

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

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When Old Worlds Meet

Southern
Indians
Since
Columbus

ALSO

**Alex Haley
Remembered**

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

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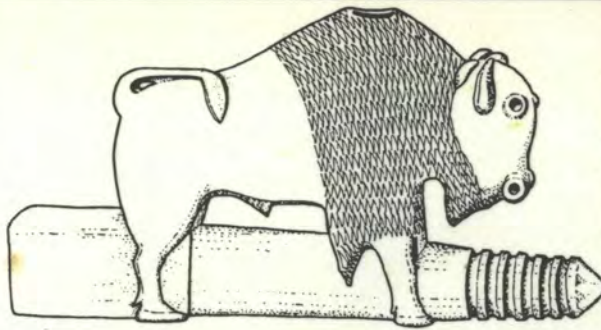
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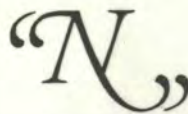
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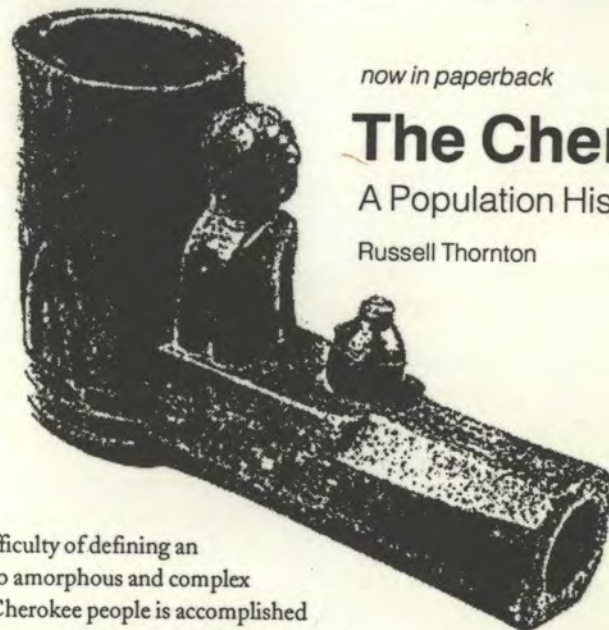
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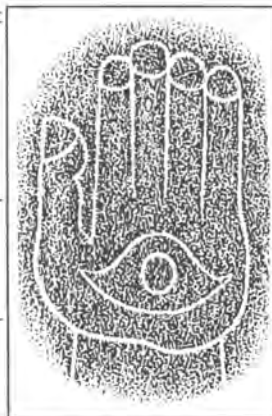
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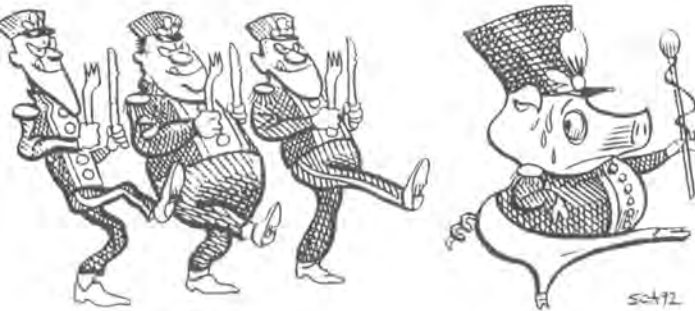
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DATELINE: THE SOUTH



SALLEY, S.C. (Dec. 1) — More than 3,000 people flocked to town today for the 26th annual Chitlin' Strut festival, where they applauded the marching pig in the "Chitlin' Strut Parade" and pigged out on plates of fried hog intestines. George Young, who supervised the yearly celebration, said volunteer cooks fried up 2,800 pounds of the Southern delicacy for the occasion.

HARRISON, Ark. (Dec. 4) — A jury ordered *The Sun* to pay nursing-home resident Nellie Mitchell \$1.5 million in damages for invasion of privacy. The supermarket tabloid used a photo of Mitchell to illustrate a story about a pregnant 101-year-old Australian newspaper carrier. A writer for *The Sun* admitted that he made the story up, but defended the paper by insisting that its articles are "so fantastic that no one would believe them." An editor for the Florida-based tabloid testified that he used a photo of Mitchell, who is 96, because he assumed she was dead.

GAINESVILLE, Ga. (Dec. 9) — The Ku Klux Klan angered local citizens by announcing plans to enter the local Christmas parade with a float entitled "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas." Public outrage forced the Klan to withdraw its float, but it was too late: more than a third of the 50 groups signed up to participate in the parade had already pulled out in

protest, prompting the city to cancel the holiday celebration.

RALEIGH, N.C. (Dec. 17) — Pine State Creamery today joined two other milk companies that have pleaded guilty to rigging bids on milk sold to virtually every public school in the state. The company has agreed to pay \$500,000 in restitution, and could be fined up to \$1 million. The bid rigging added 1.5 cents to the cost of each half-pint milk carton purchased by school children.

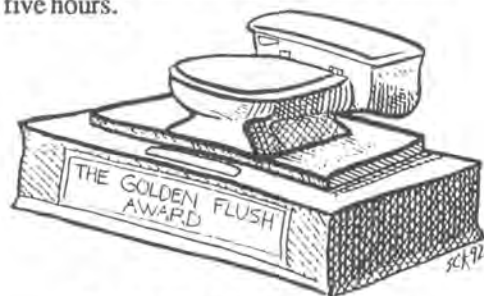
MIAMI, Fla. (Dec. 17) — Protesters picketed the courthouse to demand special clemency for 1,000 battered women imprisoned in Florida. "Some women get longer sentences for killing a husband who hospitalized them than a man who walks into a convenience store and shoots someone down in cold blood," said demonstrator Peggy Rudolph. The protest came three days after a Miami woman killed her husband as he beat her. The woman had tried to obtain a restraining order earlier in the day, but no judge had signed it. "It's sad," said Detective Jay Vas. "If police need a search warrant, we can find a judge. But these women sometimes can't."

CHARLESTON, W. Va. (Dec. 20) — Vacationing on the Atlantic coast three years ago, Patrick Fiddler wrote his address and the word "Hi!" on a piece of paper, stuck it in a soda bottle, and tossed it into the ocean. This week the 12-year-old got an answer from Mauritius, an island nation 9,400 miles away in the

Indian Ocean. A tourist there apparently found the bottle on a beach and wrote to "Monsieur Patrick Fiddler," but the signature on the letter is illegible.

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (Dec. 20) — Four years ago a state trooper arrested Tuscaloosa truck driver Wayne Barker on U.S. 231 for displaying an "obscene" bumper sticker. Barker sued the state, saying the bumper-sticker law violated his free-speech rights. A federal judge agreed, and today ordered Alabama to pay Barker's legal bills. The cost: \$12,034. The bumper sticker: "Shit Happens."

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (Jan. 2) — The local chapter of the United Negro College Fund received thousands of calls during its annual fundraising telethon — but some people made racial slurs instead of donations. "During the first segment, we got no pledges because of the crank calls," said development director Janice Dupre. "Either the callers were making racist remarks or hanging up. I really believe it was an organized effort." Despite the harassment, the telethon raised \$65,000 in five hours.



ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (Jan. 5) — Local officials trying to overcome their city's image as a haven for retirees suffered a setback today when the California Prune Board honored the city with a \$1,000 award for its unusually high consumption of prunes. "This is too funny," laughed City Council member Leslie Curran. "All I can say is, St. Pete makes the goings great."

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (Jan. 5) — An appeals court ordered Broward County Sheriff Nick Navarro to stop making crack cocaine and selling it on the streets — a practice the sheriff began in 1989 to supply undercover drug opera-



TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (Dec. 16) — State officials say that more than one million Floridians are relying on food stamps to survive — the highest level in over a decade. Appeals for aid surged 54 percent last year, including many middle-class families who have never before received welfare and thousands of people who moved to Florida looking for work. “And it doesn’t appear to be leveling off,” said Reggie Smith, head of the state food stamp program.

tions. The court noted that officials cannot account for all of the police-made crack, some of which has disappeared into the community during busts. “It was a sordid scheme,” said Cherry Grant, the public defender who challenged the drug deals. “The question is whether our problems are so big that we should abandon the rule of law to solve them.”

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (Jan. 7) — A sociology professor at the College of William and Mary who made a campaign contribution to ex-Nazi David Duke defended his donation today, comparing the former Klan leader to other Republican candidates. “I don’t see his platform as being any different than that of Patrick Buchanan or George Bush,” explained Vernon Edwards, who gave \$25 to Duke’s failed campaign for Louisiana governor.

WILSON COUNTY, Tenn. (Jan. 9) — Local budget cuts proved deadly when a woman was killed moments after she dropped her 15-year-old daughter off at school. Jacqueline Stolinsky died when her car collided with a vehicle driven by a man who was also taking his child to school. The accident occurred on the third

day of classes without school bus service in Wilson County, which parked its buses because of budget cuts and tight finances.

MOUNT AIRY, N.C. (Jan. 10) — Police recovered a slingshot that once belonged to Andy Griffith just four days after it was stolen from a museum display case in the actor’s hometown. A local woman returned the boyhood weapon, saying she had bought it from two children. The blackmarket price for the stolen museum piece: \$1.25.

POCAHONTAS, Ark. (Jan. 13) — A local woman was arrested today after she allegedly sold her one-year-old son to his former foster parent. Alerted by the buyer in advance, police said they watched the sale take place and then made the arrest. Authorities say the woman originally wanted \$5,000 for her child, but was forced to drop her asking price to \$600.

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (Feb. 3) — The oldest sugar corporation in the state was slapped with a \$3.75 million fine today for illegally dumping toxic solvents. The fine levied against the U.S. Sugar Corporation is the largest federal hazardous waste penalty to date. The court action

ended an investigation that began two years ago when armed FBI agents and EPA inspectors donned protective clothing and raided company facilities.

VICTORIA, Texas (Feb. 4) — School officials in this south Texas town banned kilt-wearing after two boys wore red-and-green skirts to a high school dance. The kilts conformed to the school dress code, falling no higher than three inches above the middle of the knee, but Principal Bob Erskine was not amused. “I know kilts,” fumed Erskine, who claims Scottish ancestry. “Those weren’t kilts, and the boys aren’t Scots.”

SENECA, S.C. (Feb. 4) — Federal officials slapped the Duke Power Company with a \$125,000 fine today, citing the company for two violations at its Oconee Nuclear Plant near Georgia. In one incident, the company failed to follow proper procedures after refueling, spilling nearly 90,000 gallons of radioactive water onto the floor of the reactor building.

JEFFERSON CITY, Tenn. (Feb. 5) — Buford Bible earned a spot in the Congressional Record for his unwavering loyalty to American-made cars. Since 1954 the retired teacher has bought 33 Chevys from a Tennessee dealer, earning two free cars in the bargain. “I’m strong for American cars,” said Bible, 87. “They’re as good or better than those made on foreign soil.” Lonas Tarr, the local Chevrolet-Geo dealer, said Bible will receive another free car when he purchases his 40th Chevy.

Illustrations by Steven Cragg.

Readers are encouraged to send items to Dateline: The South. Please send original clippings or photocopies and include name and date of publication.

HATE CRIMES ON THE RISE

Organizing and violence by the Klan, Nazis, and other hate groups nationwide hit an all-time high last year, according to recent studies released by three civil rights monitoring groups.

"A record number of white supremacist groups were active from coast to coast in 1991," reports Klanwatch, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery. "Hate group totals surged from 273 in 1990 to 346 in 1991 — a 27 percent increase."

According to Klanwatch Director Danny Welch, most of the growth occurred among traditional groups like the Ku Klux Klan and among neo-Nazi organizations like the Skinheads. An atmosphere of increasing racial tension contributed to the increase, as did racist appeals by mainstream politicians seeking votes.

"With people like David Duke moving into the mainstream, many have come to think that old-style hate groups such as the Klan are declining," Welch says. "Actually, the reverse is true."

Although most hate-group activity continues to be clustered in heavily-populated areas on the East and West coasts, the Klan is still centered in the South. Georgia and Florida have the heaviest concentrations of Klan activities, while the two largest and fastest-growing Klan groups are headquartered in Arkansas and North Carolina.

In North Carolina alone, the number of marches and rallies organized by white supremacist groups has more than doubled since 1985, the year that North Carolinians Against Racist and Religious Violence began monitoring hate groups. "There is a new boldness within these groups," says Christina Davis-McCoy, executive director of NCARRV. "David Duke's success in mainstream politics has given all supremacist groups a sense of legitimacy

SPREADING HATE

Klanwatch, Southern Poverty Law Center



EACH SYMBOL REPRESENTS THE LOCATION OF A SEPARATE WHITE SUPREMACIST ORGANIZATION IN THE SOUTH.

and confidence, especially in North Carolina."

Increased organizing seems to have spurred an increase in violence as well. North Carolina reported 58 "hate crimes" last year, including harassment, vandalism, illegal cross burnings, killings, assaults, and a foiled bomb-making plot in Guilford County. In Lenoir, two white teenagers stabbed and killed two black classmates less than 24 hours after the town witnessed the biggest Klan rally in the state since 1989.

The Anti-Defamation League also noted an increase in anti-Semitic violence, reporting that Jews in four Southern states were victims of harassment and vandalism twice as often in 1991 as they were the year before. Most of the incidents were reported in Atlanta, where the ADL has its Southeast headquarters.

One important link in the chain of racist organizing appears to be hate "hotlines" that provide around-the-clock

schedules of events and words of supremacist "inspiration." Reverend Virginia Herring received more than 100 threatening phone calls after her name and number were put on the Confederate Knights message line because she has worked for gay rights.

"There is a real organizing momentum that has been seized by these hotlines," says Davis-McCoy of NCARRV. "Young people are able to carry out the bidding of hate groups simply by dialing these numbers."

The success of such phone lines indicates the growing legitimacy of hate groups. "Racism is becoming respectable again," former Dallas attorney Kirk Lyons asserted at the annual convention of the white supremacist Populist Party. "Things you couldn't have said 10 years ago you can say now, even at the fanciest cocktail parties."

—Lane Windham

KIDS CALL FOR RACIAL UNITY

As Klan and Nazi groups continue to organize in the South, nine-year-old Anisa Kintz decided to do something to put an end to racism at her school in Horry County, South Carolina.

Working with 10 of her classmates, Kintz organized "Calling All Colors," a race-unity conference at Coastal Carolina College in January. The goal: to get kids to openly discuss racial issues and explore ways to overcome stereotypes.

Kintz got the idea for the workshop after watching her black and white friends separate themselves along racial lines on the school playground. "We have to be united and love one another," she explained. "If you take off the skin, we're all the same."

At the conference, elementary and junior high students split up into two racially mixed groups: the "ins" and the "outs." The "in" group had power over the "outs," but knew little about them. They considered the "outs" less important and more prone to drug use and violence.

