only items of personal significance decorating the graves of Afro-Americans. Two North Carolina cemeteries, one in Chatham County and the other in Robeson County, contain burial sites decorated with images of guitars. One guitar was painstakingly fashioned out of plywood. The other, probably made by a florist, consists of styrofoam and artificial flowers.

Elsewhere, a beautiful car wheel with two wrenches welded to it decorates the grave of a Fort Bragg mechanic. Made and placed on his grave by his fellow workers, this marker is but one example of a whole genre of decorations associated with cars and the mechanical arts. Automobile drive shafts seem to be particularly common on black grave sites. Although automobiles are clearly icons of the modern world, in a Kongo cemetery the concrete form of a car marks the grave of "a man who was a noted driver." On the Caribbean island of St. Thomas there are black graves decorated with car mufflers and batteries. And in Haiti, where the Bakongo made important contributions to the religion usually known as "voodoo" but correctly called *vodun*, it is still common practice to bury people with the tools of their trade.¹¹

The writings of the early twentieth-century explorer John H. Weeks give us clues to other Kongo-American funerary traditions. According to

SANTERIA: Afro-Cuban Religion in Miami

The 1980 Mariel exodus, in which some 125,000 Cuban "boat people" emigrated to the United States, has brought a new infusion of African religion into the South. Many Cubans, both black and white, participate in a religion known as Santeria. In places like Miami, where Cubans have had an enormous cultural impact in recent years, Santeria is growing at a very rapid pace.

In its basics, Santeria consists of a blend of Catholicism with Yoruba and Dahomean religions from the countries we know today as Nigeria and the

Republic of Benin. Although the Yoruba and Dahomean religions are closely related, it was the Yoruba who had the greatest influence on the structure of Santeria.

Followers of the religion worship the Yoruba gods, or *orisha*, many of whom have fused with the Catholic saints. For example Ochun, the goddess of sweet water and love, has for obvious reasons become affiliated with St. Valentine. Chango, the fiery god who mistakenly killed his family while playing with a lightning bolt, merges with St. Barbara, whose father was struck by lightning after he jealously imprisoned his own daughter. The Yoruba god of smallpox and pestilence, called Babaluaieye by the Cubans, is associated with the crip-

Weeks beds were among the items commonly needed by spirits in the Kongo world of the dead. When a man or woman's spouse died the surviving partner sometimes carried the bed of the deceased into a stream and broke it apart, letting the pieces float away with the current. Thus the bed was symbolically "killed" in order that its spirit might be free to travel, via water, to its owner in the other world. In other cases the bed remained intact as a grave marker.¹²

Beds and bed frames mark the sites of graves throughout the black Atlantic world. A photograph from the Belgian Congo in 1944 shows a wooden bed frame marking a burial site. In Texas an immense tomb "shaped like a king-sized bed, complete with an imposing headboard and two-poster footboard" sits on top of a grave of unknown ethnic origins. Metal bed frames have been observed in a black cemetery on the island of St. Thomas and in two separate black graveyards in Hale



pled St. Lazarus, whose body is covered with oozing sores.

The ongoing worship of these African gods is most visible today in the many *botanicas* (herbal pharmacies) scattered throughout the Cuban sections of Miami. In these Afro-Cuban religious supply stores one might purchase cigars to use as offerings to Ellegua, the trickster god who guards the crossroads and controls communication. Or one could buy strands of blue and white beads for Yemaya, the goddess of the sea. Some *botanicas* also offer consultations for people seeking advice regarding particular problems or quests.

Shrines to the various gods can be found in *botanicas*, in private homes, and in the *templos* devoted to Santeria.

At the heart of each shrine are the stones, always hidden from view, which embody the personal power and life force of each of the *orisha*. Because of their great importance the stones receive special care and feeding through animal sacrifices.

In the rituals of Santeria, which are performed for a variety of purposes, the "children" of the various *orisha* dance and sing to African drumming, and in some cases become possessed by one of the gods.

As Cuban influence continues to spread throughout the South, we can expect Santeria to become increasingly visible in urban areas, as it already is in Miami, New York, and New Jersey.

— Elizabeth Fenn

connected to our own by the very sea which casts shells upon our shores.¹⁴

It is no accident therefore that shells are among the objects most commonly found upon graves in the coastal South. Georgia Sea Island singer Besie Jones explained in an interview, "The shells upon our graves stand for water, the means of glory and the land of demise." One scholar surveyed some 687 Afro-American gravesites in the South Carolina Sea Islands and found that 100 of them bore seashell decorations. In Texas and the Carolinas shells can be found in inland areas as well. "Nearly every [black] grave," noted an 1892 observer in Columbia, South Carolina, "has bordering or thrown upon it a few bleached seashells of a dozen different kinds, such as are found along the south Atlantic coast."¹⁵

Pipes used for drainage and household plumbing, laden with watery associations, also serve decorative purposes in the cemeteries of Afro-America. A black graveyard in Virginia contains a marker made of two bent metal pipes united at the top by a faucet. Black cemeteries in North and South Carolina, Texas, Missouri, and New York boast large ceramic drain pipes and narrower metal and plastic pipes as grave decorations.¹⁶

Like shells and pipes, bathroom tiles are commonly associated with water. In many of our homes such tiles cover shower floors and the walls behind kitchen sinks. But outside our homes bathroom tiles find different uses. In three widely separated but heavily Kongo-influenced lands, West African aesthetic values have developed independently along strikingly similar lines. In Haiti many black cemeteries now contain tombs covered with gleaming bathroom tiles. Similar gravemarkers can be found in the Afro-American cemeteries of North Carolina and, remarkably, in the Kongo cemeteries of West Africa.¹⁷

County, Alabama. One of the Hale County burying grounds once contained two bed frames, side by side, where a married couple rests for eternity. Only one of the bed frames survives today. The other disappeared not long after an antique dealer passed through the area and inquired about purchasing one of the beds. Local residents informed him that neither of the beds was for sale. Several nights later one of the two gravemarkers disappeared. Apparently the antique dealer

was unfamiliar with Plat-eye, the spirit who, according to Afro-American folklore, spells the doom of people who steal from graves.¹³

Other cemetery decorations recall different Kongo traditions. Scholar Robert Farris Thompson pointed out that shells from the sea are emblems of the cosmos and the spiraling cycle of life and death in Kongo religious thought. Their white color recalls the chalky hue of the spirit world, a world that according to Kongo thought is



photo by Jason De Parle

OPPOSITE PAGE: ENGRAVING OF A KONGO GRAVE FROM E.J. GLAVE'S 1891 ARTICLE, "FETISHISM IN CONGO LAND," IN *THE CENTURY* MAGAZINE.

THIS PAGE: BASKETBALL HOOP, KETTLE, AND METAL GRILL-WORK IN A NEW ORLEANS BLACK CEMETERY.

Water may be important in explaining other Afro-American grave decorations as well, and the significance of water in Kongo thought may have been reinforced by its use in Christian baptism. The notable predominance of pitchers in black cemeteries (usually with their bottoms broken out) may have to do with their symbolic associations with water. When the Georgia Writers Project interviewed Margaret Snead of Pin Point in the 1930s, the black woman recalled that among the many items set upon her friend Catherine De Lancy's grave was "duh pitchuh she made ice water in."¹⁸

The great black folklorist Zora Neale Hurston sheds further light on the importance of water to the spirit world in an account of her initiation as a conjure doctor in New Orleans. For three days she lay "silent and fasting while my spirit went wherever spirits must go that seek answers never given to men as men." During that time, Hurston says, "I could have no food, but a pitcher of water was placed on a small table at the head of the couch, that my spirit might not waste time in search of water which would be spent in search of the Power-Giver. The spirit must have water, and if none had been provided it would wander in search of it." This account comes immediately to mind when one sees a black grave in eastern Georgia with a sealed plastic jug of water placed squarely in the middle of the mound.¹⁹

One of the most striking characteristics of Afro-American graves is that they sparkle in the sun. Cracked and broken glassware, Christmas tinsel, silver paint, bathroom tiles, mirrors, marbles, "mailbox" letters, and reflective red driveway markers all contribute to the glittery appearance of certain black cemeteries. Like other funerary traditions, this too can be traced to Kongo traditions and aesthetics. Just as the Bakongo see the spirits of ancestors in the brilliant reflection of the sun in water, they see the same spirits in other shining objects. In fact, such objects once formed an essential part of Kongo charms. "Bakongo ritual experts," writes Robert F. Thompson, "used to embed the glittering, iridescent wing-case of a particular kind of beetle into their charms as 'something full of light, like water, that you can see through, to the other

world.'"²⁰

Similar items are used in Afro-American charms. Blacks in the U. S. South interviewed by Newbell Niles Puckett in the 1920s included objects such as silver coins, a "glistening mineral like polished lead," or "tin foil (representing the brightness of the little spirit who was going to be in the ball)" in their charms. Likewise, many blacks *and* whites throughout the South understood that a shining piece of glass or a mirror could capture the spirit of the newly deceased. Hence many folklorists have noted that as soon as someone died, all mirrors, clocks, and pictures in the room with the deceased were either covered or turned to the wall. If this precaution was not taken, Puckett explained, the "reflection of the corpse might permanently hold in either the pictures or the mirrors."²¹

Langston Hughes and Arna Bon-temps elaborate on the mystical powers of glass and mirrors in their collection of black folklore. To see a spirit, they say, take a mirror into a graveyard and follow the prescribed ritual procedure. "You will see his reflection in the mirror and ask him what you please." Zora Neale Hurston recounts a similar ritual that is filled with Kongo imagery. "Ghosts cannot cross water," she says, "so that if a hoodoo doctor wishes to sic a dead spirit upon a man who lives across

water, he must first hold the mirror ceremony to fetch the victim from across the water."²²

In some instances the animated, flashy aesthetic so apparent in black graveyards is rendered in more symbolic forms. One scholar in the 1920s found more than 20 lamps in a small Alabama burying ground. Another counted lamps on 71 graves on the South Carolina coast, "while six other graves had articles for lighting, [such] as lamp-wick, burner, chimney, broken shade, candlestand, and [the] bottom of [a] glass candle-holder, while five graves had lamp shades. Three graves had electric light bulbs and two had dry cell batteries." Lampshades, brass lamps, and candlestick holders can still be found in the Afro-American graveyards of North Carolina and Georgia, and they no doubt exist in other locations as well. The light from such objects, according to North Carolina folklorists, "will lead the deceased to glory."²³

To argue that the rich funerary arts of Afro-America have roots in classical Kongo religion and aesthetics is not to say that present-day practitioners still see the world in Kongo terms. Traditions such as these can take on new (often Christian) meanings, or they may survive as aesthetic values alone. But as the accounts of turn-of-the-century folklorists make clear, Kongo concepts and their material



photo by Sydney Nathans

manifestations continue to influence the American artistic landscape. In the realm of graveyards, there may be no better evidence for this than the surprisingly African appearance of a few white cemeteries scattered across the South. While there are numerous European and Native American traditions that could explain the presence of a great variety of decorations on these graves, the likelihood of Kongo influence across racial boundaries cannot be ignored. Just as most black cemeteries contain European-style engraved headstones, some white cemeteries contain Kongo-style shells, ceramicware, and household objects. Indeed, this is but one indication of how Afro-American we have all become. □

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NOTES

1. Except where otherwise noted, the observations in this article are based on the author's fieldwork.
2. Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, 1969), pp. 129, 144, 150, 157.
3. Discussions of Kongo religious thought can be found in the following sources: John M. Janzen and Wyatt MacGaffey, eds., *An Anthology of Kongo Religion* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1974); Wyatt MacGaffey, "The West in Congolese Experience," in Philip D. Curtin, ed., *Africa and the West* (Madison, 1972), pp. 49-74; Robert Farris Thompson and Joseph Cornet, *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds* (Washington, D. C., 1981); and Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit:*

African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy (New York, 1983), chap. 2.

4. Thompson, *Four Moments*, pp. 34-39, 141-147, 181-186; and Thompson, *Flash*, pp. 132-145.

5. E. J. Glave, "Fetishism in Congo Land," *The Century Magazine* 41 (1891), 835.

6. Dialect appears in this article only for the sake of accuracy when I am quoting from published sources. In all other cases it has been (and should be) avoided due to its clearly racist application. Folklorists have tended to use dialect to indicate race and class rather than to record actual speech patterns. There is, after all, no difference in the pronunciation of "was" and "wuz" or "when" and "wen." Yet "wuz" and "wen" are used repeatedly in written renditions of black speech. Georgia Writers Project (GWP), *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among Georgia Coastal Negroes* (Athens, Ga., 1940), p. 136; Elsie Clews Parsons, *Folk-lore of the Sea Islands, South Carolina* (Cambridge, Mass., 1923), p. 214.

7. Terry G. Jordan, *Texas Graveyards: A Cultural Legacy* (Austin, 1982), p. 22.

8. Thompson, *Flash*, 142.

9. Glave, "Fetishism," 835; John H. Weeks, *Among the Primitive Bakongo* (London, 1914), p. 272; Thompson, *Four Moments*, 184-185.

10. Bessie Jones, *For the Ancestors: Autobiographical Memories*, ed. John Stewart (Urbana, 1983), p. 76; GWP, *Drums*, 87; Dorothy Jean Michael, "Grave Decoration," *Publications of the Texas Folklore Society* 18 (1943), 131.

11. I would like to thank Tom Hatley for giving me directions to the Fort Bragg mechanic's grave. Thompson, *Four Moments*, 202; Alfred Metraux, *Voodoo in Haiti* (1959; rpt. New York, 1972), p. 247. David Brown of Yale University has kindly shared with me his observations on black graveyards in St. Thomas.

12. Weeks, *Bakongo*, 273.

13. Many friends and colleagues have generously provided me with information from their own research on beds in black cemeteries. The information leading me to the Kongo photograph came from Robert Farris Thompson of Yale University. David Brown of Yale told me about the St. Thomas grave. Sydney Nathans of Duke University

Honoring the Ancestors, a videotape based in part on Elizabeth Fenn's research, will soon be available from North State Public Video. The tape is the third in a series entitled, *Perspectives on Blacks in Art and Culture*, which will be released in January 1986. For more information, call or write:

North State Public Video
P.O. Box 3398
Durham, NC 27702
(919) 682-7153

- deserves credit for both the photograph and the information about the Hale County cemetery from which a bed was stolen. Documentation for the other Hale County grave can be found in William Christenberry, *Southern Photographs* (New York, 1983), p. 37. On the Texas grave see Jordan, *Texas Graveyards*, 10.
14. Thompson, *Flash*, 135; and Thompson, *Four Moments*, 197-198.
15. I am grateful to David Wilcox of Harvard for sharing his research on black graves with shell decorations in Denison, Texas. Thompson, *Flash*, 135; Samuel Miller Lawton, "The Religious Life of South Carolina and Sea Island Negroes," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, June 1939), pp. 197-218; Jordan, *Texas Graveyards*, 23; Ernest Ingersoll, "Decoration of Negro Graves," *Journal of American Folklore* 5 (1892), 68.
16. Thompson, *Four Moments*, 193-195. David Wilcox of Harvard has kindly provided me with a copy of his photograph of a black grave in Denison, Texas, marked by a drain pipe.
17. Thompson, *Flash*, 84.
18. GWP, *Drums*, 87.
19. Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (Philadelphia, 1935), p. 281.
20. I am grateful to David Sullivan of Yale University for showing me his photograph of driveway reflectors marking a grave on St. Simons Island, Georgia. Thompson, *Four Moments*, 198.
21. Newbell Niles Puckett, *The Magic and Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* (1926; rpt. New York, 1969), pp. 81, 228, 233.
22. Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, eds., *The Book of Negro Folklore* (New York, 1958), p. 163; Hurston, *Mules*, 282.
23. Puckett, *Folk Beliefs*, 106; Lawton, "Religious Life," 203; Paul G. Brewster, ed., *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore* (Durham, 1964), 1:260.

photo courtesy Elizabeth Fenn



OPPOSITE PAGE: BED FRAMES IN A HALE COUNTY, ALABAMA CEMETERY.
THIS PAGE: BED FRAME ON A KONGO GRAVE.

Sick

A little-known strike by Texas poultry workers in the 1950s resulted in major benefits for American consumers.

by George Norris Green and Jim McClellan

Clara Holder, an east Texas poultry worker, wrote a letter on June 26, 1953, to Patrick Gorman, the secretary-treasurer of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of America. "I was told to contact your office to secure help in organizing a much needed plant," she wrote. "The majority of the workers are eager to organize, if only they had some advice from a bonafide labor union. Would you kindly inform me if your organization can help us."

Clara Holder's brief letter sparked a tortuous organizing campaign in Center, Texas, that stirred racial and class tensions, triggered a national boycott, and persuaded the union to launch a successful drive to reform the entire U.S. poultry industry.

Poultry was introduced into Texas by both the Spanish and Anglo-American colonists. But it was a nondescript industry producing primarily for home consumption and local markets until the mid-1920s, when outlets for commercial marketing opened up with the establishment of poultry packing plants in Fort Worth, Taylor, and a few



A CHICKEN PROCESSING PLANT IN THE MID 1970S

other towns. During the wartime boom of the 1940s, when poultry was not subject to meat rationing, the industry entered a new phase with the widespread commercial production of broilers and young fryers. The first noteworthy production was around Gonzales in south Texas. In the Lone Star State by the mid-1950s, the industry had spread to Shelby and nearby east Texas counties.

Aside from the bloody battles between the so-called Regulators and Moderators in the 1840s, Shelby

County, deep in the piney woods, had been noted primarily for its lumbering. During the 1940s business leaders in the county seat of Center organized the Center Development Foundation to attract industry. They offered the usual inducements of land, buildings, and/or low taxes, accompanied by a typical pool of unskilled, native, black, and white laborers who were abandoning their marginal cotton farms. The county and the school district also granted tax concessions to several firms. By 1954 Shelby ranked a close

Chickens



USDA photo courtesy Rural Advancement Fund

Shelby County consistently supported east Texas's long-time congressman, Martin Dies (1932-44 and 1952-58), the labor-baiting chair of the House Un-American Activities Committee. In 1941 Dies observed that the CIO was infested with 50,000 Communists who were fanatical devotees of Hitler and Stalin, and that 90 percent of all strikes could be stopped if the CIO were forced to expel these alien traitors.

Workers in Center's poultry processing plants were paid the minimum wage of 75 cents an hour in 1953. Many apparently labored under highly unsanitary conditions, 10 or 11 hours a day on their feet, with no overtime pay — in between times of no work at all. The work was unimaginably grueling. One of the town's jewelers, Bernard Hooks, was appalled by the condition of the laborers' hands. They were so bruised and swollen, with fingernails often turned inside out, that Hooks frequently had difficulty fitting them with rings. Several workers attested that they had to become accustomed to painful fingers, swollen hands, and lost fingernails; no one was allowed to switch to a different plant job in order to rest his or her hands. The plants had no grievance procedures, seniority plans, or paid holidays.