The trouble began when the "ins"

wouldn't give the "outs" permission to hold a dance in the school gym. Ruha White, a 13-year-old "out," accused the "ins" of favoritism. "The reason you don't want us to have a dance is not because you're afraid we'll do drugs, but because you don't like us," she said. "Why do you think we do the things we do? We do these things because of how we've been treated, and we're tired and fed up."

Melissa Durland, a nine-year-old "in," agreed. "If we knew these people and approved of their behavior, we'd let them have the dance," she argued.

In the end, the students decided that the core of the problem was a lack of understanding between different groups. The answer, they concluded, is to get to know each other better and create a biracial leadership council to share decision-making.

At the end of the day-long conference, students came up on stage to share their thoughts. "It's not good to always think you're right, because then you can't learn anything," said Amanda King, 12.

"We should classify all races, sizes, and shapes as people," agreed Jenny Chester, 13. "We all have the right to flourish."

—Lane Windham

1991 CUTS HIT SOUTHERN POOR

When state lawmakers try to balance the budget, they often cut programs for the poor to make ends meet. But according to a new report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, hard economic times last year resulted in "the largest state-level reduction in benefits in at least a decade."

Entitled "The States and the Poor," the report finds that virtually every state made "policy choices that hit poor people hard." Lawmakers trying to trim state budgets slashed benefits for basic necessities like medical care, housing, and food. Forty states froze or cut Aid to Families with Dependent Children, even though the number of poor people rose two million nationwide.

Ten Southern states froze AFDC benefits, effectively cutting the purchasing power of the poor by three percent, and Tennessee cut its support by five percent. Only Florida and Alabama boosted benefits — raising Alabama support for a family of three to \$149 a month, the second lowest level in the nation.

In general, Southern states did not cut programs for the poor as deeply as Northern states. The reason: Southern social programs are already bare-boned. According to the Center, not a single Southern state was among the 25 that froze or cut supplemental benefits to the elderly, blind, and disabled last year — because no Southern state had any supplemental benefits to cut.

Not only is the South a bad place to be poor, but it remains one of the worst places to get sick. West Virginia, Texas, and North Carolina are the only states in the region that offer health benefits under the Women, Infants and Children program — and Texas cut its WIC payments by 40 percent last year.

Photo courtesy Carolina Community College



SOUTH CAROLINA KIDS ORGANIZED THE "CALLING ALL COLORS" CONFERENCE TO HELP BRING RACIAL UNITY TO THEIR SCHOOLS.

Other Southern states also pared down their already bare-bones health programs. Florida cut Medicaid benefits to the elderly and disabled, and terminated its assistance to low-income households with large medical bills. South Carolina limited funded hospital visits to three a year, and North Carolina increased the fee it charges poor patients who visit a doctor.

Southern hospitality was also denied to the homeless. Only Florida, Virginia, and West Virginia offer housing programs for the homeless — and Florida cut its aid by 55 percent last year. In addition, three of the five Southern states that currently offer funds to low- and moderate-income families for affordable housing slashed their programs for 1992.

Unfortunately, states may have been cutting in the wrong place. Because cash assistance for the poor accounts for less than six cents of every dollar the states spend, the cuts did little to ease the fiscal crisis. As a result, many states that believed they had balanced their 1992 budgets are already facing deficits.

Florida and Arkansas have responded by proposing even deeper cuts to low-income programs, and Tennessee may soon follow suit. Governor Ned McWherter has proposed cutting AFDC by another 15 percent — slashing annual benefits to \$1,884 for a mother and two children with no other income.

Although the Center predicts that most state lawmakers will prefer to slash spending rather than raise taxes in an election year, it emphasized that states do have the power to protect the poor. "State priorities can reflect a commitment to protecting their poorest residents from large cuts or significant tax increases," the report concludes, "or they can plunge those whose incomes already fail to meet society's standard for a minimum level of subsistence still deeper into poverty."

—Lane Windham

For a copy of "The States and the Poor," contact the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 777 N. Capitol Street NE, Suite 705, Washington, DC 20002.

A POOR COMMUNITY TURNS OUT THE VOTE

Southerners traditionally post a lower turnout at the polls than voters in other regions, and the presidential election this year is likely to be no exception. But the residents of one poor community in North Carolina have attracted national attention with their local campaign to make grassroots democracy a reality.

Midway, a small town near the southern border of North Carolina, is one of four communities highlighted in "The Rage for Democracy," a one-hour documentary airing on public television this spring. Hosted by *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis, the film examines the effects of class on voter power.

Countering a recent study of voter turnout conducted by Harvard University, the film asserts that income and education — not race — play a key role in determining whether people vote.

"Class is America's dirty little secret," says Lewis. "Class-based political parties are potent forces. But since America is 'classless,' U.S. citizens living in poverty do not get that kind of support."

Focusing on successful, class-based efforts to mobilize the disenfranchised, the film offers the example of Midway. Although the Moore County community was

completely surrounded by the town of Aberdeen, Midway received no basic services of any kind — until residents were organized by the Piedmont Peace Project, a Knapolis-based peace and justice group.

Jesse Wimberley, a local activist with the project, admits that his first meeting with Midway residents attracted only five people. "None of them was willing to call the town of Aberdeen," he recalls. "They'd been turned down so many times. There were no basic services: no water or sewage service, no trash collection, no fire or rescue service. Some homes were even without indoor toilets. They'd about given up."

But with the help of the Peace Project, residents learned to take it a step at a time: Insist on one dumpster, or on one meeting with the Town Council. Convince some people to drive to D.C. and hold a rally on the Capitol steps. Look around, talk it up, begin targeting other problems. Locate grant money, learn the system, and put it to work.

The result: a \$600,000 community development block grant and full incorporation into the town of Aberdeen. The group that grew out of the initial activism — Moore People's Power — has gone on to protest local plant closings.

Linda Stout, director of the Piedmont Peace Project, says that poverty is the primary obstacle to democratic participa-

Photo by Paula Rollins/Citizen News-Record



LOCAL ORGANIZING BY THE PIEDMONT PEACE PROJECT RESULTED IN A SHOW OF STRENGTH DURING THE ANNUAL MARTIN LUTHER KING MARCH IN MIDWAY.

tion. "When you're raised rural and poor, there's the feeling that you're not as good, not as smart as others," says Stout, the daughter of a North Carolina tenant farmer. "Somehow, you think it's your fault that you're poor. And it's real hard to overcome. It's a matter of using little successes to build confidence."

Such small steps can lead to significant power. According to Stout, organizing in the Eighth District of North Carolina has helped improve the voting record of U.S. Representative Bill Hefner on peace and social justice issues. "We've registered 15,000 voters, and we're targeting 44,000 more this year," says Stout. "Bill definitely knows we're out here."

—Martha Heinz and
Maureen Sutton

"The Rage for Democracy" is scheduled to air nationally on PBS on Sunday, April 12. North Carolina stations will air the show on Thursday, April 16 at 10 p.m.

TOUR RESURRECTS SHANTYTOWN ART

A few weeks after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the spring of 1968, more than 3,000 poor Southerners converged on Washington, D.C. They came by bus and by train, on mules and on foot. They called it the Poor People's March, and they erected a shantytown of tents and plywood at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial to protest the plight of the impoverished.

For more than a month, "Resurrection City" echoed with choruses of "We Shall Overcome" and chants of "Hell no! We won't go!" Residents sang and marched and listened to speeches, and in their spare moments they decorated their huts with crude drawings and passionate graffiti.

In the end, however, the protest fell into muddy disarray. Constant rains created sanitation and cooking problems, and the assassination of Robert Kennedy

on June 6 further demoralized demonstrators. On June 24, Resurrection City was demolished.

But today, nearly a quarter century later, the city is being resurrected — through a touring exhibit of nearly 100 pieces of artwork left behind by its residents. John Tackett, ex-director of a rescue mission in Johnson City, Tennessee, organized the tour to preserve the spirit and message of the original march.

"The items are of such historical and cultural value that they should be shown," says Tackett. "They heighten our awareness that there are still hungry people and poor people who need help desperately."

The exhibit opened last December in the small Delta town of Marks, Mississippi. Tackett says he picked Marks as the first stop on the tour because town residents had organized a dramatic mule caravan to Resurrection City in 1968.

Unfortunately, few present-day residents seemed to notice the pieces of history on display at a church parking lot in Marks. The lot overflowed with plywood boards covered with art and graffiti — anti-war slogans, poems to Dr. King, paintings of the Bible. Across the road, children played in their front yards, and a woman swept her sidewalk, oblivious to the exhibit.

Tackett says the plywood artifacts were

preserved by K.W. Graybeal, a Tennessee lumberman who observed Resurrection City from an airplane and arranged to purchase the shantytown plywood for scrap lumber. When Graybeal examined the boards, however, he discovered many covered with poems and paintings. Recognizing their historical value, he placed more than 400 pieces in storage, where they were eventually discovered by Tackett.

This spring, Tackett is transporting the exhibit from town to town, following the trail of the original Poor People's March: through Montgomery, Selma, Tuskegee, Albany, Greenville, and Richmond. He hopes the tour will prompt the Smithsonian to form an exhibit using additional artifacts from Resurrection City.

—C.E. Lindgren

For information on locations and dates of the Resurrection City Exhibit National Tour, call (615) 929-0092.

Readers are encouraged to submit news articles to Southern News Roundup. Please send original clippings or photocopies with name and date of publication, or articles of no more than 500 words.



RESIDENTS OF RESURRECTION CITY COVERED THEIR PLYWOOD SHANTIES WITH ART, MUCH OF WHICH HAS BEEN RESURRECTED IN A NATIONAL TOUR.

Does Affirmative Action Work

Women and blacks in the Southern labor force since 1970

AN INSTITUTE REPORT

Step into the Southern workforce of the 1990s, and enter a terrifying world where a small but vocal minority dominates the entire economy.

The minorities represent barely a third of the population, yet they have managed to use their skin color and gender to get the best jobs — often squeezing out majority applicants who are better educated and more qualified. Thanks to the preferential treatment they receive in hiring and promotion, the minorities hold half of the white-collar professional jobs, two-thirds of the top management positions, and three-quarters of all skilled trades jobs.

They are the boss. They tell the majority what to do. When the majority of workers ask for tougher laws to ensure they are treated fairly, the minorities scream about “racial quotas” and “reverse discrimination.”

Can it be? Have the nightmares of white supremacists like David Duke come true? Do minorities really rule the workforce?

They do — but the minorities who hold a disproportionate share of the good jobs are white men, not blacks and women.

White men make up approximately 38 percent of the population of the South, yet they hold 67 percent of the top white-collar jobs in private industry and 71 percent of the best blue-collar jobs. By contrast, they fill only 11 percent of all pink-collar clerical positions and just 22 percent of the lowest-paying service jobs.

The continuing dominance of white men in private industry has often gone unmentioned in the current debate over federal affirmative action laws. Indeed, “affirmative action” has become virtually synonymous with “special treatment for minorities.” But in reality, federal employment mandates are designed to protect the *majority* of workers — the 6.2 million women, blacks, and other people of color who now comprise nearly 60 percent of the private labor force in the South.

Have affirmative action programs really helped most workers? To answer that question, the Institute for Southern Studies has conducted a state-by-state review of job data from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The study examined the race, gender, and jobs of 42 million workers employed by over 38,000 companies that do business with the federal government — nearly half of all private payroll employees in the nation.

The findings indicate remarkable progress throughout the South. Since 1970, women and non-whites in the region have made substantial gains in every sector of the economy. Some of the biggest strides were made by white women entering professional jobs and by black men breaking into the skilled trades.

But the study also indicates that much more remains to be done to ensure fair employment in the region. After two decades of affirmative action, white men still dominate the private labor force — and most blacks and women are still segregated in jobs that offer the lowest pay and the least responsibility.

“White males are not turning over to minorities and females any of the leadership roles in corporate America,” says Peter Roulhac, a former affirmative action manager for a Miami bank. “I can understand the perception of some white males that they’re being discriminated against, but if you did a fair statistical analysis, white males have not been negatively impacted at all.”

GOODBYE GOOD JOBS

An analysis of federal statistics suggests that the greatest impact on all workers, white males or otherwise, has come from the shifting economy. Since 1980, manufacturing jobs have ground to a halt, especially in traditional Southern industries like textiles and tobacco. Lower-paying service and trade jobs now employ nearly half of all Southerners — up from one third in 1969 (see “The South at Work,” *SE* Vol. XVIII, No. 3). The result: Good jobs are harder to come by, even when the economy is good.

At the same time, women across the country have been entering the workforce in greater numbers than ever before. Seventy percent of women ages 25 to 54 now work, up from 50 percent at

the beginning of the 1970s.

The growing number of women in the workforce has meant increasing competition for a dwindling number of good jobs. When Ashland Oil — the eighth-largest public corporation in the South — expanded its refinery in Catlettsburg, Kentucky in February, 2,200 job seekers waited hours in freezing temperatures to apply for 25 openings. The company set up portable toilets and water coolers for the applicants, many of whom spent more than a day standing in line for a crack at an \$11-an-hour refinery job.

As white men have felt the job squeeze, some have blamed affirmative action. “I spent 20 years in the trade, and a girl who spent one year in the trade became my foreman,” says one male painter who filed a complaint with the EEOC. “That really hurt me.”

“I have no bad intentions against any one person,” says Bill Anderson, a white Miami firefighter who claims he was passed over for promotion in favor of less-qualified blacks and Hispanics. “It’s just the system.”





The “system” of affirmative action dates back to World War II, when President Franklin Roosevelt ordered defense contractors to halt discriminatory hiring practices. In 1961, President John Kennedy introduced the phrase “affirmative action” in Executive Order 109255, imposing the first federal sanctions on government contractors who violate minority hiring rules.



BLACK MEN HAVE NEARLY DOUBLED THEIR SHARE OF SKILLED TRADE JOBS SINCE 1970, BUT WHITE MEN STILL HOLD NEARLY THREE-QUARTERS OF THE BEST BLUE-COLLAR POSITIONS.

AFFIRMATIVE GAINS

Southern women and black workers have made significant strides in private industry since 1970, filling a greater share of jobs in almost every category.