The first few weeks of the organizing effort were conducted under the cloak of secrecy. After receiving Clara Holder's letter, Patrick Gorman forwarded the matter to the union's southwestern district vice-president Sam Twedell in Dallas. Twedell rapidly contacted Holder, asking her to arrange an opportunity for him to discuss unionization with about 10 of her fellow poultry workers. Twedell ad-

vised Holder to "please keep it [the proposed meeting] confidential as we would not want the employers to know anything about it until after we had the people organized."

The first meeting was held after working hours in the K.B. Cafe in Center on July 8, 1953. In the weeks that followed, the organizers easily obtained the number of names needed to call a union election. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) scheduled the union representation election for September 15 at the Denison Poultry and Egg Company. Another election was set for the employees of Eastex Company, a second poultry concern in Center, for November 5.

The local business community, a tightly knit group that ran the town, was stunned at the announcement of a union election in the city's two major plants. They launched a drive to discourage pro-union votes by the poultry workers, relying on social pressure and argumentation. A petition opposing the union was circulated among the city's business leaders which most owners signed. At least a half dozen businessmen — notably the jeweler Bernard Hooks, grocery store owner Laurie Hegler, and Weldon Sanders, a Texaco service station operator — refused to countenance the anti-union drive. For his dissent, Sanders was accused by his peers of "working for the Union and all the things that go with it" and suffered a loss in his trade.

Five days before the Denison election, the 182-person Center Development Foundation (CDF) purchased a full-page ad in the local newspaper, the *Center Champion*. Signed by the six directors of the CDF, the open letter declared, "We believe that Center's

second to Gonzales County in chickens sold in Texas with 8,227,247.


Like most small Southern towns, those in east Texas had long regarded unions as radical threats to God, home, and country. Lumber baron John Henry Kirby probably summarized the region's feelings in 1911 when he referred to conservative, AFL-type unionism as "a greater menace to Christian civilization than the anarchists, Black Hand, Molly Maguires, Mafia, Ku Klux Klan, and Night Riders."

unusual industrial growth is partially due to the fact the Center was known as a non-union town where there has been no labor violence or strife." The ad reminded workers of the allegedly tremendous monetary sacrifices of foundation members in bringing industry to Shelby County. The foundation praised the "harmonious" relationship between management and worker and confided that "the employers tell us that you employees have made them the best and most loyal workers they have ever had." The attack on unionism concluded with a plea: "Let's all work together to make Center a better place in which to live and work rather than a town divided and torn by Strife."

While business leaders worked to sway the opinion of county residents against unionism, the plant management sought to convince the poultry workers that they neither wanted nor needed the Meat Cutters. Prior to the NLRB election, the Denison Poultry Company presented each employee with a two-page letter. The owners argued that they paid all they could afford in wages and that they already (and voluntarily) financed an insurance program and Christmas bonuses for the workers. The company claimed it was competing with poultry processors all over the nation and that unionization would cost them customers.

The letter asserted that the union had to accept whatever the company offered or go on strike, and it attacked the "union method of violence, strikes, lost time and turmoil."

"You must decide," said the letter, "whether the union is making false promises to get you to pay dues." The workers also received a mimeographed statement cautioning them not to be influenced by threats that they would lose their jobs if they refused to join the union. In condemning the alleged union threats, however, the company issued its own prediction of future reprisals. "When the election is over," the statement read, "we [the company] shall retain in our payrolls all who have rendered faithful and efficient service." The Denison Poultry employees also received a letter from a group calling itself the "Loyal Employees Committee," closely echoing the arguments of the company's two letters.



TO ALL CENTER POULTRY WORKERS

Greetings:

I have reliable evidence that the Management of the Denison Poultry and Egg Company has entered into a conspiracy with a certain group of Business and Civic leaders of Center to deny the Denison and Eastex Poultry Workers the right to form a Union.

The right to form, join and belong to a Union is your right under the Law of the United States of America. If any Banker, Lawyer, Implement Dealer, Feed Salesman, Newspaper Publisher or anyone else, unlawfully interferes in these rights, they will be called into Court of Law and be made to answer for their misdeeds.

Did you ever stop to think why all at once a banker and these other civic leaders should suddenly become interested in the welfare of the poultry workers? Have they ever been interested in you before? Have you ever borrowed money from a banker, and if you have, did he let you have it out of the kindness of his heart, or was he interested in his five or six percent?

Every poultry worker knows that the reason these men are trying to break up the Union is because they want to keep the wages of all the working people in and around Center down to seventy five cents an hour. I have a feeling that if there were not a Law that compelled them to pay sevanty five cents, they would want you to work for 50¢.

I don't believe that many will be fooled or frightened by all the attention they are now getting from these businessmen. I have a firm conviction that when the Denison Poultry Workers vote on Tuesday, September 15, that 90% will vote "for the Union". A vote for the Union means a vote for higher wages and better working conditions.

All Denison and Eastex Workers are invited to attend the Union meeting on Monday night at the V.F.W. Hall. Everyone please attend and hear what we have to say about the conspiracy that has been hatched to keep your wages down to seventy five cents an hour.

Sam Twedell, Intl. Vice President
A.M.C. & B.W. of N.A., AFL
2909 Maple Avenue, Dallas, Texas

OBIV #45

Sam Twedell retaliated in kind. One of his handbills pointed out that the six directors of the Center Development Foundation were bankers, car agency owners, and one lumberman. "They don't do your kind of work or live in your kind of homes or take your kind of vacations," the circular claimed. "Would these men and their wives work in the plant for a lousy 75- per hour? THEY ARE AFRAID THAT IF YOU GET HIGHER WAGES THEY WILL HAVE TO PAY HIGHER WAGES TO THE PEOPLE WHO SLAVE FOR THEM."

Despite social pressures, company hostility, and the pleadings of "loyal" employees, both Denison and Eastex Poultry Company workers selected the Amalgamated Meat Cutters to be their collective bargaining representative. At the Denison plant, where all the workers were white, the vote was 81 to

55 in favor of the union. The election held later at the Eastex Plant approached landslide proportions. Eastex workers, 75 or 80 percent of whom were black, cast 118 votes for the union and nine against.

During the seven months following the election the organizers and officers of the Meat Cutters met repeatedly with the company owners. The labor representatives asked for union recognition, higher wages, and working conditions on a par with those in union-organized poultry plants in other regions of the country. The union even enlisted the aid of big business. One of Armour's industrial relations directors wrote Ray Clymer, owner of Denison Poultry, that Armour enjoyed "extremely harmonious relations with unions" and that the Meat Cutters were familiar with the limitations of the poultry business. But

the Texas companies never firmly committed themselves to any of the union proposals. In an April 1954 letter to Patrick Gorman, Twedell summed up the negotiations thus far: "We have been meeting with the employers continuously since that time, and they would make concessions and then withdraw them at the very next conference. They would schedule meetings with us [and] then at the last minute cancel them."

Union organizer Jim Gilker drew the conclusion that the owners were not bargaining in good faith, which federal law required. He felt that the companies were determined to conduct a long fight against union recognition and wage increases. Gilker reported to Gorman that Ray Clymer "does not take the position that he can't pay more money, but states very bluntly that he won't."

By March 1954, the Amalgamated Meat Cutters had become weary and skeptical of the negotiations with the companies. They were convinced that a strike would be not only costly but also futile in an area that would quickly supply strike-breakers for the unskilled jobs in the poultry plants. Secretary-Treasurer Gorman and vice-president Twedell leaned toward economic action. As early as January Twedell had written Gorman, "We [will] put the 'squeeze' on this poultry processor in every way that we possibly can and that can be done, not by striking, but by taking away some of their large customers." Negotiations were thus subordinated to the national boycott as the means of forcing a settlement.

According to the contracts which existed between Meat Cutter locals and their retail employers across the nation, the latter could not legally sell products which had been placed on the unfair list of the union. After providing the required notice to the Center poultry companies, union president Earl Jimerson issued a proclamation declaring that "Denison Poultry Company of Center, Texas is UNFAIR to Amalgamated Meat Cutters of North America, AFL." Once this formality was out of the way, letters were sent to companies distributing Denison products requesting that they comply with the terms of their contracts and desist from handling the products of

the unfair firm.

The Lucky Stores, Inc., a large San Francisco food chain, provide a typical example of compliance with the boycott directive. Upon receiving advanced word of the pending unfair decree, the company contacted Denison Poultry owner Ray Clymer to request that he immediately come to terms with the union or Lucky Stores would be forced to stop buying from his firm. Clymer replied that he had been bargaining in "absolute good faith" and recommended that Lucky Stores consult legal advice before participating in the proposed boycott. Lucky Stores announced early in April of 1954 that they would no longer purchase the products of Denison Poultry Company.

The boycott also was carried out by the local Meat Cutters unions. On March 29, 1954, president Jimerson sent letters to all locals in areas where Denison products were sold. The locals were told to wire Clymer to inform him that they could not handle a product on the union's unfair list. The locals were further directed to dissuade outlets in their areas from selling Denison's products. In California, a state that sold a great deal of Denison goods, the Western Federation of Butcher Workmen and the Meat Cutters conducted an extensive and successful campaign to ban the products of the unfair company.

Ray Clymer evidently anticipated problems in marketing his merchandise and decided to speed up his production in order to get as far ahead as possible should the boycott become completely effective. The normal chain speed on the production line in the plant was between 37 and 42 chickens per minute. By April 5 the rate had been increased to 66 chickens per minute. According to Twedell, it was not unusual for women to pass out from sheer exhaustion during the course of the day's work.