		% of All Jobs	WHITE COLLAR				BLUE COLLAR				PINK COLLAR
			Officials/Managers	Professionals	Technicians	Sales Workers	Skilled Crafts	Semi-skilled Operatives	Unskilled Laborers	Service Workers	Office/Clerical
White Men 	1970	52.0	87.4	73.5	66.4	53.9	81.1	45.0	39.1	25.7	20.8
	1980	45.2	76.6	59.4	50.8	42.1	73.2	40.5	37.0	25.0	12.4
	1990	40.6	67.3	48.2	45.1	33.8	71.1	39.6	35.3	22.6	10.6
White Women 	1970	28.8	9.4	21.5	23.3	37.2	7.8	31.1	16.3	25.2	70.4
	1980	30.3	15.3	30.8	31.7	41.7	7.9	27.1	18.3	31.3	68.5
	1990	32.2	22.1	39.3	33.3	42.8	8.0	25.2	19.0	29.1	64.8
Black Men 	1970	10.2	1.5	1.2	2.6	2.8	6.8	13.4	30.8	21.6	1.5
	1980	9.9	3.7	2.3	4.6	4.0	11.4	15.1	22.9	14.4	2.2
	1990	9.4	4.0	2.3	5.4	5.4	12.2	15.2	21.6	14.7	2.7
Black Women 	1970	5.3	0.3	1.5	4.5	2.5	1.2	6.7	7.7	20.5	4.4
	1980	8.4	1.4	2.9	7.3	6.1	2.3	10.8	11.5	19.9	11.0
	1990	10.1	2.5	4.1	9.1	10.0	2.7	12.5	12.5	21.6	14.6

Source: Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Four years later, President Lyndon Johnson ordered federal contractors to develop written plans detailing how they would overcome ingrained recruitment practices and create equal job opportunities for blacks and women. The overall goal was to diversify private industry by taking positive steps to pry open the "good ole boy" system — the relatively small, informal networks that most firms rely on to find new employees.

In the past decade, however, federal enforcement of anti-discrimination laws has slackened, as both the Reagan and Bush administrations have fought to weaken civil rights initiatives. In addition, federal courts have handed down several rulings that make it harder for blacks and women to prove job discrimination — and easier for white men to claim reverse discrimination.

"With the conservative mood of the country, affirmative action doesn't appear to be getting the attention it had in the past," Doug Cunningham, senior vice-president of NationsBank, told the *Tampa Tribune*. "It's very lax right now."

WORKING WOMEN

Despite the lack of enforcement in recent years, EEOC data confirm that affirmative action has helped Southern

blacks and women make significant inroads in private industry since 1970. Consider the overall gains:

▼ Women made up 46 percent of the private industry payroll in the region in 1990, up from 36 percent in 1970. Female workers increased their share in every job category, filling nearly half of white-collar professional spots and more than a third of all blue-collar jobs.

▼ Black workers increased their share of the Southern labor force from 15 percent in 1970 to nearly 20 percent in 1990. The number of African-Americans in white-collar jobs more than doubled to 10 percent, and the black share of blue-collar jobs bucked a regional downturn, increasing to 27 percent.

"It's very clear that affirmative action programs have made lots of better jobs available to people who have been kept out of them in the past," says Steve Ralston, deputy director of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. "The progress for both women and black workers has been dramatic."

Among workers protected by affirmative action laws, Southern women appear to have fared the best. Indeed, women in the region now hold an almost equal share of all jobs in private industry. In 1970, women made up barely a third of the workforce in most Southern states;

today their slice of the employment pie ranges from a low of 40 percent in Louisiana to a high of nearly 50 percent in Florida.

Women in the South have always worked outside the home in higher proportions than their non-Southern counterparts, and they have always been more likely to hold manufacturing jobs. But EEOC figures show that the rest of the nation has undergone something of a "Southernization" of the workforce in the past two decades. For the first time, women now hold a slightly greater share of jobs outside the region than in the South.

Nevertheless, Southern women still maintain a bigger share of blue- and pink-collar jobs than women outside the region. In 1990, women made up over 35 percent of the blue-collar labor force in every Southern state except Louisiana, Texas, West Virginia, and Kentucky — energy-dependent states where men still dominate the coal mines and oil fields.

The employment gains have occurred across the board:

▼ **White Collar.** Women make up 44 percent of all managerial, professional, technical, and sales jobs — up from 25 percent in 1970. One of every four top managers is now a woman, compared to fewer than one in 10 two decades ago.

"Affirmative action has helped women with professional training and an educa-

tional background break into a wider range of professions beyond nursing and teaching," says Barbara Smith, professor of sociology at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia. "Today we have more women lawyers, more doctors, more engineers. Affirmative action helped open some of those doors."

▼ **Blue Collar and Service.** Southern women now hold more than one of every three jobs in this category, but most remain relegated to low-paying positions in service and unskilled labor. Barely one in 10 skilled crafts jobs is held by women.

"Women who try to break into the building trades face an all-male club," says Chris Weiss, a West Virginia organizer who founded Women and Employment, Inc. in 1980 to train women for non-traditional jobs. "Women who went to work on building sites would be threatened and harassed. The family is real important here, so when you had these uppity women come along who didn't have a father in the trades, it didn't sit well with the men."

▼ **Pink Collar.** Office and clerical jobs — long treated as "women's work" — grew even more female-exclusive in the past two decades. Women now hold a whopping 85 percent of manual office jobs, up from 77 percent in 1970.

BLACK-COLLAR JOBS

Although affirmative action was initially created during the early days of the civil rights movement as a remedy for racial discrimination, it now seems that black workers have not fared as well as women in the past two decades.

"Affirmative action for women is as necessary as for Afro-Americans or any other group," says Mike Sheely, a North Carolina attorney who specializes in employment discrimination cases. "But after 25 years, it appears that white women are in better jobs at a greater rate than black men. I see a whole lot more white women lawyers than black lawyers in the major downtown firms."

Data from the EEOC bear out such observations. Since 1970, the share of black men in white-collar jobs has edged up to just over four percent — nearly double the rate 20 years ago. But the overall share of black men in the Southern workforce has actually *declined* by 10 percent since 1970. Most of the drop came in blue-collar jobs, as black women

in the region have replaced black men as unskilled laborers and service workers.

Indeed, black women now hold one of every 10 Southern jobs, compared to one of 11 for black men. African-American women outnumber men among the ranks of white-collar professionals and technicians, as well as in service and sales jobs.

Affirmative action helped open the factory doors for black women. "Beginning in 1969, there was an industry-wide change in the textile industry," says Richard Seymour of the Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law. "For the first time, you saw large numbers of black women able to get jobs in textile mills. For many, it was their first factory job. There's no question in my mind that government enforcement of affirmative action made an enormous difference in the lives of black women."

But for black men and women alike, most employment gains over the past 20 years have taken place at the bottom of the job ladder. "Companies are hiring blacks, but they're sticking them in low-paying jobs," says attorney Mike Sheely. "Once a company reaches what it deems to be an appropriate hiring level, it just stops hiring blacks."

Across the region, the "good ole boy" network remains strong — and black workers remain stuck in the most dangerous and dirty jobs:

▼ **White Collar.** Mississippi, Louisiana, and South Carolina — the Southern states where blacks make up the largest share of the population — discriminate the most against blacks in white-collar work. Blacks have the fairest share of white-collar jobs in Virginia and the five Southern states with the smallest black populations — West Virginia, Texas, Florida, and Kentucky.

▼ **Blue Collar and Service.** Manual work remains disproportionately black work in every Southern state. Once again, Mississippi has the worst record, giving black workers 47 percent of all blue-collar jobs, but a meager 17 percent of white-collar jobs.

▼ **Pink Collar.** Like women, black workers have been shunted into office and clerical work in greater numbers over the past two decades. Over 17

percent of all pink-collar jobs now go to blacks — most of them women — compared to less than six percent in 1970.

SEGREGATION AT WORK

For black and female workers in the South, such numbers tell the story. Affirmative action has helped open doors to employment with many private firms — but once inside, women and people of color still face enormous barriers. As a result, the workforce remains starkly segregated along lines of race and gender.

"Black workers broke through the initial barriers early on in the 1970s," says Steve Ralston of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. "Since then, our litigation has focused on what happens after you get the job. Blacks can get hired, but they

often have trouble getting promoted. They tend to be in the dead-end jobs, while whites move up rapidly."

As blacks and women have entered private industry in record numbers, racial and sexual discrimination on the job have become major issues. "Many of my cases now involve promotions and firings," says Mike Sheely, the North Carolina attorney. "Blacks are slower to be promoted and quicker to get fired than whites."

Floyd Pough discovered "job segregation" when he graduated from college in 1976 and became the first black man hired as a project accountant at a large company in Mobile, Alabama. Soon after he took the job, he noticed that the boss only invited white employees to his home for cocktails or to go fishing with him. When it came time for promotion, Pough was told he was doing good work — but his probationary period was extended.

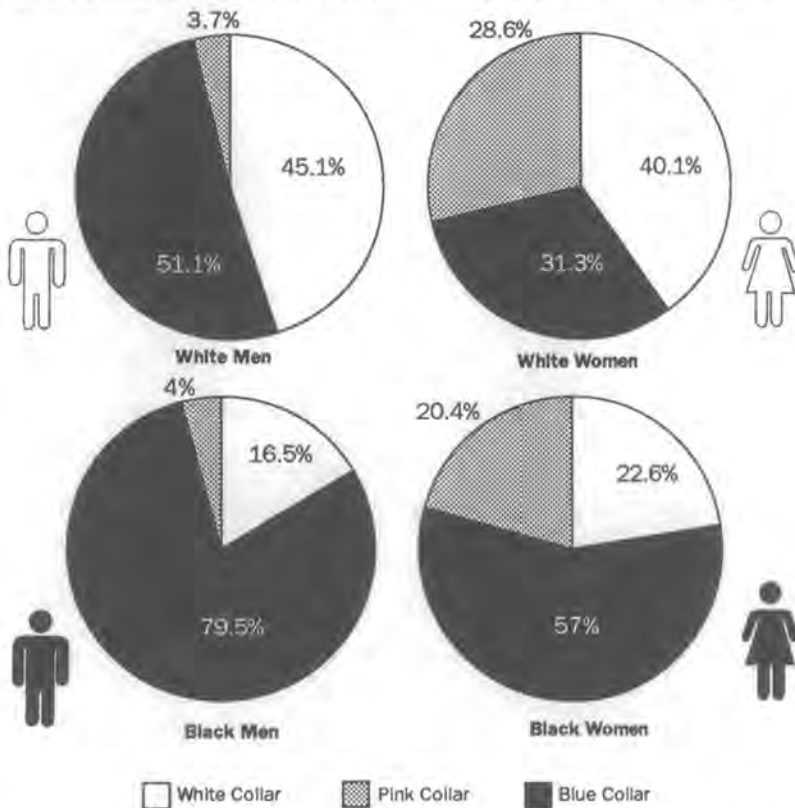
"Telling me I'm doing a good job but not ready to move up to the next level is double talk," says Pough, now the director of the Mobile Community Action Agency. "A lot of times promotions come from within — but they are based on the color of your skin and what school you attended." Frustrated by his inability to advance in the firm, Pough quit after a year.

Such experiences are all too common. The Reverend Nimrod Reynolds, head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference chapter in Anniston, Alabama,

Black workers have not fared as well as women in the past two decades.

DIVISION OF LABOR

Despite progress by blacks and women in the past two decades, Southerners in 1990 held very different types of jobs according to their race and gender.



Source: Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

recently accompanied a black man who had filed an EEOC complaint to his discrimination hearing. "This man says he was fired because he's black," says Reynolds. "He says that of every 10 people fired at his company, eight are black."

As federal enforcement of affirmative action guidelines has slackened, cases of job discrimination have increased. Last year alone, 63,898 workers filed complaints with the EEOC — up from 56,228 a decade ago.

Among those filing a complaint was Regene Radford, a fashion designer who took a job at a weight-loss clinic to make ends meet while she built up her own business. Lloyd Liming, the owner of the clinic in Waynesville, Virginia, hired her one Friday — but over the weekend, he apparently had second thoughts.

On Monday, clinic manager Kim Fisher approached Radford and said she had just received a call from Liming. "You won't believe what that man just said," Fisher told her. "He said he's going to have to get rid of you because you're

black, and you'll attract a lot of black clients and his business will go down."

Liming didn't fire her immediately, Radford says — but over the next two months, he called the clinic repeatedly to check on how many black clients were coming in. "It was like I was on pins and needles," Radford recalls. "I never knew when I would go in and find somebody else sitting in my seat."

Liming finally sent an assistant to fire Radford — and Radford went to the EEOC. The agency has filed a lawsuit against Liming in U.S. District Court in Charlottesville.

Radford says the experience taught her that racism is still rampant in the workplace. "It's prevalent," she says. "I'm not going to say it's targeted to the South. It's everywhere. My case just happened to have been located in the South. It's sickening. That's why we need laws — the only way we can make these people stop is to make them pay out of their pockets."

GRASSROOTS ACTION

It has taken more than laws, however, to help workers like Radford break into private industry in the South. All across the region, community advocates have used affirmative action rules as a tool in grassroots organizing, helping to pry open the doors of corporations and industries that exclude women and blacks.

Chris Weiss was a member of the YWCA board in Charleston, West Virginia in 1979 when the federal government handed down new regulations to make sure women and minorities were represented in federal contracts. Weiss developed a new program to train women looking for construction jobs, and she raised the money to make it happen.

"At the time there was a lot of building in Charleston with federal funds, which should have given women a chance," recalls Weiss. "But it wasn't until after we started the training program that I discovered there were no women in the building trades. I didn't realize what they'd be up against. We would go around to the construction sites and the men would say, you can't enter the union except through the apprentice program, and that doesn't open up until next spring. It was a no-win situation."

When Weiss threatened to file an EEOC complaint, the federal government pulled the funding for the training program. "That's the point I took everything home to my attic and started an organization that they couldn't shut down," Weiss recalls. She called it Women and Employment, Inc.

The new group worked with more than 30 women who were qualified for construction jobs. "They would go on site in pairs so they could document each other's stories," Weiss remembers. "At one site the men dangled a purse and bra and said, 'Look what happens to women who come on this site' — the implication being that they get undressed and raped."

Joining forces with a local group representing black men, the women took their case to court — and won. In 1982, the city agreed to hire more women on federally funded construction sites, and to use Women and Employment as a referral.

"Thirty-five to 40 women worked on the job in all," says Weiss. "That was the first time in the history of the state that

women worked on a building trades job.”

Since the early 1980s, however, Weiss and other grassroots organizers have watched as the Reagan administration cut back funding for the EEOC and its enforcement arm, the Office of Federal Contract Compliance.

“They effectively eliminated any kind of monitoring and enforcement in West Virginia,” says Weiss, now a program associate with the Ms. Foundation for Women. “It was real clear what was happening — and the employers got the message that they could pretty much do what they wanted to with impunity. The building trades and contractors started thumbing their nose at us when we would come around with women.”

The numbers bear out the slowing of progress during the Reagan-Bush era (see chart, pg. 10). Women raised their share of skilled crafts jobs twice as fast in the 1970s as they did in the 1980s — and the same is true for black gains in all white-collar jobs.

SCAPEGOATS AND SLOWDOWNS

With weak enforcement of affirmative action rules, community organizing by grassroots groups like Women and Employment is more important than ever to ensure workplace diversity — especially in the midst of a recession. “In recessionary times it’s very easy to point a finger, very, very easy to say that a black or a female is taking something away from the white male,” says Peter Roulhac of First Union Bank in Miami. “You look at David Duke, Pat Buchanan ... it’s very easy to find scapegoats.”

In truth, the Southern white male has not lost his advantage in the job market. He still occupies a vastly disproportionate share of the good jobs, and continues to receive preferential treatment from personnel managers who generally share his skin color, gender, culture, and personal mannerisms. Although white males make up a smaller percent of the total workforce than they did in 1970, the increasing number of jobs in the region means they still enjoy lower unemployment rates and higher pay.

As the recession has deepened, blacks and women who were the last hired are often finding they are the first fired. Advocates of affirmative action say many businesses are simply using hard times as an excuse to lay off workers.



SOUTHERN WOMEN NOW HOLD MORE THAN A THIRD OF ALL BLUE-COLLAR JOBS, BUT WHITE MEN ARE STILL THE BOSS.

“I have sensed that affirmative action had been receding before the slowdown,” says Maxie Broome, a Jacksonville attorney and former chair of the Florida Black Business Investment Board. “The slowdown is just an excuse for not aggressively pursuing affirmative action. I’m not saying it’s a devious kind of thing. But the first thing to go is the luxuries — and affirmative action has always been viewed as a luxury by these companies.”

In the end, advocates say, the only way to truly diversify private industry is to expand the number of job opportunities available for all disadvantaged workers. “We need to retool affirmative action to address the realities of the 1990s,” says Clint Bolick, director of litigation at the Institute of Justice in Washington, D.C. “We must provide basic skills and literacy training, day care, mentoring, transportation of inner-city residents to suburban jobs — action that is truly affirmative.”

But if affirmative action is to work,

then the federal government must renew its historic commitment to ensuring fair employment for all workers in private industry. “The federal government played a clear role in opening up job opportunities and eliminating discrimination in this country, and they clearly backed off from it,” says Chris Weiss. “If we’re going to see changes in the future, we’re going to have to see a stronger federal role for ensuring equal opportunity for all Americans.” □

Research conducted by Eric Bates, with Bob Hall, Jenny Labalme, Ellen Forman, Julie Hairston, Mike Hudson, James Smith, and Christopher Paetsch. Financial support provided by the Southern Labor Fund of the Institute for Southern Studies.

For a packet of employment data for the 13 Southern states, send \$10 to: “Affirmative Action,” Institute for Southern Studies, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702.

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When Old Worlds Meet

Several months ago, two Native Americans joined an archaeologist and a clergyman near a construction site in Jacksonville, Florida. Excavations for the new Holy Spirit Catholic Church had disturbed the bones of 23 Indians, thought to be the victims of a 16th-century epidemic, and the four had come together to reconsecrate the burial ground.

Harvey Silver Fox Mette, the white-haired chairman of the Commission for Native Americans of the Diocese of St. Augustine, made offerings of corn and tobacco. After burning sweetgrass for incense, he lit a sacred pipe and passed it to each participant. "Creator, help the spirits of all generations buried in this site to understand," Silver Fox intoned. "We are here to honor this place and honor the dead."

Southern Indians, living and deceased, have not always been treated with such respect. When the Seminole chief Osceola died in a South Carolina prison in 1839, for instance, the attending physician felt no qualms about removing the Indian leader's head and taking the skull home to St. Augustine as a souvenir.

Today, museums across the country are reconsidering their position regarding human remains and sacred artifacts scavenged from Indian sites by earlier generations. Those planning the new National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. are taking special pains to design a facility that treats the Native American past with proper regard.

But 500 years after the arrival of Columbus, most Americans

remain as oblivious as ever to Native American cultures, past and present. When controversy erupted last year over the names of two Southern sports teams — the Washington Redskins and the Atlanta Braves — most spectators knew more about split ends and stolen bases than about the history of the original Southerners.

"White people rarely concerned themselves with Indian matters," concludes the central character in *Mean Spirit*, a recent novel by the Chickasaw poet and essayist Linda Hogan. "Indians were a shadow people, living almost invisibly on the fringes."

Invisibility is nothing new in the South. A generation ago, black Southerners, forced to sit at the back of the bus on the way to work, had no seat at all when it came to occupying a place in the region's past. Black history was distorted and ignored. A few African-Americans knew a great deal about their ancestors, but the white majority was cloaked in a blanket of ignorance.

It took scholars decades to uncover the Afro-American past and reveal the story of black struggle in the region. Yet Southern historians are only now beginning to devote their attention to the Native American past — even though Indian history is just as central to the real South, and just as obscured by disregard and misinformation.

As the study of Southern Indian history intensifies, it is fast becoming one of the most exciting fields of current research and writing. Unfortunately, generations of silence and prejudice have allowed important oral history, as well as written records and other artifacts, to disappear forever. Nevertheless, much remains within reach for making the saga of Native Southerners more visible — a story that lives on among the nearly 300,000 Indians who still inhabit the region.

FOLLOW THE THREAD

Last year I expressed some of these thoughts to Eric Bates, the editor of *Southern Exposure*, and enthusiastically described the remarkable number of new books and articles dealing with the long and circuitous past of Southern Indians. I remembered that his publication had devoted a special edition to Indian issues in 1985, and I had worked with him before to publish articles on the Native American heritage of the region.

We talked at length about whether the magazine might somehow go beyond the political bantering and journalistic hoopla that has marked the Columbus quincentennial. "Would it be possible to follow the thread of Southern Indian history from Columbus to the

present?" Eric asked me.

"Easier than it would have been a generation or so ago," I answered evasively.

"Look," he continued. "Everybody seems to be telling us what happened in 1492, and everyone is arguing about where we stand now. But no one ever talks about how these worlds are connected to one another, about what happened in between *then* and *now*. Most of us have heard of Pocahontas and Osceola, but Indian Southerners still seem unconnected to the rest of the region's history. Isn't it all part of a single story?"

"Absolutely," I replied.

His next question was tougher. "Can you write about all of it in 30 pages?"

"Absolutely not," I answered. "It's too big a subject."

But the more I thought about it, the more the idea excited me. "I'll be glad to sketch out a broad overview," I finally agreed. "But only if we find a way to make the story available to public schools." After all, I explained, we historians are just beginning to explore this part of Southern history. The people who will eventually write it properly are still in high school.

Was the idea worthwhile? Luckily, the North Carolina Humanities Council and the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation thought so. They gave us a grant to prepare a special report and to work with teachers and libraries to develop a supplementary packet of classroom material. With their encouragement, we assembled an advisory panel of first-rate scholars — Charles Hudson, Jane Landers, James Merrell, Theda Perdue, and Daniel Usner — all of whom have written about Indians in the South.

I taped George Catlin's portrait of Osceola above my desk and went to work. If I could not return the Seminole leader's head to his body in any literal way, perhaps I could restore some completeness to the dismembered story of Southern Indian history itself. It was worth a try, and I jumped at the opportunity.

Since I wanted to survey the whole story of Native American history, I knew I could not begin in 1492. The world Columbus had encountered by mistake, though new to him, was a very old world indeed. So I moved the starting point of the story back more than 12,000 years, to the origins of Native American



THE SEMINOLE LEADER, AS PORTRAYED BY GEORGE CATLIN IN *OSCEOLA, THE BLACK DRINK, A WARRIOR OF GREAT DISTINCTION*, 1838.

culture in the region.

After 1492, I wanted to give each century equal weight. I knew I would have neither the space nor the background to explore the unique history and culture of every Indian group in detail. I also knew it would be impossible to pursue the story of what has happened to Southern Indians who were removed to Oklahoma 150 years ago. At least not this time. Still, if I could sketch the forest in 30 pages, maybe readers would be inspired to examine individual trees on their own.

I was fortunate to have the support of dozens of people who helped to strengthen "When Old Worlds Meet." I join with the editor in thanking the N.C. Humanities Council, the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, and our supportive panel of advisors, as well as Duane King, Sharon Dean, and John Colonghi at the National Museum of the American Indian.

Eric Bates and Claudio Saunt did wonders to give shape to the project. I would also like to thank Larry Chavis, Jim Crisp, Stephen Davis, Lil Fenn, John Hope Franklin, Thomas Hatley, Woody Holton, David Kleit, Roger Manley, Joel Martin, Deborah Montgomerie, Jon Sensbach, Maude Wahlman, Trawick Ward, Emily Warner, Greg Waselkov, Susan Yarnell, and members of the Triangle Area Native American Studies Workshop.

Even with the help of all these people, exploring so many centuries of Native American history has proven a humbling experience. In writing the six articles that follow, I was constantly aware that each paragraph represents only a brief glimpse of a much wider subject. No matter what the topic or the era, much more is known than I could include here — and far more remains to be learned by the next generation.

Peter Wood is a former Rhodes Scholar and a co-editor of Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast. He has been a professor of history at Duke University and a contributor to Southern Exposure since moving to North Carolina in 1975.

For information about our supplementary packet of classroom materials, write: "When Old Worlds Meet," Institute for Southern Studies, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702.

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Look Upon the Great Mound



A dozen miles from the little town of Noxapater in east central Mississippi stands the ancient Indian mound of Nanih Waiya. The Choctaw people have always considered the large platform mound sacred, calling it their *ishki chito*, or “great mother.” According to one tale of origin, “In the very center of the mound, they say, ages ago, the Great Spirit created the first Choctaws, and through a hole or cave, they crawled forth into the light of day.”

Another story tells how the Choctaws, after wandering many years in search of a home, settled near the Pearl River and erected a burial mound over the bones of their ancestors, which they had been carrying with them. “Behold the wonderful work of our hands; and let us be glad,” they sang, after years of incessant labor. “Look upon the great mound; its top is above the trees, and its black shadow lies on the ground, [stretching as far as] a bowshot. [Here lie] the bones of fathers and relatives; they . . . died in a far off wild country. . . . Our journey lasted many winters; it ends at Nanih Waiya.”

During the 1800s, when citizens of the new United States first pushed west across the Mississippi Valley in great numbers, white settlers were amazed by the size and quantity of ancient mounds like Nanih Waiya that dotted the landscape. Most refused to believe that these great earthworks could have been built by the ancestors of the Indians whom they were fighting for control of America’s heartland. Instead, they devised elaborate

and mistaken myths about ancient races from Europe who might have been clever enough to create such monuments.

At the same time, settlers tore down many mounds as obstacles to progress, obliterating evidence of early Indian life. On the rare occasions when the newcomers did gather up artifacts from the surface, it was done randomly, with no attention to the “context” which might have fostered further investigation.

Only in the past century has it become possible to collect and examine evidence of the continent’s earliest inhabitants in a truly systematic way. Indeed, the study of North America’s oldest residents remains in its infancy. In the South, archaeologists have unearthed artifacts from four distinct prehistoric periods — Paleo-Indian, Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippian — stretching back 12,000 years before the arrival of Europeans and Africans from across the Atlantic. Although there is still much to be learned, the initial evidence provides a glimpse of the rich and varied cultures that thrived among the diverse peoples who have lived in America since the end of the Ice Age.

IN THE BEGINNING

Where did the first Southerners come from, and when did they arrive? Asia is now accepted as the source of the earliest Americans. Physical anthropologists, who compare human groups around the world, find similarities between the hair, skin color, blood types, and teeth of the inhabitants of Siberia and America. Both North Asians and Native Americans, for example, tend to have “shoveled incisors” — upper-biting teeth that have a scooped-out shape different from those of other peoples. Experts say this characteristic first appeared in the Asian population 40,000 or 50,000 years ago, so people from Siberia traveling to America must have come after that time.

The last great Ice Age occurred from roughly 70,000 to 10,000 years ago, and at least twice during that time — once 50,000 to 40,000 years ago and again 28,000 to 10,000 years ago — lower sea levels exposed a land bridge in the Bering Strait linking Siberia to Alaska. Over the past century experts have come to agree that humans were widespread throughout the Americas before the end of this second opening.

One dramatic proof is that archaeologists have found handmade spear points embedded in the bones of large animals known to have become extinct at least 9,000 years ago. Also, modern carbon-14 dating procedures allow scientists to estimate with growing accuracy the age of any charred material, such as wood burned in an

ancient campfire, and such evidence confirms human activity in America at least 12,000 years ago.

Could initial arrival have taken place well before then? Recently some experts have said, "Yes . . . maybe." They speculate that diverse stone objects, such as those gathered recently at the Meadowcroft rock shelter in Pennsylvania, seem to date from much earlier. But few such artifacts have been found in a context that would allow precise dating, and some are thought to be the product of natural geological forces, not human craftsmanship. Doubters also point out that no convincing human remains have been discovered in America from that earlier time.

Still, the probable date for America's human beginnings has been pushed back steadily in recent generations, and it may soon be pushed back further. In February scholars announced that they had discovered human fingerprints and charred materials in a New Mexico cave that seem to date from 28,000 years ago, according to carbon-dating estimates.

Whatever happened in earlier times, it is clear that roughly 12,000 years ago, as the global climate shifted, bands of hunters now known as Paleo-Indians moved southward from what is now Alaska. As they emerged into the heartland of North America they encountered an abundance of Ice Age "megafauna," herds of large mammals that had never faced human attack or learned to fear it. Mastodons and mammoths, ancient bison and horses, even camels — perhaps as many as 100 million animals in all — were hunted to extinction in less than a thousand years. If human beings, and not the rapidly changing climate, were primarily responsible for this decimation, then it constituted North America's first man-made ecological disaster, and the largest one to date.

Pursuing receding herds, searching for new quarry, and perhaps seeking warmer climates, these big-game hunters fanned out rapidly across all of North America. Within a few centuries, some had reached the region now composed of the southern United States — a land that proved to be a hospitable home. "In these early Indians," explains anthropologist Dean Snow, "we have one of the thinnest and most mobile human populations ever, scattered through one of the richest environments a hunting culture could hope to find."

In the South, evidence regarding these first inhabitants has turned up in unlikely places. At Little Salt Spring southeast of Sarasota, underwater archaeologist Carl Clausen has explored an hourglass-shaped sink-hole that was a source of water in the arid climate of Ice Age Florida. The water level then was well below the waist of the hourglass, almost 90 feet below its present depth. While scuba-diving at this lower level, Clausen found the shell of a large tortoise resting upon fire-baked clay. When carbon-dating of a charred stake suggested an age of

12,000 years, the diver surmised that a Paleo-Indian might have fallen into the mineral spring; unable to climb out through the narrow opening above, the hunter could have speared the tortoise and roasted it while trying to stay alive on the ledge.

Other hunters settled in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, where they found outcrops of jasper, a dark green quartz well-suited for spearpoints. Known as Clovis points after the site in New Mexico where they were first discovered in the 1920s, these delicate implements, sharper than a surgeon's scalpel, were created by hand through "pressure-flaking." Found widely throughout eastern North America, Clovis points represent a very high level of stone-chipping technology. The slender blades were more finely crafted than necessary for killing large animals, and are therefore regarded not only as efficient tools but as impressive works of art. Archaeologists at Flint Run near Front Royal, Virginia have discovered waste chips left by skilled "knappers" who handcrafted these razor-sharp stone points some 11,500 years ago. In the same area, excavations have revealed other evidence regarding these First Families of Virginia: faint traces of upright wooden posts that suggest the oldest human structures known in North America.