Without consulting any national union official or organizer, every union member at the Denison plant bolted off the job on the evening of April 5. Union members at Eastex initiated a walkout and were followed by all other employees of the company. Both plants were temporarily shut down by the wildcat strikes, but the companies soon resumed operations, as the Meat

Cutters union feared they would, by tapping the area's unskilled labor supply.

After Twedell observed firsthand the conditions that had touched off the strike, he persuaded the union to support it. He wrote Gorman that "these people are 'the salt of the earth' and we must do everything within our limits to see that they get a square deal." Soon the threat of violence hung over the town, as picketers tangled with reckless drivers, county deputies, state highway patrolmen, and perhaps Texas Rangers.

In addition, a wave of racism engulfed the strike. As in most east Texas towns, the white citizens of Center were angered by the May 1, 1954, school desegregation decision of the U.S. Supreme Court. Thus, while white strikers seem to have been regarded as curiosities, black picketers were deeply resented. Just after the Eastex strike began, Twedell claimed that he was summoned to the county district attorney's office. There, in the presence of the sheriff, Twedell said he was ordered to "Get those goddamn Niggers off the picket line or some of them are gonna get killed." Twedell refused.

KDET radio, a strongly anti-union station, exploited the town's racist attitudes as an angle of attack on the union. On May 20 Twedell sent telegrams to the FBI and the Federal Communications Commission concerning a KDET broadcast which "openly advocated violence, as a result of Supreme Court decision . . . and other racial problems, if Negro pickets were not removed from the picket lines." Station manager Tom Foster explained that his announcer had merely stated that "Twedell himself was advocating trouble by ordering Negro and white pickets to walk the picket line together. Hancock [the announcer] said that may be common practice in Chicago [home of the union's international headquarters], but we are not ready for that here." Twedell began walking the line with the black picketers.

On May 9 organizer Allen Williams had prophetically reported to Twedell that "we are sitting on a keg of dynamite here. . . . I honestly think our lives are in danger. . . . These bastards

will stop with nothing, including murder, if they think there is half a chance to get away with it." On the night of July 23 a time bomb explosion destroyed Williams's Ford. A fire which resulted as an after-effect of the detonation completely leveled two cabins of the tourist court where Williams was living and did extensive damage to two other buildings. Fortunately, Williams had stayed out later than usual on the night of the bombing and thus escaped injury. The would-be assassins were never apprehended and, according to his reports in the next few weeks, Williams held some doubts that law enforcement officers seriously sought to find them.

Remarking on the openly anti-union sentiments of a majority of the members of a grand jury investigating the bombing, Williams jokingly explained that he felt some fear of being indicted for the crime himself. A second bombing occurred near Center's black neighborhood on August 12.

Neither of the two banks, whose presidents were directors of the Center Development Foundation, extended credit to their fellow townfolk on strike. But the Meat Cutters paid regular benefits through the duration of the conflict and also conducted a highly successful nationwide clothing drive for the strikers. So much clothing was received from the locals that it actually became necessary for president Jimereson to ask members to halt the donations.

Though the union neither expected nor won the support of Center's business and political leadership, it did a surprisingly good job of securing the confidence of the area's citizenry. Allen Williams believed that the union had 85 percent of the population on its side, though this hardly seems likely considering the historical image of unions in the area or the fervid racism aroused by the strike.

Both Williams and Twedell attributed a great portion of the popular support to the union's own radio program. Each Saturday afternoon the Meat Cutters purchased time on a local radio station, during which a union representative would explain various facets of the union's side of the controversy. One of these programs early in May 1954 included an explanation of the tax structure in Shelby County,



CHECK THAT CHICK

Protect Your Health!

The union revealed that the Eastex Poultry Plant, which had been publicly valued by its owner at \$500,000, was listed on county and state tax books as worth only \$5,000. Its combined county and state tax bill for 1953 had been \$76. The Denison building, according to the labor broadcast, was valued on tax rolls at \$1,160 and was taxed only \$25 in 1953.

These disclosures embarrassed the business community and aroused the populace. Twedell repeated his charges, with 500 people looking on, before a dramatic evening session of the city council. Mayor O.H. Polley defended the low taxes as necessary inducements for industry. Union leaders then held a pep rally, and the antagonistic local newspaper, the *Champion*, admitted that they "were soundly cheered by a large portion of the audience." Twedell recorded that

the expose "caused quite a furor and I don't believe there has been as much excitement in Shelby County since the Civil War."

The strike in Shelby County and even the Denison and Eastex boycotts were soon overshadowed by another major thrust in the union's campaign against the Center poultry firms. As early as February 1954, organizer Jim Gilker reported to Patrick Gorman:

Our ace with Denison is that they don't have Federal Poultry inspection. . . . This means that there is no doctor on the line checking the birds. . . . At the present time the inspectors are condemning a large number of birds because of "Air Sac disease" in the inspected plants. At the Denison plants these birds are packed and shipped out.

Since the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906, it has been illegal to ship beef, veal, pork, lamb, or other red meat products in interstate commerce unless they have been slaughtered under sanitary conditions and inspected by government veterinarians. Many states also adopted compulsory meat-inspection laws. When these laws were being passed, however, the poultry business was still small and was not included in the provisions. By the mid-1950s poultry was a major item in the food market, but the U.S. government inspection service that was available until 1958 was voluntary and had to be paid for by the poultry processors. Only conscientious companies had government inspectors on duty, and the companies could transfer the inspectors if they did not like their work. In some companies there was a tradition of "close relations" between inspector and plant. Marginal plants as well as the unscrupulous and unsanitary companies, the ones most in need of inspection, shipped the poultry uninspected. Less than one-fourth of the poultry marketed in the U.S. in the mid-1950s had been subjected to federal inspection. Neither Denison nor Eastex hired inspectors, though Eastex claimed it hired a "resident sanitarian" in the spring of 1953.

Eastex owner Joe Fechtel told a radio audience that the union offered him a contract in lieu of exposing the diseased poultry he was processing (which he denied was happening). Pat Gorman, after receiving the first affidavits on the diseased chickens, wrote Sam Twedell that the Amalgamated would "blast the hell out of the poultry industry if the Denison and Eastex strike isn't settled."

In April 1954 Sam Twedell began forwarding affidavits depicting gory and unsanitary conditions in the poultry plants to secretary-treasurer Gorman. One Center poultry worker testified:

My job was to pull feathers. . . . When the chickens reached me, most of the feathers were off the bodies and I could see the skin of the birds very clearly. It is quite often that thousands of chickens would pass on the line with sores on their bodies. Thousands of them would have large swellings as large as a

chicken egg on their bodies. These swellings were filled with a yellowish pus, and the odor was very strong. Others would have red spots all over their bodies that looked like smallpox.

An affidavit from another worker declared:

When I was killing chickens I have cut the throats of many chickens that were already dead and stiff. . . . The first time I saw these kind of chickens come along, I did not cut their throats, but [my] supervisors came and told me to cut their throats and let them go through with the good ones. . . . When on the killing job, I would also kill chickens that would be sick and have long, thick and stringy pus coming from their mouths and nostrils. When clipping gizzards I would see large growths on the entrails that looked like a mass of jelly. These chicken entrails would smell awfully bad, and at times would make me sick at my stomach.

Sam Twedell dramatically reviewed the loathsome conditions in the Texas poultry industry before the Amalgamated's executive board in the spring of 1954. Reports by others of somewhat similar conditions elsewhere lent strength to the arguments. Upon Pat Gorman's recommendation, the board approved the launching of a campaign for an effective poultry inspection program. The union enlisted the complete support of its 500 locals, as well as the endorsement of the AFL-CIO and most of the nation's labor press. Active support came from public health officers, conservationist spokespeople, and church groups — from the national to the local level. The drive was assisted by at least a dozen national organizations — for example, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officers, the American Nurses Association, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the American Association of University Women, and the National Farmers Union. The campaign did not receive notable coverage from the mass media, though several journal articles appeared as well as syndicated columns by Victor Riesel and Drew Pearson.

The Amalgamated also approached the legislative branches of the state and federal governments. Hilton Hanna,

the leading black executive in the Meat Cutters union, was responsible for most of the research and pamphleteering. He listed 34 key supporters in Congress; none were from Texas and only three were from the South. As the campaign picked up public support, the Southwestern Association of Poultry, Egg, and Allied Industries suddenly endorsed state legislation for poultry inspection but continued to oppose "federal interference." Texas Agriculture Commissioner John White took the same position, but the state legislature could not be roused. The most graphic union pamphlet, "Check That Chick," caused an Arizona state senator, known for his anti-labor stance, to lose his breakfast and introduce a poultry inspection bill. Gorman and Twedell believed that federal law was best, however, and that state laws would only conflict with each other and allow the processors, through their political connections, to control the various inspection systems.

Five hearings on poultry conditions were held before three different congressional committees in the mid-1950s. Union spokespeople presented some of the Center affidavits along with statistics from the U.S. Public Health Service and Bureau of Labor Statistics. Expert supporting testimony was offered by veterinarians, doctors, sanitarians, and scientists. During the course of the hearings it was revealed that a third of all listed cases of food poisoning by the mid-1950s were traced to poultry.

Several of the chicken diseases reported during these hearings constitute a considerable risk for the workers who slaughter, process, and handle poultry. Psittacosis (parrot fever) is the most common ailment. The first outbreak in Texas occurred in Giddings in 1948, and two other epidemics struck the turkey processing workers in that town before 1954. Seven died. In May 1954, 48 workers in a Corsicana poultry dressing plant were stricken. In 1956 three psittacosis epidemics broke out in Texas, Oregon, and Virginia; 136 men and women were struck and three died.