SETTLING DOWN

As the Ice Age ended 10,000 years ago, the mastodons and other large beasts that had adapted to the cold weather began to disappear. Whether they were killed off by the climatic shift or by the Clovis spears of the Paleo-Indians, their extinction forced successive generations of hunters to turn to pursuing small animals, fishing, and gathering acorns, hickory nuts, and other forest products. Gradually, the hunting culture of the Paleo-Indians gave way to an era called the Archaic Period.

To sustain their changing lifestyle, Archaic Indians developed a new array of tools — grooved axes, mortars and pestles of polished stone, fishhooks and needles carved from bone. They devised a spear-thrower or *atlatl* for hunting deer and other game, and they began to create simple fiber-tempered pottery, in which strands of grass or Spanish moss were mixed into the clay to strengthen it during firing.

Archaic groups were more settled and more numerous than



THIS BATTLE SCENE ILLUSTRATES ONE MYTH DEvised BY WHITE AMERICANS TO EXPLAIN THE ORIGIN OF ANCIENT MOUNDS.

their predecessors, and exploited wild foods more intensively. They were also more widespread, adapting to inland and coastal regions. Inside Russell Cave near the Tennessee River in northeast Alabama, excavations begun in 1953 penetrated successive levels of ancient debris to a depth of 14 feet. The lowest layers revealed that Archaic hunters took shelter here as far back as 8,500 years ago. Farther north on an old channel of the lower Tennessee River, the Eva site shows occupation beginning 7,000 years ago. Besides hunting deer and gathering nuts much as their counterparts in the forests of Europe were doing at the time, the Eva inhabitants also used fresh-water mussels for several millennia, leaving behind an enormous "midden" or refuse heap of leftover shells that was characteristic of Archaic settlements.

At Stallings Island on the Savannah River near Augusta, Georgia, a huge shell midden 1,500 feet long and 12 feet thick has yielded fiber-tempered pottery dating back 4,000 years — about the time Stonehenge was at its height in ancient England. Pots with more elaborate decorations, nearly as old or older, have been found in another extensive midden on the St. Johns River in Florida.

As the centuries passed, the steady changes of the Archaic Period led to significantly new patterns of life in the South. By 3,000 years ago, native communities had begun to farm small plots of land, trade with their neighbors, and build huge mounds. The earliest large mounds appear at Poverty Point in northeast Louisiana, an impressive and puzzling settlement that illustrates the transition from Archaic culture to an era known as the Woodland Period.

Founded between 1500 and 1200 BC — when Thebes was a center of power in ancient Egypt — Poverty Point went virtually unexplored until 1953, when an archaeologist reviewing aerial photographs taken by Army mapmakers noticed six concentric ridges laid out in an octagonal pattern. Excavations revealed that while the original inhabitants had depended on the spear-throwers and fiber-tempered pots of the Archaic Period, they had also become active traders and developed a complex ritual life. Much about their settlement remains a mystery, including the exact use of thousands of "Poverty Point objects," small balls of fired clay that may have been used to line cooking pits in a floodplain where few stones were available.

Increasingly, people of the Woodland era settled along the rich "bottomland" created by Southern rivers. They not only collected the seeds of common plants such as pigweed, giant ragweed, and canary grass, they also began to cultivate sunflowers and sumpweed. Seeds from all these plants have been found, for example, in the cool atmosphere of Mammoth Cave and nearby Salts Cave, north of Bowling Green, Kentucky, where Indians gathered gypsum



crystals from cave walls. Though some of the most revealing Woodland artifacts have been carried off by curious amateurs, many have been preserved, including feather blankets, strips of rough cloth, and a sandal woven from the inner bark of a pawpaw tree. Surviving squash rinds indicate that several members of the "cucurbit" family, long domesticated in Mexico, had made their way into the South, where they have flourished ever since: Bottle gourds provided excellent containers, and squash expanded the diet.

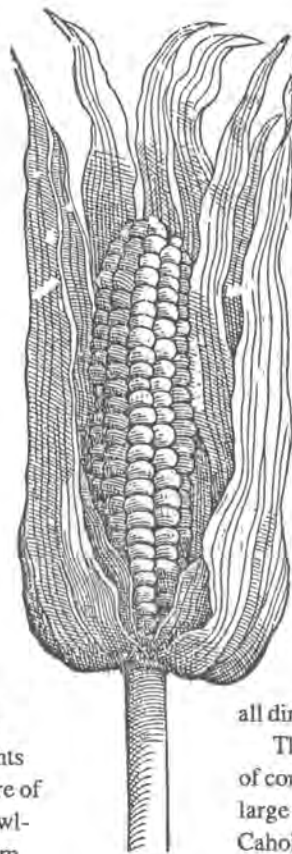
As experience made Indians ever more adept at gathering and preserving the bountiful nuts and fruits of the Southern forest, they became more sedentary. Underground storage

pits protected a surplus of acorns, walnuts, hazelnuts, chestnuts, beechnuts, butternuts, and hickory nuts; persimmons, pawpaws, grapes, and berries of all kinds were harvested in season.

As subsistence became easier, time for artistic work and building projects increased. Pottery, now tempered with shell or grit instead of fiber, became more widespread, and it was decorated by pressing cords, fabric, or carved stamps into the soft clay. Prominent persons adorned themselves with gorgets and pearls, placed decorative "spools" in slits in their ears, and smoked carefully carved pipes shaped like tubes, or flat platforms topped with a small bowl in the form of a crouching person or animal.

Jewelry and pipes were preserved in extensive burial mounds, along with a wide array of trade items such as seashells and fossilized shark teeth from coastal areas, or mica and obsidian from

distant mountain ranges. Elaborate "effigy mounds" in the shapes of birds and snakes also began to appear. At the Rock Eagle Effigy Mound at Eatonton, Georgia, Woodland workers carried thousands of white quartz rocks a considerable distance and piled them six to eight feet high. Over the years, they shaped an enormous buzzard, or eagle, with a wingspan of 120 feet, the purpose or meaning of which remains unknown. Equally difficult to interpret is the "Old Stone Fort," 4,600 feet of stone-and-earth wall constructed nearly 2,000 years ago on a bluff above Duck River near the town of Manchester in central Tennessee.



THE MISSISSIPPIANS

Between 700 and 800 AD, as Europe was entering the Middle Ages, a social and economic revolution began changing Native American life in much of the South. Known as the Mississippian transformation, this shift began in the Mississippi Valley and spread in all directions, surviving in Natchez until about 1700.

The new way of life was characterized by the cultivation of corn, the ranking of people in society, and the erection of large ceremonial mounds. Its best-known center was at Cahokia, located across the Mississippi from modern St.

Louis. Recently designated a World Heritage Site by the United Nations, the complex includes the largest Indian mound in North America, a ceremonial pyramid rising more than 100 feet above the floodplain and containing nearly 22 million cubic feet of earth. During its heyday between 1050 and 1250 AD, Cahokia was home to well over 10,000 people, an unprecedented concentration for the time.

While the cultivation of maize cannot be said to have caused the Mississippian transformation, it undoubtedly played a major role. Woodland farmers had acquired tropical flint corn from Mexico around 200 BC, but this small-eared variety required a long, dry growing season. When the Southern climate became slightly wetter and cooler after 400 AD, corn virtually disappeared from the Mississippi Valley for more than four centuries.

When the crop reappeared, it was augmented by a new variety called eastern flint from the mountains of Guatemala. This hardy strain provided larger ears and was well suited to the relatively cooler climate of North America, where it was in wide use by the 13th century.

The cultivation of beans began at about the same time, and together corn and beans proved to be a nutritional combination. But there were costs. Corn consumed valuable soil nutrients, forcing its growers to cultivate rich

alluvial bottomland or regularly clear new fields. Preparing the land, weeding the fields, and harvesting the crop all demanded considerable labor and organization.

The spread of corn was thus accompanied by a fundamental shift in Southern social structures. Egalitarian tribal societies organized around kinship gave way to more centralized chiefdoms, based upon hierarchy and deference. An elite emerged, separated from the common people. Leaders occupied exclusive mound-top residences and received burial in elaborate mounds. A few "paramount chiefdoms" gained dominance over their neighbors, though efforts at centralized control generally proved unstable and short-lived.

Expanded military organizations enforced internal social

THAR SHE BLOWS

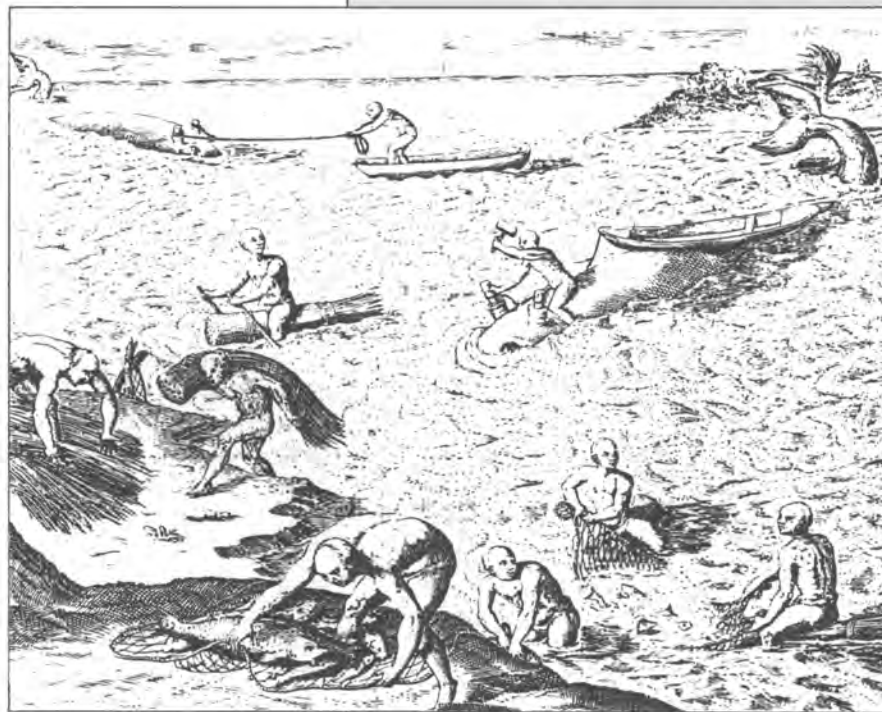
The Native American harpooners who sailed aboard New England whaling ships in Herman Melville's day were not the first, nor perhaps the bravest, Indian whalers on the East Coast. When the Spanish first encountered the Tequesta Indians in the 16th century near present-day Miami, the native people had long been using an ingenious and daring method of harvesting whales from the Gulf Stream.

Long before the arrival of Columbus, whales had provided important nourishment to Tequesta communities. Taking a single whale could feed a large group for months without posing an ecological threat to the species. In 1593, when Friar Andres San Miguel was shipwrecked in Florida, he reported that "on some parts of this coast I saw large numbers of the bones of the spinal columns of whales that the Indians kill." Dragging a whale ashore, "they cut it into pieces and make jerky for their food supply, and in particular those from the interior country eat it."

How did the Tequesta hunt whales? First, the Indians would wait for a mother whale to venture into a lagoon to nurse her calf, or men in boats would herd the large mammals into a shallow area. Archaeologist Lewis Larson collected an early Spanish account of what happened next:

"This is how it is done: an Indian takes a long and strong rope, with a few prepared snares, and gets into a canoe, and goes there where he sees the whale coming with its young; and he throws himself on one of them and climbs onto its back and quickly places a snare on its muzzle. When the calf feels this, he dives to the depths of the sea, and the Indian hugging it goes down with it; for they are great swimmers and suffer a lot by remaining under water. Because it is necessary to remedy the situation, the calf returns to the surface. During this interval the Indian thrusts a sharp wedge into it, and puts one through each of its nostrils, through which it breathes, and he rams them in with his fist so that the calf cannot cast them off by itself and when it has returned to the surface, the Indian lengthens his rope and returns to his canoe and pulls the calf, which, because it cannot breathe, drowns easily, and comes to the shore."

Another account concludes the story: "Finally he approaches land, where with the enormity of its body it quickly runs aground lacking strength to go forward or backward. Here a group of Indians attend to the defeated in order to collect their spoils. In fact they finish the killing and divide it and cut it into pieces, and from its abundant tough meat, drying and grinding it, they made true powder that they use for their food and it lasts a long time."



controls and built substantial fortifications against nearby enemies. A defensive palisade can be seen at Moundville, a 300-acre state monument on the Black Warrior River south of Tuscaloosa, Alabama. This major Mississippian community was second only to Cahokia in size, with 20 flat-topped mounds spread around a central plaza. Several artificial ponds created by digging earth for the mounds may have been used to stock fish for a population of at least 3,000 people. Built around 1200 AD, the community was still thriving a century later, when Cahokia had begun its decline. It has yielded rich finds to archaeologists, including engraved discs, copper pendants, shell gorgets, delicate pottery, and an axe and handle carved from a single stone.

THE SOUTHERN CULT

Similar sacred objects and symbolic designs of Mississippian culture have been found throughout the South, suggesting shared ritual practices and religious beliefs. These common traits, described as the Southern Cult or the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex, include pictures of human skulls, feathered serpents, faces with forked designs around the eyes, and hands with an eye in the palm.

Mississippian warriors apparently spread the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex through their clashes with other settlements. Indeed, many common symbols found across the region relate to war. The forked-eye design, for example, was based on the eye markings of the peregrine falcon — perhaps the most spectacular bird of prey, notable for its ability to dive at speeds of over 100 miles an hour and strike its quarry on the wing, killing birds twice its own size.

Such symbols of Mississippian culture spread outward from the Mississippi Valley in all directions. To the west, the Spiro mound in eastern Oklahoma contained a rich trove of Mississippian artifacts, and some aspects of Mississippian culture reached the Caddoan peoples of Arkansas, Louisiana, and eastern Texas.

To the east, Emerald Mound in Mississippi represents one of the largest temple mounds in the United States. Mississippian culture also spread to the Etowah site north of Atlanta, to the Lake Jackson site near Tallahassee, and to the Mulberry site on the Wateree River near Camden, South Carolina.

In a few instances the Mississippian expansion proceeded by an actual migration of people. At the Ocmulgee site at Macon, Georgia, newcomers who pushed eastward beyond the Appalachian mountains around 900 AD built a large earthlodge which has now been reconstructed.

Perhaps the latest and clearest example of migration occurred around 1300 AD, when a group of Mississippian peoples from farther south and west pushed into the area around Town Creek on a tributary of the Pee Dee River near Mount Gilead, North Carolina. There they planted corn and built a ceremonial mound and temple, fortified by a strong palisade. But local people apparently resisted the Mississippian expansion, struggling to preserve their local culture. The Town Creek settlement was abandoned after little more than 100 years.

Even as the Mississippian newcomers to Town Creek were withdrawing, however, forces were at work in Europe and Africa that would prompt an unprecedented era of oceanic exploration. Soon two very old worlds on opposite sides of the Atlantic, each unknown to the other, would come into direct and lasting contact. A complex Southern world that had evolved gradually over more than 100 centuries would be violently and irrevocably altered in the five short centuries to come.