The union's "ace" worked at Eastex. In the midst of the boycott and national publicity, after an 11-month strike, the Eastex Poultry Company yielded and agreed to a contract with the Meat

Cutters. The terms of the March 1955 agreement called for wage increases of five cents an hour for women, seven-and-a-half cents an hour for men, time-and-a-half for overtime, three paid holidays each year, the establishment of a vacation system and grievance machinery, and the reinstatement of all strikers. If called to the plant, the workers had to be given at least three hours' work that day. The re-employment was with full seniority, which meant that the 20 or 25 "scabs" left in the plant had lowest seniority. The Eastex Company also agreed to submit voluntarily to U.S. Department of Agriculture poultry inspection.

As the expose began to arouse attention, the manager of the Denison plant informed the supervisor, Florence Smith, that she had been named chicken inspector and would thereafter receive her paycheck from the city of Center. The city government obediently notified Agriculture Commissioner John White that Smith would inspect all poultry for wholesomeness. (Like all of White's "inspectors," Smith lacked the guidance of any published tests or standards; Texas had no poultry inspection law.) After several days as inspector, Florence Smith discovered that the chickens she had condemned and removed from the production chain had been put back on further down the line by another supervisor. She testified, moreover, that:

It has been a regular practice to place Texas Department of Agriculture tags of approval on chickens processed in the Denison Poultry plant. These tags of approval were placed in chickens that had never been inspected. In fact, it has been a regular practice to place these tags on non-inspected chickens ever since I have been working for the company [over three years].

The struggle to unionize the Denison plant ended in abject failure — three years after the Eastex victory. In February 1958 the Meat Cutters decided to call off the strike. Both union and company were exhausted by four years of apparently inconclusive boycotting and striking. Ralph Sanders, an organizer for the union, was assigned the unenviable task of telling the picket walkers that the strike at Center had been canceled. "It was about the sad-

dest thing I was ever confronted with," he wrote Gorman. Hilton Hanna wrote earlier that the striking Texans were the shock troops in the cleanup campaign, that they must be supported to the hilt, and that they "have demonstrated a spirit that has been rare in the labor movement for many years." Their steadfastness and zeal persuaded the Amalgamated to pay strike benefits for four years, which not many internationals would do.

Ray Clymer's unyielding position seems to have been the crucial factor in the union's defeat at Denison. The company lost most of its markets as a result of the boycott and eventually went bankrupt. According to Twedell, Clymer had an independent income which he refused to plow back into the business and preferred bankruptcy to dealing with a union. Certainly his only offer to settle the dispute reflected contempt for collective bargaining. In June 1955 Clymer offered to recognize the union as bargaining agent for six months and allow the strikers to return — with no changes in wages, hours, or working conditions — if the pickets and boycott were called off. A new election would be held in six months and if the union won, Clymer promised to negotiate in good faith.

It is also possible that the workers at Eastex, 93 percent of whom voted for the union in the election, were more determined than the Denison strikers, 60 percent of whom originally voted to unionize. Black workers recalled that a determined black union-consciousness arose. They also recollected that they were more willing to walk the picket lines than the whites.

In evaluating the impact of the strike on the town and its establishment leaders, a Chamber of Commerce spokesperson who requested anonymity declared that it was "just about the first event from the outside world to reach Center." There had never been a union in Shelby County. Companies seeking new locations at that time were notorious in demanding a depressed laboring group, and most of the townspeople and even many of the local establishment were former cotton farmers who had been driven off the land by national economic forces. They were so fiercely independent that they seemed innately to resist

even thinking about unionism. They were particularly appalled that the chicken processing plants were "attacked," since it was poultry that saved the town when the bottom fell out of the cotton market in the late 1940s. The spectacle of blacks and whites walking the picket lines together at the time of the 1954 desegregation decision was deeply resented by the bigoted element; "we'd never had any race trouble," the anonymous city leader believed.

Change occurs even in Shelby County. The union has been entrenched for three decades and can hardly be considered alien. The workers, who were making \$4.80 an hour (with no discrepancy between the sexes) in 1984, have never been involved in another strike. Nowadays, companies seeking new sites are inclined to inquire about local services and schools and do not seem to be searching just for low taxes for themselves. Several companies have brought unions with them. Moreover, the processing plants are not nearly as vital to the town's economy as in 1954. And the racial situation is quieter; the school system is integrated.

Of course, Shelby County did survive and, in fact, prosper. *Champion* editor Pinkston pointed out in 1972 that the county was growing, the banks were "filled with money," and the old hatreds had "faded away." Former strikers confirmed that bitter feelings had disappeared.

The outlook for the union in Southern poultry has brightened in the past 20 years, as the structure of the industry has changed. During the 1960s and the early 1970s the independent poultry operators were largely supplanted by the integrators, a few big vertical oligopolies that own hatcheries, feed companies, processing plants, and even distribution facilities. The trend toward major corporate ownership may have leveled off in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but agribusinesses dominate the industry. Dick Twedell, successor to his father as regional director of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters, asserts that the Southern integrators are more amenable (or vulnerable) to unionization than the independents. Though less than a third of the 30 or so poultry plants in Texas, for instance, are un-

ionized, the one in Center, now part of the Holly Farms empire, produces more birds than half the non-union plants put together.

The roles of the union and the federal government in the nationwide drive for compulsory poultry inspection were duly noted by Senator James D. Murray of Montana. In his report that followed one of the congressional hearings in 1956, Murray spoke for the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare in praising the "definitive and thoroughly documented expose of conditions in the poultry processing industry under the Department of Agriculture's voluntary inspection program. . . ." The report deemed the department "seriously remiss" in never having called the poultry conditions to the attention of the public and in never having taken the initiative in recommending corrective measures to the president or Congress. The committee was shocked that the Agriculture Department opposed compulsory inspection even though it was in command of more facts than the union in regard to diseased poultry. The committee report added:

While we are grateful to the union and believe the American people will share that gratitude, we think it a shame that an organization of workers whose earnings are very modest should have to spend its funds to alert the Nation to a situation which is already known to a division of a governmental department which has apparently put processor relationships ahead of its responsibilities to the people of the United States.

So it was that on the national level the organizing drive in Center and the subsequent boycott and cleanup crusade scored a success for the American consumer. After a three-year, uphill fight the union overcame the opposition of the poultry industry and the Agriculture Department (which changed its position in 1956). On August 28, 1957, President Dwight Eisenhower signed the Poultry Products Inspection Act, establishing compulsory federal inspection of all poultry moving across state lines and in foreign commerce. The law is supposed to assure the wholesomeness of poultry and poultry products placed on the market, the maintenance of



USDA photo courtesy Rural Advancement Fund

sanitary facilities and practices at slaughter and processing plants, and correct and informative labeling.

Unfortunately, there is considerable doubt that the 1957 law (as well as the 1967 Wholesome Meat Act) is being enforced. For one thing, the tradition of "close relations" between some inspectors and plants continued. The poultry industry vigorously opposed the consolidation of meat and poultry inspection in 1969, which placed them under the leadership of officials trained in the red meat inspection traditions. Also, the definition of "wholesomeness" is constantly in flux. Standards are powerfully influenced by the Advisory Committee on Criteria for Poultry Inspection, established in 1963, comprised of veterinarians and consultants from the industry; neither its meetings nor its minutes are open to the public. There is also a distinct shortage of staff to enforce the laws. In 1971 the Dallas district office the Food and Drug Administration, for instance, had 6,000 food firms to supervise with 35 inspectors.

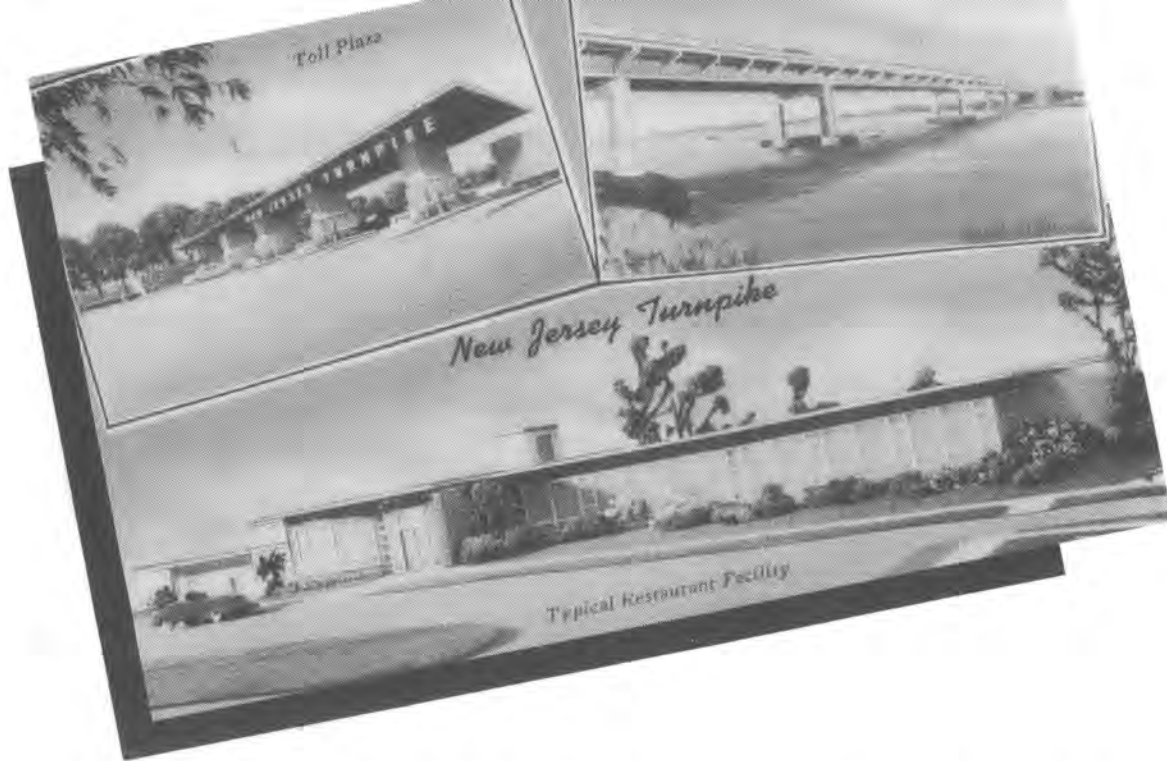
Even if enforced, the laws do not require the monitoring or control of microbiological contaminants in fresh meat or poultry. In the spring of 1971 a government spot check of 68 poultry slaughtering plants found sanitary conditions "unacceptable." One inspector for the General Accounting Office discovered that in one plant "the ceiling areas gave the appearance of a cheap horror movie scene with numerous cobwebs and heavy dust accumulations." In December 1972 the Agriculture Department admitted that about 465 million broilers and fryers, nearly one out of every six grown that year, went to market with illegal

residues of organic arsenic in their livers. In 1979 the General Accounting Office charged that the Agriculture Department's inspection program checks for only 46 of the 143 potentially harmful drugs and pesticides that could be present in meat and poultry and estimated that 14 percent of meat and poultry reaching the public contained illegal residues.