A COPPER PLATE FROM THE ETOWAH MOUND IN GEORGIA
TYPIFIES THE BIRD IMAGERY OF THE SOUTHERN CULT.

14
15

92

A War of Fire & Blood

2,000 different languages spoken in the Americas, evolving slowly and persistently from common roots during millennia of migration, isolation, and change. In the onslaught of war and disease initiated by Columbus's first voyage, many languages soon disappeared entirely without ever being recorded or preserved. Others, such as Cherokee and Choctaw in the South, have endured to this day.

Over the past century, by comparing words and structures in surviving Indian tongues, linguists have identified 15 or 20 large "families" of languages that each share a common source. Of the language groups prominent in the South 500 years ago, by far the largest was Muskogean, which gave rise to the speech of Creeks in Georgia and Alabama and Choctaws and Chickasaws in Mississippi. The Cherokees in Southern Appalachia and the Tuscaroras in Eastern North Carolina shared an Iroquoian language stock; the neighboring

In early October 1492, after more than two full months at sea, Christopher Columbus still had not sighted land. By sailing due west from Spain at 28 degrees north latitude, he had hoped to reach Japan and then China. He knew the earth was round, but he had drastically underestimated its circumference, leading him to believe he was now close to his destination.

On October 7, advised by his pilot that signs suggested land to the southwest, he altered course in that direction. It was a fateful decision. Had he continued at 28 degrees for another week or two, his small fleet would have landed south of what is now Cape Canaveral, Florida, altering the course of Southern history.

Such was not to be the case. Columbus came ashore on a tiny island in the Bahamas, and in three return voyages he pressed south and west into the Caribbean and along the coast of Central and South America. He continued to believe until his death in 1506 that he had reached the islands off the Asian coast known as the Indies, and he insisted on calling the inhabitants "Indians."

The name stuck, and as Europeans encountered and described Native American peoples over the coming centuries the term took on a life and meaning of its own. No name has ever been more thoroughly misplaced. But *any* unifying phrase posed problems, for tremendous diversity characterized the long-time residents of the Americas.

Nothing illustrates this diversity better than language. By 1492, there may have been as many as

Catawbias spoke a language distantly related to Siouan; while the coastal tribes near Chesapeake Bay were Algonquian speakers. "The languages which belonged to these families," explains Charles Hudson of the University of Georgia, "were as different from each other as English is from Chinese."

SOUTHERN LIVING

The first Southerners also differed from each other physically. Even if early explorers lumped them together as "Indians," not all Americans looked the same. Giovanni da Verrazzano, cruising along the Carolina coast for the French in 1524 in hopes of discovering a passage to the Pacific, noted that the local residents were "rather broad in the face: but not all, for we saw many with angular faces." Early Europeans noted that many Southerners appeared taller than themselves and varied in skin color from olive to dark-copper. Some inhabitants tattooed their bodies with elaborate designs, while others bound their infants to cradle boards during their first year to flatten their skulls permanently in a manner considered handsome.

The complex geography of the region also prompted variations in Southern living. Existence in the coastal low country, with its long growing season, mild temperatures, and abundant water resources, contrasted with daily life in the cooler piedmont and the more heavily wooded mountains, but the differences usually represented variations on a common



theme: easier fishing, larger gardens, or a longer hunting season. "By the time Europeans arrived at the dawn of the 16th century," says Professor Tim Silver of Appalachian State University, "all Indians in the region practiced four basic types of subsistence. They hunted game animals, fished the streams and rivers, planted and harvested crops, and gathered available wild foods."

This combination guaranteed long-term prosperity — "for when Sickness, bad Weather, War, or any other ill Accident kept them from Hunting, Fishing, and Fowling," explained an early European observer, the Indians could rely on corn, peas, beans, "and such Fruits of the Earth as were then in Season." Likewise, if droughts or floods interrupted the planting cycle, then deer and turkeys, perch and herrings, acorns and hickory nuts became larger sources of food.

The lunar calendars of Southerners reflected the numerous activities that shaped the rhythm of the seasons. For most, the high point of the year was the Green Corn Ceremony in September, accompanying the first full moon after the late corn ripened. During this four-day festival of fasting and renewal, past sins were erased, petty crimes were forgiven, conflicts were set aside, and the sacred fires were extinguished and then rekindled.

The annual cycle between Green Corn Ceremonies varied, but the calendar that Europeans found in use among the Natchez illustrates a widespread tradition. The moon "of Maize or the Great Corn," reports a French visitor, is followed in October by "that of the Turkeys... It is then that this bird comes out of the thick woods... to eat nettle seeds, of which it is very fond." The November moon "is that of the Bison" and December "that of the Bears," when the animals are at their fattest. January and February, a lean time of "Cold Meals," center upon wildfowl and stored nuts. But in March the deer reappear: "The renewal of the year spreads universal joy."

The next moon, "which corresponds to our month of April, is that of the Strawberries. The women and children collect them in great quantities." In May come the first ears of spring corn, a time "awaited with impatience," and in June the watermelons are ready and the fish increase. In July and August, any grapes and mulberries not already eaten by the birds are gathered in, while the corn begins to ripen.

GOLD AND SLAVES

Very few outsiders saw this diverse Southern world during the 16th century, but those who did brought momentous changes, both

intentional and unintentional. Those who followed Columbus in the West Indies imposed ruthless punishments and transmitted new diseases that caused massive death. They introduced cattle and hogs that uprooted gardens, and they forced inhabitants to search ceaselessly for gold at the expense of their own subsistence.

Within a generation, the Spanish wiped out nearly all of the several million inhabitants of the islands. "Who of those born in future centuries will believe this?" asked the priest, Bartolome de las Casas. "I myself who am writing this and who saw it and know most about it can hardly believe that such was possible."

Firmly ensconced in the Caribbean, the Spanish probed relentlessly outward in search of gold, routes to the Pacific, and new workers to replace the dying West Indian population. Juan Ponce

de Leon, the wealthy governor of Puerto Rico, was probably searching for slaves rather than a fountain of youth when he first encountered the North American mainland during Easter week — *pasqua florida* — in 1513. The Spanish gave the peninsula a Latin name, and were soon applying the term *La Florida* to the entire South as they explored and laid claim to the region.

A generation of voyages along the Atlantic coast would make clear that no easy northern route to the Pacific existed, though hopes of a Northwest Passage to the Orient died hard. In the meantime, a slaving raid to Florida in 1521 proved profitable, and that same

year word spread that Hernando Cortez had toppled the wealthy Aztec empire in Mexico.

The success of Cortez, and the bonanza reaped by Francisco Pizarro in 1533 when his army conquered the Inca empire in Peru, fueled hopes among Spanish adventurers that similar wealth could be discovered in North America. Lucas Vasquez de Ayllon led an expedition to the Carolina or Georgia coast in 1526 using Indian hostages as guides. But his translators deserted, the commander died, and the colonizers withdrew in disarray, leaving behind a number of Africans who went to live among the Indians.

The following year, Panfilo de Narvaez landed at Tampa Bay on the Gulf Coast of Florida with a contingent of 600 men. He marched north and west in search of riches, only to be driven out by the Apalachees. Almost all the soldiers died, but Cabeza de Vaca and three companions, including an African, made it back to Mexico City after about a decade in the South and West. De Vaca's narrative of their harrowing journey described many hardships, including enslavement among Indians on the Texas coast. But his early account of the region encouraged other adventurers to try their luck.

Etching by Theodore De Bry



MUCH OF OUR IMAGERY OF EARLY ENCOUNTERS COMES FROM THE *GRANDS VOYAGES* OF THEODORE DE BRY, PUBLISHED BETWEEN 1590 AND 1634.

THE SPANISH PRESENCE

The first and most important arrival was Hernando de Soto, an ambitious *conquistador* who had fought under Pizarro in Peru. De Soto landed at Tampa Bay in 1539 with an army of 600, including at least four priests, four women, and dozens of enslaved Africans. The invaders brought strange new animals: several hundred horses, a large herd of pigs to provide meat for their journey, and vicious mastiffs and greyhounds — large war-dogs trained to attack on command.

Among the Timucuan of northern Florida, de Soto discovered a Spanish survivor of the Narvaez expedition who could serve as a translator. The soldiers headed north from Apalachee into the more populous and centralized Mississippian chiefdoms of the interior. At Cofitachequi in South Carolina the Spanish stole casks of pearls and took the local chieftainess hostage (see sidebar, this page). In the province of Coosa in north Georgia they arrested the paramount chief, forcing him to join other captives.



THE CHIEFTAINESS OF COFITACHEQUI

The spring of 1540 was a troubled time for the people of Cofitachequi, a Mississippian "paramount chiefdom" centered along the Wateree River near present-day Camden, South Carolina. Spanish trade goods — glass beads, rosaries, metal axes — had already reached the villages from the coast, and so had foreign diseases. In 1538 an epidemic had weakened the population. Now one of the southern towns was rebelling against the paramount chieftainess by refusing to pay tribute, and she had sent her niece to impose justice.

Reaching the rebellious town along the Wateree, the young official received word that enemies from the neighboring chiefdom to the southwest had crossed the deserted hunting zone between the two chiefdoms to attack several villages. Worse still, they had been emboldened to do so by a large army of Spaniards who were advancing upon Cofitachequi in search of gold.

The newcomers were hungry, and they were brutal. When several Indians refused to provide directions to Cofitachequi, the Spanish commander had them burned alive. The next Indians he captured informed him that the *cacica* or chieftainess of the land "had already heard of the Christians and was awaiting them in one of her towns." An Indian woman guided them to the riverbank, where Governor Hernando de Soto's secretary, Rodrigo Ranjel, takes up the story:

"The next day," Ranjel writes, "the Governor came to the crossing opposite the village, and the chief Indians came with gifts and the woman chief, lady of that land whom Indians of rank bore on their shoulders with much respect, in a litter covered with delicate white linen. And she crossed in the canoes and spoke to the Governor quite gracefully and at her ease. She was a young girl of fine bearing; and she took off a string of pearls which she wore on her neck, and put it on the Governor as a necklace to show her favour and to gain his good will. And all the army crossed over in canoes and they received many presents of skins well tanned and blankets, all very good; and countless strips of venison and dry wafers, and an abundance of very good salt. All the Indians went clothed down to their feet with very fine skins well dressed, and blankets of the country.... The people are very clean and polite and naturally well conditioned."

The *cacica* realized that the invaders desired pearls, and she acted quickly to placate them.

She told the Spaniards that they might visit towns deserted after the recent plague and search in their temples where ancestors had been buried. There, according to an account by "the Gentleman of Elvas," they found great quantities of pearls made into necklaces, dolls, and birds, along with "a considerable amount of clothing — blankets made of thread from the bark of trees and feather mantles (white, gray, vermilion, and yellow), made according to their custom, elegant and suitable for winter. There were also many deerskins, well tanned and colored, with designs drawn on them and made into pantaloons, hose, and shoes."

But the hospitality of the Indians did little to improve the manners of their Spanish guests. Within days, the *cacica* was so shocked over "offenses committed against the Indians by the Christians," that she became determined not to provide de Soto with guides or bearers. Sensing this, "the governor ordered a guard to be placed over her and took her along with him; not giving her such good treatment as she deserved for the goodwill she had shown him."

The *cacica* proved a valuable hostage. Throughout the chiefdom "she was very well obeyed, for all the Indians did with great efficiency and diligence what she ordered of them." But when the invaders reached the edge of her domain, near present-day Asheville, North Carolina, her desire to escape increased. According to accounts, she took an enslaved African named Gomez as a lover. Accompanied by several other

slaves anxious to throw in their lot with the Indians, the couple escaped, for "both had made up their minds" to return to Cofitachequi.



ALTHOUGH THE ENGLISH OFTEN USED GRAPHIC IMAGES TO EXAGGERATE SPANISH ATROCITIES, MOST SCHOLARS NOW AGREE THAT THE DEVASTATION WAS ENORMOUS.

wielding lances, wreaked havoc on the Indians, killing at least 2,000 people, including women and children.

The brutal victory proved hollow. "They felt they could never make the Indians come under their yoke and dominion either by force or by trickery," one chronicler wrote, "for rather than do so, these people would all permit themselves to be slain." By 1542 de Soto was dead. The next year his 311 survivors withdrew from the region, enslaving 100 Indians to be sold for profit.

In the following generation, Spanish expeditions continued to probe the South. When Tristan de Luna and his men headed north from Pensacola in 1559, they found the interior less populated than before, for "the arrival of the Spaniards in former years had driven the Indians up into the forests," and epidemic diseases had begun to devastate the population.

Ill-supplied and often hungry, the intruders refused to kill their mounts for food, knowing that the Indians feared horses. Nor did they take time to look for maize. Instead, as one observer wrote, "they asked most diligently where the gold could be found and where the silver, because only for the hopes of this as a dessert had they endured the fasts of the painful journey. Every day little groups of them went searching through the country and they found it all deserted and without news of gold."

The Spanish not only failed to extract much gold and silver from the South; they actually lost their precious metals to the region. The annual treasure fleet hauling New World booty from Havana to Seville followed the Gulf Stream north along the Florida coast, where storms were frequent. When a ship wrecked, local inhabitants salvaged gold bars and fashioned them into ornaments, while killing or enslaving any Spanish survivors.

Hernando de Escalante Fontaneda, sailing to Europe at age 13, was taken captive in such a mishap by the powerful Calusa Indians of southwest Florida. When rescued 17 years later he had mastered four local languages and could serve as a knowledgeable, if embittered, guide. Feeling certain that the region's militant inhabitants would never make peace or accept Christianity, he advised Spanish officers to deceive and enslave them. "Let the Indians be taken in hand gently, inviting them to peace; then putting them under deck, husbands and wives together, sell them among the Islands," Fontaneda counseled. "In this way, there could be management of them, and their number become thinned."

Spanish authorities were anxious to protect the annual treasure fleet and its sailors and to enhance the traffic in Indian slaves. But it was not until 1565, when faced with the prospect of rival French settlements along the Atlantic coast, that they sent Pedro Menendez de Aviles to establish a fort. Menendez destroyed a nearby French colony and built a crude outpost at St. Augustine that would become the first permanent European settlement in North America.

In 1566, in an effort to make peace with the powerful Calusa to the south, Menendez "married" the sister of the *cacique*, or chief. That same year, just north of the region known as Guale, he set up a post at Santa Elena near present-day Beaufort, South Carolina. From there he sent Captain Juan Pardo inland as far as the Blue Ridge Mountains on two expeditions to explore the territory, plant small garrisons, and introduce Christianity.

Menendez, like other 16th-century Spaniards, was particularly troubled by the open acceptance of homosexuality among Native

Americans. Most Indians, including those in the South, recognized androgynous men known as berdaches who dressed as women and accepted non-masculine roles. Far from despising the berdaches, Indians respected them for sharing male and female traits and often granted them important ceremonial status.

But by the era of Columbus, the fear of homosexuality had grown into a powerful force in Christian Europe, and suppression of sexual diversity was especially intense in Spain. When Menendez pressed for permission to expand the slave trade from Florida, he accused the local chiefs of being "infamous people, Sodomites." He explained to the King of Spain, "it would greatly serve God Our Lord and your Majesty if these same were dead, or given as slaves." They consider their activities the "natural order of things," Menendez protested. "It is needful that this should be remedied by permitting that war be made upon them with all rigor, a war of fire and blood, and that those taken alive shall be sold as slaves, removing them from the country and taking them to the neighboring islands, Cuba, Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico."

SUDDEN DEATH

Policies of "fire and blood" had a devastating effect on nearby tribes, but they ultimately took far fewer lives than the invisible sword of pestilence. Native Americans had lived in an isolated disease environment for thousands of years. Now, with dramatic suddenness, the Spanish were exposing them to new sicknesses for which they had no inherited immunities or pre-ventive treatments. Infectious diseases traveled even more rapidly and widely than the Spanish themselves, wreaking far greater destruction.

The same West Indian smallpox epidemic that helped Cortez conquer Mexico City in 1521, for example, raced throughout North and South America killing untold numbers, for smallpox mortality among unexposed populations can run as high as 90 percent. As historical demographer Henry Dobyns observes, "The most lethal pathogen Europeans introduced to Native Americans, in terms of the total number of casualties, was smallpox."

If smallpox was the most terrible killer, it was not the only one. Typhoid carried off roughly half the inhabitants of the Gulf Coast barrier islands in 1528; measles swept northward out of New Spain in the 1530s; influenza reduced Southeastern tribes in 1559; and typhus ranged from tidewater Carolina to central and western Florida in 1586.

In the century after the arrival of Columbus, the population throughout the Americas was drastically reduced, fragmenting societies, weakening cultures, and undermining spiritual beliefs. Southerners, who encountered the Spanish first, were among the hardest hit. But the full extent of the dislocation and devastation remains difficult to comprehend. "Aboriginal times ended in North America in 1520 to 1524," explains Dobyns, "and Native American behavior was thereafter never again totally as it had been prior to the first great smallpox pandemic."

By the time English colonists landed at Roanoke Island, North Carolina in 1586, most Southern Indians had still never seen a European, but all had felt the impact of transatlantic contact. As more Indians and non-Indians met face-to-face in the coming years, it would be hard for each group to sense or imagine how different the other had been scarcely a century before.



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In the Midst of Great Death

The result, say some modern scholars, was nothing short of a holocaust. By 1690 — when usable data for Native American populations began to appear in European records — only an estimated 200,000 Indians survived in the South. Since present-day demographers estimate that the Indian population may have been reduced by as much as 80 percent between 1492 and 1692, it appears that *at least* one million people had inhabited the South at the time of Columbus, before the onslaught of new maladies.

Just as the Black Death had challenged Christian beliefs in medieval Europe, the New World devastation through disease shook Indian beliefs to their foundations. The enduring balance thought to prevail between humans and the rest of the living world of plants and animals seemed inexplicably disturbed. Native American healers, though skilled in matters where spiritual insight and herbal medicines could play a part, had no remedies for the new afflictions. Some survivors along the coast turned away from their own medicine men and listened, in desperation, to the teachings of the European newcomers.

They planted crosses in their villages and accepted Catholic missionaries, hoping that the strange faith could protect them from the depredations of Spanish soldiers and the ravages of disease.

Because fewer Europeans died from such diseases as smallpox, measles, and influenza that they had encountered before, Indian interest in their religion increased. And for oral societies with no written languages, the fact that Christianity was recorded in a book added to its mystery and power.

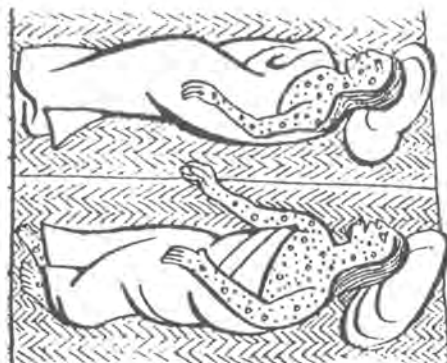
Capitalizing on this leverage, the Spanish sent missionaries among the coastal Indians — with limited success. In Guale, along what is now the Georgia coast, Franciscan priests were put to death in an uprising in 1597. A new generation of friars established missions in northwest Florida during the 1630s, but in 1647 the Apalachee Indians revolted, killing several priests and burning down more than half a dozen churches. Nine years later the Timucuan rebels in central Florida.

Although willing to hear of another God besides their own, native Southerners were not eager to give up traditional ways. Their balanced economy of fishing, farming, hunting, and gathering required constant mobility, but missionaries insisted upon permanent residence near a makeshift church. The priests also demanded regular

"We find that from four years ago down to the present, there have died on account of the great plagues and contagious diseases that the Indians have suffered, half of them," a Florida missionary reported to the king of Spain in 1617. According to church doctrine, each life lost on earth could become a soul gained in the Christian afterlife if the person had been baptized before death, so the priest hastened to note the bright side he saw in the devastation.

"Your Majesty has had a very great part in the growth that was given to heaven," observed the flattering cleric. "For with the help of the twenty-two Religious which your Majesty sent . . . to these regions five years ago, a very rich harvest of souls for heaven has been made in the midst of great numbers of deaths."

By the time the missionary wrote, epidemics had been ravaging the area the Spanish called *La Florida* for nearly 100 years. During the 17th century, English newcomers began to occupy bits of the Southern coast in numbers greater than the Spanish or French had been able to muster — extending the clash of cultures and the deadly "harvest of souls" to the coasts of Virginia and Maryland.



supplies and backbreaking labor, and they tried to prohibit traditions of polygamy, nakedness, and dancing.

Still, their presence offered hope of economic exchange, military protection, and spiritual favor to some beleaguered groups. By 1655, 38 missions, staffed by 70 friars and claiming to serve 26,000 Christianized Indians, existed north and west of St. Augustine. Within another generation, however, these outposts had all but disappeared. Lack of support from Europe contributed, as did continued Indian resistance. In 1680, the Pueblo Indian Revolt against Spanish rule in New Mexico marked the largest successful North American uprising of the colonial era.

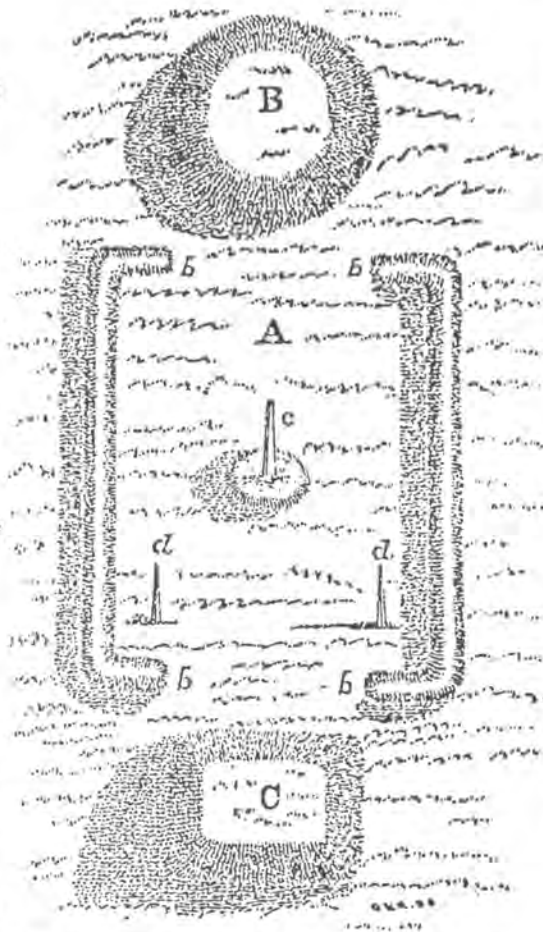
BIG SALT BAY

The most profound change along the Atlantic coast in the 17th century involved the arrival of settlers from England. While they looked and acted much like earlier Europeans, the English were products of the Protestant Reformation who saw powerful Spain as their religious and economic rival. An initial attempt to establish a colony at Roanoke Island in the 1580s failed, in part because English ships were needed to stave off the Spanish Armada sent to invade England in 1588.

By 1607 England's increasing commercial and naval strength made possible another, more successful, colonization attempt. The English called the region Virginia after their late virgin Queen, Elizabeth I, and the settlement Jamestown after their current king. But to longtime inhabitants the domain was Tsenacomoco, and the ruler was Powhatan, whose name was linked to the paramount chiefdom he controlled.

Powhatan's "empire" was a young and still-growing domain that had originated near the fall line of the James and York Rivers, east of modern-day Richmond. Inheriting control of more than half a dozen local groups, Powhatan used aggression to expand his territory and double the number of Algonquian-speaking communities under his confederation. He swiftly emerged as the *mamanatowick* or "great king" of a paramount chiefdom, extracting tribute from subjects as far north as the Potomac River and across the Chesapeake to the east. A local chief or *weroance*, owing allegiance to Powhatan, held sway over each separate group, such as the Appamattucks, Rappahannocks, or Pamunkeys.

Those who still resisted the expanding empire in the early 1600s were destroyed or absorbed. Powhatan's forces annihilated the Chesapeake, near the mouth of the "big salt bay" from which they took their name. Later he would envelope the Chicka-



VISITORS TO THE MUSKOGEE TOWN OF APALACHICOLA SAW A TYPICAL BALL COURT (A) SURROUNDED BY AN EMBANKMENT FOR SPECTATORS (b). THE SQUARE GROUND FOR DANCING WAS ATOP THE MOUND (C).

hominies, or "crushed corn people," living in several villages on the northern branch of the James. By the time the English arrived, Powhatan communities numbered an estimated 13,000 people.

At first the English and the Powhatans saw the utility of maintaining friendly relations. Englishmen wanted converts to Protestant Christianity, guides to the countryside, and allies against Spanish forces from the south. The Powhatan communities confidently exchanged turkeys for swords and provided starving Jamestown with countless bushels of corn, hoping the newcomers would prove strong additions to the paramount chiefdom.

But what started in 1607 as a small and useful appendage to Powhatan's domain soon loomed as a serious threat to the region. Powhatan even allowed his daughter, Pocahontas, to marry an English leader named John Rolfe in 1614 and return to London with him, but the gesture failed to cement a lasting alliance, and Pocahontas died in England after giving birth to a son.

At first, Powhatan thought he could avoid conflict through isolation. "My country is large enough," he boasted to the English in 1615, that "I will remove my selfe farther from you" if insults persist. But as the English began to grow tobacco for profit and demand more land, relations quickly deteriorated.

Former enemies of Powhatan, such as the Monacans to the west, joined with him against the English. Wars erupted in 1622 and 1644, but the Indians could not stem the English tide. Whenever English settlers died, others arrived to take their place.

Powhatan communities were desperate. By midcentury, one observer wrote, the colonists were "takeing away their land and forcing them into such narrow streights and places that they cannot subsist either by planting or hunting."

In 1676 the English, led by Nathaniel Bacon, attacked several weakened Indian communities to secure more land. The Occaneechee, for example, were forced to move further south, settling at a site on the Eno River that would later become Hillsborough, North Carolina. By 1690 the English completely dominated Virginia east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. More than 40,000 whites and 3,000 blacks lived on land previously controlled by Powhatan, and fewer than 3,000 Indians remained in the vicinity. Most survivors were confined to small reservations and forced to pay an annual tribute to remain on the land they had once hunted. On the Eastern Shore, the Accomacs were confined to one reservation, the Choptanks and Nanticoke to another.

"The Indians of Virginia are almost wasted," Robert Beverley observed in 1705. But a few native Virginians survived the sickness, warfare, and land loss. Such pressures "did not result in the

complete disappearance of all the Powhatan groups by 1700 — or 1800 or 1900,” says Helen Rountree, an Indian expert at Old Dominion University. Like other native Southerners, she adds, they were “people who refused to vanish.”

PATHS OF TRADE

Although native and foreign cultures clashed near Chesapeake Bay in the 1600s as they had at Florida missions in the 1500s, almost the entire South still remained free of colonization in 1650. In the 1660s a few English migrants entered the Albemarle region of North Carolina, and during the 1670s colonists from England and the Caribbean began to occupy the South Carolina coast. In 1682 the French explorer La Salle, using Indian translators and guides, descended the Mississippi to the Gulf, noting that the population was considerably reduced since the time of de Soto. He later returned by sea with a colonizing expedition, hoping to establish a town at the mouth of the river, but his venture foundered on the east Texas coast, and the few survivors were absorbed into Indian groups.

By 1690 — two centuries after the arrival of Columbus — only tidewater Virginia had a sizable colonial settlement, numbering more than 43,000. Elsewhere, from the Outer Banks to east Texas, roughly 10,000 whites and 1,000 blacks clustered in a few tiny coastal enclaves. The rest of the vast region remained the exclusive domain of nearly 200,000 Native Southerners.

As a few colonizers began to explore the Southern interior, they discovered the inhabitants linked by extensive trade networks. The Spanish found Calusa Indians traveling by dugout canoe from Tampa Bay all the way to Cuba to exchange such

valuable light-weight items as feathers and bird wings. Communication between the Southern coast and the hinterland flowed along Appalachian rivers like the Potomac, Santee, Savannah, Chattahoochee, and Coosa, and warriors and traders in the Mississippi Valley used the Red, the Ohio, the Cumberland, and the Tennessee as thoroughfares.

For centuries Native Americans had also been trading along a grid of overland trails joining one river valley to another. Most followed natural contours, such as the “Great Warrior Path” which ran along the Shenandoah Valley. Many of these trails eventually become white trade routes, such as the Natchez Trace, extending northeast from the lower Mississippi to the future site of Nashville. Local pathways and secondary arteries connected to each major thoroughfare.

Native Americans transported goods of all kinds along these trails. The Tequestas in south Florida trafficked in dried whale meat. Elsewhere, coastal Indians carried dried fish inland, along with shark teeth, pearls, and a variety of shells. Conch shells could be made into horns, cups, and gorgets, while the polished cylindrical beads known as *peak* came from the central stem of the quahog shell. *Roanoke* (disks cut from cockles, mussels and other thin shells and pierced with a central hole) was often hung from the ear as decoration or strung together for exchange. In addition, the warmer

THE BURDEN OF CHRISTIANITY

The year was 1602, and Spanish missionaries based in Florida were returning to the Georgia coast after the recent Guale revolt. The problem, Father Pedro Ruiz wrote in a letter from St. Augustine, was one of supplies. Boat travel could be treacherous, he reported, and if Indian bearers were sent overland, “the way is through swamps and 10 leagues of beach that are enough to discourage and kill all there are.”

Father Ruiz continued: “Now and then it happens that the Indians are sent for the food by land . . . and they return utterly tired and with what they were bringing considerably diminished, because necessity obliges them to eat part of it, and if by chance it rains on the road, it arrives a total loss.”