Under the Reagan administration, inspection standards appear to be deteriorating even further. In the winter of 1981-82 the Program Review Branch of the Agriculture Department investigated the sanitary conditions in 272 poultry and meat plants. Adulterated products were discovered in a fifth of them, and in a third of the plants reviewers considered it likely that rancid products were escaping to the market. Shortly after the evaluation the Reagan administration crippled the Program Review Branch. Indeed, the administration not only is loosening enforcement standards and reducing the frequency of inspections, but also is speeding up the time pressure on a diminishing number of inspectors and attempting to prevent inspectors' reports from reaching the public.

Meanwhile, the Amalgamated Meat Cutters (now merged with the Retail Clerks to form the Food Workers Union), joined by such consumer advocates as Ralph Nader and Kathleen Hughes and such periodicals as the *Food Chemical News*, *Nutrition Action*, and *Southern Exposure*, continue to plead with Americans to ask more searching questions about the meat and poultry that they eat. □

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POSTCARD POEM

by Judith Ortiz Cofer

It should be brief
and written in
indelible ink, so the postman's
hands, sweaty with the strain
of so many words on his shoulders,
will not smudge your message.
It should contain the expected "wish
you were here," but no return address;
it should bear an exotic stamp
with the likeness
of the martyred leader of an
underdeveloped nation, or a plea
to save a nearly extinct species
of sea mammal. Through panoramic
views dominated by impossibly blue
skies, it should imply
that where you are
is the only place to be.

*Judith Ortiz Cofer's first book of poems, **Reaching for the Mainland**, is forthcoming from Bilingual Review/Press. A native of Puerto Rico, she currently teaches English at the University of Georgia.*

UNDER THE KNIFE

by Judith Ortiz Cofer

She wipes blood from her knife
across a kitchen towel.
The thick contents of a just decapitated
hen spill into the sink.
I feel slightly nauseated but must
forbear for my aunt's sake. Childless
family martyr; renowned for her patience
with human frailty, and her cooking.
Her man drinks; she has failed three times
at childbearing. She squeezes the last
of the blood from the neck and a blue button
falls into her hand. Rinsing it, she drops it
into her apron pocket. As she places the pale carcass and
the knife before me she explains
how to cut the pieces with even, forceful
strokes: no hacking. She is under
no obligation to be kind.
The mothers and the daughters
have given her a lifetime license to mourn.
Like a queen in exile she acknowledges
nothing as a privilege. The pale fingers
of my aunt work with precision over
the pink flesh, showing me just how
to separate the tough from the tender.

Covington Hall: the Wobbly poet

— by David R. Roediger

A growing and influential body of literature describes the South as historically existing in a colonial relationship to the North or, at the least, having a separate national existence of its own. Such an analysis may take the form of the pointed reference to the Civil War as the “War for Southern Independence,” a formulation common in the work of Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. In other cases the post-bellum relationship of economic dependency on Northern capital receives emphasis. Usually critical of industrial capitalism, such an historical stance has been compatible with sympathies for populism and for socialism.

Whatever the merits and deficiencies of studies seeing a Southern nation or colony inside the United States, it is striking that very few Southerners involved in labor and socialist struggles over the century following the Civil War attempted to ground a case for Southern socialism within a characterization of their region as an oppressed nation. This article is about one who did: Covington Hall. It briefly treats his eventful life — a full biography is badly needed — and explores the contradictory impact on his writing and politics of a brand of Southern nationalism, critically embraced.

Hall, a prolific poet, essayist, humorist, historian, and writer for farm and socialist periodicals and for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), enjoyed a career in radical causes spanning more than four decades. The most complete collection of his verse, a 1946 volume titled *Battle Hymns of Toil*, gathers but a smattering of his poems, which suffer from unevenness by virtue of their very volume, but which, at their best, stand in the first rank of American left-wing poetry.

Born in Woodville, Mississippi, in



1871, Hall descended from the Southern elite on both sides. His father, a Presbyterian minister, did not stay long with Hall's mother, to whom the poet would later dedicate a haunting poem. With his parents' separation, Hall went to live with a half-uncle, Dr. A.V. Woods, whom he called Uncle Ami (that is, Uncle Friend). From that nickname, Hall derived his own favorite pen names, Covington Ami and Covami.

The Woods family raised Hall in Bayou Terrebonne, Louisiana, a sugar-growing district where the family's heavily mortgaged plantation was finally lost to a sheriff's auction in 1891. Hall's later reflections lay this financial failure to merchants' and bankers' attempts to fix sugar prices and, perhaps, to a generous paternalism on the part of his family. Deceased, Hall settled in New Orleans and, prior to the century's turn, participated in politics as a Populist and a supporter of William Jennings Bryan. He remained enough of an aristocrat to be chosen adjutant general of the United Sons of Confederate Veterans in 1904. Oscar Ameringer, the “Mark Twain of American Socialism” and a Hall associate during these years, remembered his friend and romantic rival as “the best-dressed, handsomest man” in New Orleans at the start of the twentieth century.

By 1907, the swashbuckling Hall may still have dressed well, but he had torn

his clothes with the Southern elite and with all but the most radical wing of the New Orleans labor movement. During that year, he helped to organize those he called the “white and black dock slaves of New Orleans” as well as workers in Louisiana's piney woods region. American Federation of Labor organizers and reform socialists stayed away from Hall, both because he acted so strongly on the principles of interracial unity and because he invited the revolutionary socialist Daniel DeLeon to speak in New Orleans.

After 1907, Hall combined writing, editing, and organizing in radical activities which stretched until his death in 1951. Through most of that career, he was a leading member of the IWW, although he periodically differed with the policies of that organization by opposing even minimal centralization of authority and by advocating organization of independent small farmers as well as tenant cultivators and industrial workers. Active in the “timber wars” of lumber organizing in Louisiana and Texas during the years before World War I, Hall edited *The Lumberjack*, the organ of the National Industrial Union of Forest and Lumber Workers. His own literary/political journal, *Rebellion*, bore the subtitle, “Made Up of Dreams and Dynamite.”

During the 1920s Hall worked as a publicist for the Non-Partisan League, a radical agrarian mass movement based mainly in the Dakotas and other Northern farm states but also having a Southern following. Despite advancing age, he remained active during the Depression years, writing many of the IWW's most forceful attacks on New Deal liberalism and teaching for a time at Work People's College in Duluth, Minnesota. A surviving IWW associate, Fred Thompson, recalls that in Duluth, Hall consistently displayed a Southerner's distaste for Great Plains winters.

Throughout this long tenure as an organizer and poet, Hall was practically alone on the American left in arguing

for Southern nationalism. He repeatedly referred to the South as an internal colony of the United States, as the "First Conquered Province of the American Plutocratic Empire." In 1919, for example, Hall prefaced a letter to the IWW's *One Big Union Monthly* by observing, "I note that *The Monthly* wants news from all foreign countries, so I thought the editor might be interested in a few items from the strange Land of Dixie." In his fullest development of this position, a charming "Factful Fable" written in 1938 and titled "All About



Civilizing the Uncivilized," Hall recounted the Civil War as an invasion by the "Coming Class" in "Samsland" against the "Dixieans." The invaders sought "the best Undeveloped Market in sight" and objected to the Dixieans as being "Too Lazy and Unprogressive." As a result of the war, "The Slaves were freed. They were thereafter no longer attached to their jobs nor their jobs to them." "Churches and factories and slums," Hall continued, "blossomed side by side everywhere."

Such an analysis, although not wildly different from that offered in modern histories of the slave South by Eugene Genovese and of the New South by C. Vann Woodward, is obviously partial and misleading in that it minimizes the anti-slavery motivations of Northern participants in the war, the role of black

Americans in liberating themselves, and the possibilities of Reconstruction. In both politics and poetry, a continuing identification with the Rebel South sometimes served Hall poorly. His objections to centralization of power in the IWW, hardly an authoritarian organization, often amounted to little more than a reflexive rebel yell, quite misplaced, in favor of local self-rule against national power.

Similarly, Hall's founding just before World War I of the Clan of Toil as a secret terrorist organization among blacklisted timber workers betrayed a monumental racial insensitivity in its choice of names. Nor did his 1938 poem, "For Instance," with the refrain "Our granddads were not Liberals; they called a spade a spade," suggest much awareness of racism in language. And the contention of Hall and Texas Socialist Thomas Hickey that the "rebel farmers" of the South might "rise again" in solidarity with the Mexican Revolution was nothing short of romantic nonsense. Finally, the racial paternalism which Hall saw as part of his Old South heritage often lent a cloying sentimentality to his lyrics when race was a theme or when he tried to write in Afro-American dialect. The largely forgettable "My Negro Mammy's Son," for instance, begins "I don't want to see him crushed, my dear old Mammy's son,/ The boy I played with long ago, whose marbles oft I won."

Nonetheless, far more remarkable than such political romanticism and literary mawkishness were the ways in which Hall recast, criticized, and used the Southern heritage in politics and in art. The race issue is an important example. Even if the paternalism he imputed to slave masters was largely legendary, Hall effectively utilized the "moonlight and magnolias" myth of humane race relations under slavery to call for solidarity between the races. The closing lines of "My Negro Mammy's Son," for example, accuse Northern capitalists of "rottening the structure that the fathers built of old" and transform the woman in the title into "Mother Labor" before praying to her "That all your sons in Dixie, be their color what they may,/ Will rise in one great union and drive the wolves away."

Whatever its impact in converting others, such a rooted vision apparently sustained Hall's own racial egalitarianism. During years in which many Southern radicals and ex-radicals descended to the trading of race baits with white-supremacist Democrats, Hall consistently pursued interracial labor organizing, often at great personal risk. He signed his letters, "Yours for the liberty of man, woman and child, regardless of creed, race or color."

Because Hall cast American history in terms of a struggle between the "Coming Class" (both culturally and economically bourgeois) of the North and the "uncivilized" South, he cultivated in his poetry an uncommon appreciation for the wisdom and artistry of "primitive" peoples. This awareness, along with the proclivity to juxtapose the values of primitives against those of the dominant classes in Western civilization was, of course, common to much of the early nineteenth-century romantic writing which Hall loved and to the work of some later American writers, especially Melville and Twain. But Hall's poetry seems as akin to the modern writings of W.E.B. DuBois, Paul Robeson, Aime Cesaire, Andre Breton, and other politically charged authors, especially those from black America and from the Third World and those influenced by surrealism or the Negritude movement.

Much of Hall's poetry exploring primitivism, particularly that written in dialect, walks a very thin line between simplicity and affectation. But it often succeeds through humor and the effective evocation of Southern rural images:

*I'd like to be a savage fer a little while
agen,
En go out in the forests where there
ain't no business men;
Where I'd never hear the clatter of their
factories and things,
But just the low, soft buzzin' uv the
hummin's crimson wings.*

This explosion of the distinction between the developed and the undeveloped, the "civilized" and the "uncivilized," doubtless contributed to his further musings on the line between sanity and insanity (a theme common in IWW literature and best addressed by Hall in "The Madman's Boast") and

REVIEWS

the distinctions between fantasy and reality (probed effectively in Hall's essay "In Defense of Dreaming") and between heaven and hell.

Hall's writing on the last of these paired themes, writings clearly reminiscent of John Milton and William Blake, are best exemplified in one of his few successful Afro-American dialect poems, "Uncle Liga's Heartbreak Sermon." The narrator of this anti-war work is a wise but "uncivilized" observer of life who describes himself as "nothin' but a nigger, a ig'nunt cropper-man." He recounts a European massacre of children occurring on Christmas Day before concluding:

*An if dis here is dey Promised Lan', well
den, den well,
I don't want to go to Heaben, — I'd
ruther go to Hell.*

Hall's religious imagery is the most vital aspect of his poetry and is intimately connected to his appreciation of opposites and to his critical adoption of the Southern heritage. Many of his verses delightedly observe that Christ was a hunted radical, "Caesar's enemy," and exhort "Christian workers" to live up to the demands of the social gospel and to their God's courage and vision. Hall enlisted theological sanctions, for example, in arguing for land redistribution, especially in the haunting "Saith

the Lord":

*"This land shall not be sold forever,"
Saith the Lord;
"Of this I have repented never,"
Saith the Lord.
"Not a letter, word or line,
Can the landlords show of mine,
Taking Earth from thee and thine,"
Saith the Lord.*

However, set alongside this powerful Christian imagery, often jarringly, are paeans to Lucifer. Indeed, a single poem, like "Rebellion," might praise both Lucifer and Christ (not to mention Moses, Mohammed, Lincoln, Jefferson, and Zoroaster). In other works, the identification is solely with Lucifer, as

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it is in "Boast of the Foot-Loose Rebels," in which Hall counts himself and his comrades as "the hope of liberty. Earth's Lucifers today."

The common thread throughout all Hall's Miltonesque and devilish tributes is an emphasis on rebellion. In his fullest poem on the subject, "Prayer to Lucifer," Hall identifies the object of his prayer as "God of the Rebels" and as "the God of my fathers." This portrayal of a rebel Lucifer as the patron of the South's Civil War generation suggests the manner in which Hall ultimately reconciled his Southern nationalism with the knowledge that much of Southern history had been pathological. It is as close as he could ever come to praising the flesh-and-blood rebels who fought the "Coming Class."

That is, none of Hall's hundreds of surviving poems name an actual Confederate hero in the eulogies of rebels, though they repeatedly praise anti-slavery Yankees like William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Benjamin Franklin, and Abraham Lincoln. Except for a passing nod toward Patrick Henry and Andrew Jackson, only Thomas Jefferson occupied a place in the Southern wing of Hall's pantheon of rebel heroes. It is true that that place was a crucial one because Hall regarded the Sage of Monticello as the major American proponent of an "equal

rights" philosophy which could undergird theories of "industrial democracy" and even of "industrial Communism." But in no sense was the identification with Jefferson the slave-holder or even with Jefferson the paternalist in race relations. And Hall found no legitimate heirs to the Jeffersonian tradition in the Civil War South.

Thus it was far less the specific content of the Southern nationalist heritage to which Hall was attracted than the generalized Luciferian spirit of rebellion, and of defiance in defeat, which he saw as central to that heritage. In "Us the Hoboes and Dreamers," probably his bitterest and best poem, Hall clearly cast his lot with that tradition of rebellion, rather than with Southern tradition as a whole. He closed with a warning to Dixie's rulers that they could be the victims of such rebelliousness:

*We shall laugh to scorn your power that
now holds the South in awe.
We shall trample on your customs, we
shall
spit upon your law.
We shall outrage all your temples, we
shall
blaspheme all your gods.
We shall turn your slavepen over
as the plowman turns the clods.*

Such a critical embrace of Southern tradition, a concern with his region's distinctiveness, its mythic heritage of

antebellum racial harmony, its not-too-specific history and its contradictions, contributed to Hall's poetic and political vision and to his staying power in radical politics in a final and vital way. While most Americans considered the South — and the nation as a whole — as static and conservative, Hall saw volatility and change. His own transformation from Bourbon gentleman to Wobbly revolutionary must have helped to shape this perception, but so too did Hall's musings on Southern history. "I was born," he wrote, "in the midst of tumults and riots. I have seen the collapse of two great social systems, Southern Feudalism and . . . Capitalism." Amidst such tremendous flux, it was, according to Hall, not too optimistic to hope for still another transition — one rooted in the best of Southern traditions — to a "cooperative Democracy, a confederation of the world based on the Jeffersonian principle of 'Equal Rights and opportunities to ALL and special privileges to NONE.'" □

David R. Roediger is on the history faculty of the University of Missouri. He is editor of Dreams and Dynamite: The Selected Poems of Covington Hall, forthcoming in October from Charles H. Kerr Publishers in Chicago.

The Klan kind of people

The Klan, by Patsy Sims. Stein and Day, 1985. 355 pp. \$3.95.

— by Linda Rocawich

Stein and Day has finally issued a mass-market paperback edition of Patsy Sims's book on the Ku Klux Klan, which they first published in 1978. Her approach was a personal one, prompted by questions long on her mind: "Who are these men? What makes them tick? Do they ever fall in love and get spring fever? Do they laugh at jokes and, sometimes, at themselves? Do they cry at funerals and sad movies? Or do they only hate? Is there good in them or only evil? What are they really like?"

She does, in fact, get inside the men to whom she devotes chapters — the likes of David Duke, Robert Shelton, and Bob Jones, as well as less well-known characters. But the re-issue also

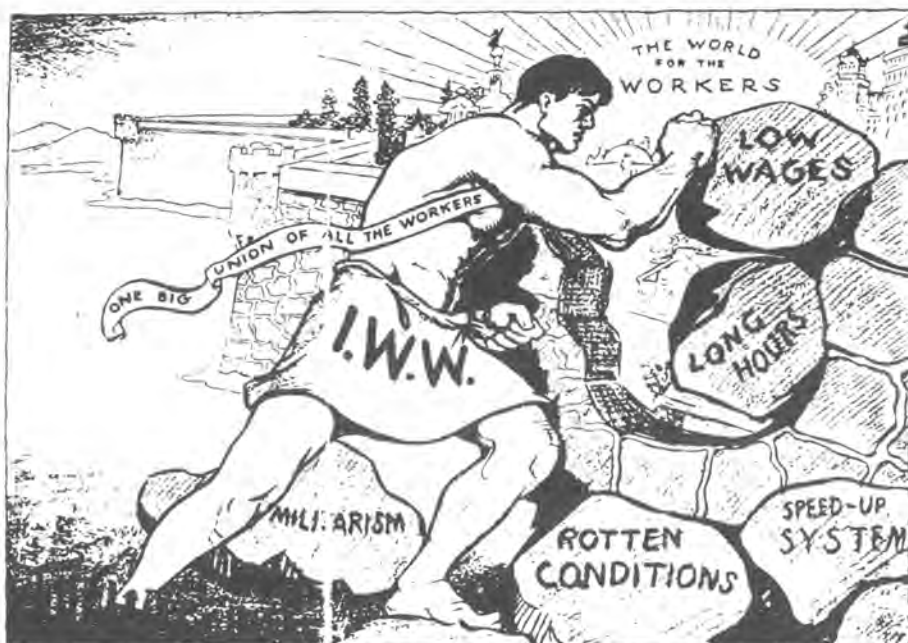


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KLAN RALLY, SEABROOK, TEXAS, 1982

suffers from age. The publishers didn't bother to ask Sims to update anything, and much has happened since 1978. I can't imagine, for example, publishing in 1985 a chapter on Ed Dawson that does not mention his key role as participant and police informant at the November 3, 1979, Greensboro murders of anti-Klan demonstrators. But that's what Stein and Day has done.

Nonetheless, the understanding Sims affords of how Klanspeople think and feel and talk, and its value as an oral history of the mid-'70s resurgence of the Klan, continue to make this book worth reading and keeping. And then there's the eerie feeling of reading now what Virgil Griffin said then of his Klan-inspired determination:

"We can do it peacefully if we can git the people organized, an' if not, we can do it violent."

"To what length would you go?"

"Any length."

"Would you kill?"

"If that is necessary. I'd rather kill them than have them kill me!"

"But would you initiate it?"

"No comment."

"But you would be violent if you had to?"

His voice was low but positive.

"Sure, the niggers are violent. Why not?"

Virgil Griffin was the ringleader in Greensboro. □

Linda Rocawich is an editor of *Southern Exposure*.

Books on the South

This list consists of books published through Winter 1985. All books were published in 1985 unless otherwise noted. Dissertations appeared in Dissertation Abstracts in February and March, 1985. All dissertations are dated 1984.

The entries are grouped under several broad categories for your convenience. Mention of a book here does not preclude its being reviewed in a future

issue. Unsolicited reviews of publications of general Southern interest are welcome, recent works being preferred.

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Boy Colonel of the Confederacy: The Life and Times of Henry King Burgwyn, Jr., by Archie K. Davis. UNC Press. \$29.95.

Champ Ferguson, Confederate Guerrilla, by Thurman Sensing. Vanderbilt Univ. Press. \$14.95.

The Economics of U.S. Slave and Southern White Fertility, by Richard H. Steckel. Garland Publishing. \$35.00.

A Good Southerner: The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia, by Craig M. Simpson. UNC Press. \$29.95.

"An Honest Fanatic": The Images of the Abolitionist in the Antebellum and Historical Minds," by Allen Roy Vogt. Univ. of Houston.

"Juan Baptista de Segura and the Failure of the Florida Jesuit Mission (1566-1572)," by Frank Marotti, Jr. Univ. of Miami.

The March to the Sea and Beyond: Sherman's Troops in the Savannah and Carolinas Campaigns, by Joseph T. Glatthaar. New York Univ. Press. \$27.95.

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"Aldermanic Redistricting in El Paso, Texas: A Case Study of Democratic Representation," by Eugene I. Finke. New Mexico State Univ.

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A History of South Carolina, by Anne R. Osborne. Sandlapper Pub. Co. Price not set.

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Rhetoric and American Protest: Black Protest through Vietnam Dissent, by Randall M. Fisher. Univ. Press of America. \$26.50/\$14.25.

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Southeast Coast, by George Reiger. Graphic Arts Center. \$37.50.

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— Jesse Stuart

*Jesse Stuart (1907-84), Kentuckypoet, novelist, essayist, and sheep rancher, was first of all a teacher — a profession he entered just shy of his seventeenth birthday. Many years later he published **The Thread That Runs So True**, a memoir dedicated “To the School Teachers of America.” This excerpt begins in Lonesome Valley during his first month as a teacher.*

I had from the beginners to the eighth grade, all in one room. Their ages ran from five to twenty. . . . The beginners were the most difficult of all to teach. I would bring my beginners up and teach them ABC's on the old dilapidated chart, used years and years before I came to Lonesome Valley. After I had gone over their ABC's with them, they went back to their seats and had nothing to do. They needed more attention than I could give them. Many of them fell asleep in the hot schoolroom. . . .

I knew how beginners had been taught in the Greenwood County Rural Schools in the past. I knew because I had been a beginner in this same type of school. I had been taught to read on this kind of chart, and I still knew everything on it from memory. . . .

When one of those little fellows I was trying to teach went to sleep, I let him sleep. What else was there to do? What else could I do when I was trying to hear fifty-four classes recite in six hours, give them new assignments, grade their papers? What else could I do when I had to do janitorial work, paint my [school] house, keep the toilets sanitary, the yard cleaned of splintered glass and rubbish, and try to make our school home more beautiful and more attractive than the homes the pupils lived in? . . .

[In the] morning when I got up, I was still trying to think of something to do with my beginners. I wanted to start today. . . . I went early and walked slowly along by myself and tried to think of a way. . . .

Then I started whistling. I walked along beneath the willows in the morning sun, whistling “The Needle's Eye. . . .”

“The needle's eye that does supply,

The thread that runs so true . . .”

What was the needle's eye? What was the thread that ran so true? The needle's eye, I finally came to the conclusion, was the schoolteacher. And the thread that ran so true could only be play. Play. The needle's eye that does supply the thread that runs so true. The teacher that supplied the play that ran so true? . . . Play. Play. Play that ran so true among little children, little foxes, little lambs! My beginners should play. Their work should be play. I should make them think they were playing while they learned to read, while they learned to count! That was it! I had it. Play.

When time came for my first beginners' class, I tore the big sheet from the Lawson Hardware calendar. I took the scissors from my drawer and sat in a semicircle with the class. Every eye was upon me. I cut the numbers apart, told or asked what they were, and handed them to the children. Then I cut the stiff backs of tablets into squares of approximate size. Taking a jar of paste, I pasted one number to one cardboard. Then I told the class to sit four to a seat (I had eight) and paste all the numbers and cardboard squares together.

While I went on with my other classes these children were busy. When recess came they wanted more to do — rather than go out to play. Some numbers were pasted sideways, but what did that matter? . . .

I drew objects on the board with which they were familiar — apples, cups, balls, and stick-figures of boys and girls — in groups of one, two, three, and four. When time came for the next beginners' class, I asked the children to identify the objects, first by name, which I wrote above the object, then by number, which I wrote beneath it. They were so excited they sat on the edge of the recitation bench, their bare feet tapping nervously on the floor. Then I reached for the stack of number cards and held them up asking the class to name the number. I was surprised they recognized so many.

The room was so quiet you could hear a pin fall. This was something they had never done — had never seen done — but they recognized it as an interesting way to learn. This was play.

Five years passed, during which Stuart finished high school and earned a college degree. Soon he was back in Greenwood County, the only teacher at Winston High School, a Tiber Valley school with 14 students.

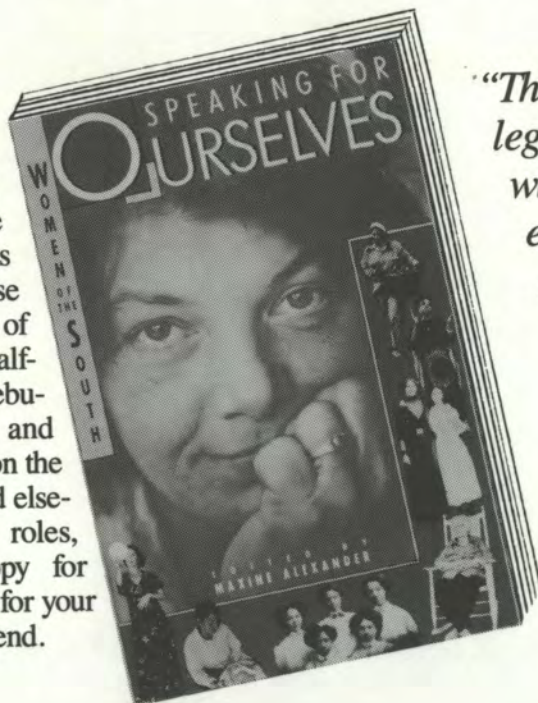
Often I walked alone beside the Tiber in autumn. For there was a somberness that put me in a mood that was akin to poetry. . . . Then a great idea occurred to me. It wasn't about poetry. It was about schools.

I thought if every teacher in every school in America could inspire his pupils with all the power he had, if he could teach them as they had never been taught before to live, to work, to play, and to share, if he could put ambition into their brains and hearts, that would be a great way to make a generation of the greatest citizenry America had ever had. All of this had to begin with the little unit. Each teacher had to do his share. Each teacher was responsible for the destiny of America, because the pupils came under his influence. The teacher held the destiny of a great country in his hand as no member of any other profession could hold it. All other professions stemmed from the products of his profession. . . . It was the gateway to inspire the nation's succeeding generations to greater and more beautiful living with each other; to happiness, to health, to brotherhood, to everything! □

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 Ruthann Robson Genealogy
 Rayna Green The Bawdy Lore of Southern Women
 Mattie Mae Nelson Tribute to My Husband

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 Amelia Diaz Ettinger My Aunt Isadora (fiction)
 Lee Howard The Rape of Dona

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 Margaret Jones Bolsterli It Seems to Help Me Bear It
 Luisah Teish Ole Black Emelda (fiction)
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 Anne Braden Shoulder to Shoulder
 Victoria Morris Byerly Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls
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 Carmine Prioli Miss Elsie Riddick

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