Feeding and clothing dozens of Spanish friars in farflung missions was no easy task. Florida historian Amy Turner Bushnell calculates that in the 1630s the total weight of each friar’s annual ration of food and table wine came to nearly 1,400 pounds plus 48 pounds of communion wine and several pounds of wax.

“As the number of missions grew, the delivery of supplies to them became a recognized problem,” Bushnell writes. “The second advance of the Franciscan frontier, which would scatter missions across Central Florida and into Western Timucua and Apalache, began gathering momentum in the 1610s. Behind the frontier, the supply lines lengthened, until in a land without cartroads or draft oxen, the *camino real* stretched to 100 leagues.”

For the Spanish, the answer was to demand labor from the Indians they were attempting to convert. “Following a native precedent for which they could see no alternative, the Spaniards pressed Indians into service as burdeners,” reports Bushnell. “This use of native labor had long been common in Spanish colonies and would be again in British South Carolina.”

According to Bushnell’s calculations, it would take 30 burdeners carrying 75 pounds each to supply each friar — on a journey that averaged 130 miles each way. “If 30 friars were stationed at inland doctrinas, and if it took 30 burdeners two weeks on the road to supply any one of them, the Indians of the landlocked missions were spending 12,600 days on the road to carry supplies on their backs to their friars.”

Etching by Theodore De Bry



coastal areas provided the South with yaupon holly leaves, the ingredient for the strong "black drink" consumed regularly at public ceremonies.

In return, inland traders might supply tobacco, flint, salt, soapstone, and the hides of buffalo, which were common in the interior mountains. Like the Spanish explorers before them, the first Englishmen to venture inland experienced the network of trading paths firsthand. Gabriel Arthur, a prisoner among Indians near the French Broad River in North Carolina during the 1670s, accompanied them to Port Royal Sound, Mobile Bay, and the Ohio River Valley.

In the next decade traders from Charleston, South Carolina ventured inland along Indian paths to trade with a Muskogean-speaking group. The Indians were living along Ochese Creek, a branch of the Ocmulgee River, to take advantage of commerce with the Carolina colony. So the English traders called them the Creek people, and established a new commerce.

European goods also flowed between Indian groups along established lines of trade. When John Smith explored the Chesapeake Bay in 1608, he found that inhabitants at the head of the bay already possessed numerous European hatchets, knives, and pieces of brass and iron that had been traded southward from the French in Canada. After the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, Spanish horses began spreading east from New Mexico via familiar trade routes across the Mississippi. The Chickasaw people, living in what is now northern Mississippi, became significant middlemen, and one breed of mounts became known in the South as Chickasaw horses.

COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

At the end of each trading path lay an Indian town, usually inhabited by several hundred people. A nearby river provided fish, caught with spears, arrows, hooks, or traps. Some Indians even ground up buckeyes and sprinkled the toxic powder in a pool; the organic poison attacked the central nervous system of the fishes so they could be pulled in by hand. The river also created fertile bottomland for cleared fields where hills of corn and squash were farmed communally by the local women. If the soil became exhausted or the supply of firewood ran thin, a community would simply move, limiting the demand on local resources. Many Europeans made their settlements in these "Indian Old Fields," which had already been cleared and cultivated.

These open fields, created by stripping a ring of sap-carrying bark from trees and letting them die, let sunlight into the adjoining woods and allowed grass and leafy plants to grow along the "edge," which in turn attracted game. The Indians occasionally burned wooded areas to flush animals into the open, but the practice also cleared undergrowth, revitalized the soil, and encouraged new grass which lured deer to graze in predictable places where they could be hunted more easily with bow and arrow.

Hunting was a necessity, not a sport, and Indians were careful to ask the pardon of animals they killed. The first animal killed during a hunt was treated as a sacrifice, and Indians often threw a

HUNTING WAS A NECESSITY, NOT A SPORT, AND INDIANS WERE CAREFUL TO ASK THE PARDON OF ANIMALS THEY KILLED.

portion of their meat into the fire as a further offering when they ate. Everywhere the local woods provided abundant small game. The Cherokees used blow guns made of bamboo to shoot darts at squirrels and rabbits, but bows and arrows were the weapon of choice in hunting wild turkeys, black bears, and white-tailed deer.

The homes to which hunting men and farming women returned varied with the locality. Native Virginians built oblong houses that had sapling frames and barrel-shaped roofs resembling the long houses of their distant relatives, the Iroquois. Farther south among the Upper and Lower Creeks, dwellings were thatched with cane. According to anthropologist Peter Nabokov, vertical walls on their winter houses were "plastered inside and out, with a very small opening which is closed at dark and a fire being made within it remains heated like an oven, so that clothing is not needed at night. Baby boys slept on panther skins and baby girls slept on soft, tanned fawn skins, which the Indians believed would impart the appropriate masculine and feminine traits to their children."

For the Creeks and other groups with roots in Mississippian culture, the town itself surrounded a four-sided "square ground," oriented to the four primary directions. Nearby stood a circular council house, built around eight upright poles. (Four and eight were considered special numbers.) The sacred fire was kept at the square ground, where the annual Green Corn ceremony took place. Ancient mounds sometimes flanked the square.

Most towns also had a very large ball court — a wide ceremonial expanse, often 250 yards in length, surrounded by a low embankment for spectators. Residents kept the court swept and strewn with fresh sand for playing the ancient game of *chunkey*. Players rolled a stone disc and then tossed poles after it, betting on who could hit closest to where the stone would stop. Dominating the open space was a large pole of stripped pine, 30 or 40 feet high, used as the goal for several ritual ball games, one of which was a Southern ancestor of lacrosse.

Though much smaller and less numerous than they had been in the heyday of Mississippian culture, most Southern towns of the 17th century still functioned in traditional ways. But word of further change was in the wind. In 1671 two Englishmen named Thomas Batts and Robert Fallam headed west from the Chesapeake, crossing the Appalachian divide in southwest Virginia to where the Tug Fork River divides West Virginia from Kentucky. Like all Europeans of the time, they remained thoroughly ignorant of the true geography of America. Hoping to find access to the Pacific, they scanned the horizon for water and watched the west-flowing streams for signs of tidal ebb and flow.

Instead, Batts and Fallam saw the eastern edge of the vast Mississippi Valley, which French Canadians were beginning to explore from the north. Along the way they met an Indian who had come from farther west on his own journey of exploration, trying to confirm rumors about the arrival of strangers. Over the next 100 years, such rumors would prove all too true.

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Like Snow Before the Sun

"My ancestors may not have come over on the *Mayflower*," Will Rogers used to quip, "but they met 'em at the boat." The famous comedian, born in Oklahoma Territory in 1879, used this breezy one-liner to remind his audiences about a complex past they were unwilling to face seriously. Like many modern Native Americans, Rogers combined an Indian and non-Indian heritage. His American roots stretched into the South, where his Cherokee ancestors had already dealt with the disastrous consequences of Spanish exploration by the time the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth in 1620. But ongoing relations with Europeans did not begin for the Cherokees and other major groups of the Southern interior, such as the Choctaws and Chickasaws, until the 1690s. The next hundred years would be anything but funny, as seemingly advantageous contact rapidly turned into a desperate struggle for survival, using every tool of diplomacy and warfare.

As always, geography played a crucial role. When the English had first invaded Massachusetts and Virginia, the smaller coastal tribes had been rapidly overwhelmed by disease and defeated in combat. Those who survived were confined to narrow reservations. But further inland, protected by the Appalachian mountains, the Iroquois Confederacy in the North and the Cherokee nation in the South survived the initial onslaught of sickness and conflict, buying time to respond knowledgeably and aggressively to the new threats from overseas. By the beginning of the 18th century, the

two interior nations each still numbered more than 30,000.

Seacoast societies were less fortunate. During the 18th century, European powers probed all of the shorelines of North America with increased intensity. The Russians established posts in Alaska; the Spanish built missions in California; the English expanded trading factories in Hudson Bay. In the South, a warm climate and proximity to the booming sugar colonies of the Caribbean intensified competition, and the French now joined the European land grab.

During the 1680s, La Salle had explored the Mississippi River and claimed its huge hinterland for the French monarch, Louis XIV. By 1699 Frenchmen were building an outpost at Biloxi and exploring the lower Mississippi by boat. They found one town of the Houma Indians — a village of 100 huts surrounded by a palisade of cane — ravaged by a smallpox epidemic. Further upriver, where Houma hunting grounds met those of the Bayougoules, they came across a curious boundary marker on the east bank — "a maypole without

branches, reddened, with several heads of fish and bears attached." This red post, over 30 feet tall, was called *Istrouma* by the Indians and *Baton Rouge* by the French. It would one day provide the name and location for the capital of Louisiana.

Dan Usner, a native of Louisiana and professor of Native American history at Cornell University, estimates that roughly 24,000 people occupied the bayous of the Gulf Coast and the Lower Mississippi during the 1680s. A generation later scarcely 7,000 remained. In 1718, as French settlers were laying out the town of New Orleans, a survivor from the Chitimacha tribe described the years of crisis in vivid terms:

"The sun was red, the roads filled with brambles and thorns, the clouds were black, the water was troubled and stained with blood, our women wept unceasingly, our children cried with fright, the game fled far from us, our houses were abandoned, and our fields uncultivated, we all have empty bellies and our bones are visible."

As the small coastal tribes of Mississippi and Louisiana were being devastated by the sudden arrival of the French, similar groups along the Carolina coast were succumbing to the increasing English presence. "The Small-Pox and Rum have made such a Destruction amongst them," wrote English traveler John Lawson in 1709, "that, on good grounds, I do believe, there is not the sixth Savage living within two hundred Miles of all our Settlements, as there were fifty Years ago."

Lawson could have added slavery to his list, for the labor-hungry English were paying Indians to deliver up captives taken in

war. In 1704, South Carolina raiders and their Creek Indian allies destroyed Apalachee villages in western Florida, taking hundreds of captives to Charleston, where they were enslaved on local plantations or sold into bondage in other English colonies.

Tribes that took part in slave raids, such as the Tuscaroras in North Carolina and the Yamasees in South Carolina, were often pitted against one another, thus dividing resistance to European encroachment. When some Tuscarora villages launched a desperate war against the English in 1711, Yamasee warriors were recruited to crush the rebellion. Many of the defeated Tuscaroras left the South, moving north to join the powerful Iroquois League. Others, who had remained neutral or sided with the English, stayed behind and seized the first opportunity for revenge. In 1715, Tuscaroras helped to suppress a Yamasee uprising that nearly destroyed the South Carolina colony. In 1717 they were granted land on the Roanoke River, and later migrated to Robeson County, North Carolina, where many of their descendants still live.

In Louisiana, meanwhile, the French colony generated limited Indian resistance at first. The colony grew slowly, creating little pressure for land. "There was enough for them and for us," observed the Natchez elder, Stung Serpent (see sidebar, page 33). But as French numbers rose and encroachments increased, tensions mounted. In 1729, ravaged by disease and insulted by a French demand to move their villages, the Natchez nation staged a desperate uprising. They attacked neighboring Fort Rosalie, killing 237 people.

The French retaliated. Employing Choctaw allies in a war of extermination, the newcomers destroyed what had once been the strongest society on the lower Mississippi. More than 400 Natchez captives were taken to New Orleans and sold into slavery in the Caribbean; a few hundred survivors escaped to join the Chickasaws to the north and Creeks to the east.

DEERSKINS AND DIPLOMATS

Groups like the Natchez, Tuscaroras, and Yamasees had once been successful brokers and middlemen between port towns and the

Chasse générale du Choucrail



THIS FANCIFUL EUROPEAN DRAWING REFLECTS THE CENTRALITY OF THE DEERSKIN TRADE TO NATIVE AMERICANS AND NEWCOMERS ALIKE.

interior. But by 1730 they had been violently destroyed or thrust aside by the pressures of increasing trade. The survivors helped to strengthen existing groups or build new ones, such as the Catawbans in Carolina and the Seminoles in Florida.

Further away from the coast, life changed less rapidly and less dramatically. Distanced somewhat from coastal epidemics and land claims, native residents of the Southern interior were still numerous and strong enough to be wooed as potential allies in imperial conflicts and courted as likely markets for European goods. They also proved able producers of an endless supply of furs and pelts drawn from the abundance of game — especially deer — in Southern forests.

Having set aside the Spanish dream of vast mineral wealth, the French and English now concentrated on the ever-expanding deerskin trade. Their colonial settlements had become less reliant upon Native American help for immediate survival and more closely tied to the Old

World through regular shipping. The market for Indian labor was drying up, as a vast transatlantic network poured enslaved Africans and European indentured servants into the Southern colonies at great profit to the suppliers. The colonists had learned Indian techniques for raising and smoking tobacco, so they could meet the growing European clamor for this American product. But Europe was also developing a taste for gloves, vests, aprons, and other items made from soft and durable deerskin, and only Southern Indians could meet the rising demand.

This new commerce offered clear advantages to the suppliers. As it rose in importance, it blunted colonial zeal for enslaving Indians and grabbing their land, since white traders depended on peaceful conditions to protect their livelihood. The deerskin trade also tapped a seemingly limitless resource, utilizing traditional Indian hunting and curing skills developed over centuries. At the same time, it brought useful trade goods into Indian communities, modifying and improving many daily tasks without revolutionizing them. Iron cooking kettles lasted longer than clay pots; metal hoes cleared gardens more easily than wooden digging sticks; glass beads for jewelry and embroidering were less expensive than traditional *peak* made from shells.

But the disadvantages of trade with the Europeans gradually emerged. At first, Indian burdeners were paid to carry heavy packs of skins hundreds of miles to navigable rivers or port towns. As horses became more common in the region, trains of pack animals took over the transportation, and colonial merchants absorbed the profits. Improved transportation also increased the number of European traders vying for commerce in the interior. Besides foreign customs and strange diseases, they brought with them trade goods that created long-term dependency. Guns for hunting and warfare, for instance, increased local military power and aided in procuring skins, but users became reliant upon Europeans to provide gunpowder and make repairs, while losing skill with their traditional weapons. Indians in Virginia "use nothing but firearms, which they purchased from the English for skins," observed William Byrd in 1728. "Bows and arrows are grown into disuse, except only amongst their boys."

Another trading staple, rum, also fostered crippling dependency. Long before Westerners began selling opium to the Chinese and cigarettes to the Third World, colonists realized that addictive substances could secure commerce. Slave-based sugar plantations in the Caribbean gave white entrepreneurs a ready source of molasses from which to distill cheap rum, and soon they were transporting casks of the demon drink into the backcountry.

Indians, unfamiliar with sugar-based alcohol, became eager buyers of the addictive brew. Southern Indian leaders looked on in dismay as traders used liquor to leverage their people into debt and keep them there. Some fought back. Indeed, Creek headmen organized what may have been the first prohibition movement in North America, sending scouts out to smash rum casks on the trail before pack trains could enter their territory and intoxicate their hunters.

Even the sheer success of the deerskin trade began to prove burdensome. At the beginning of the 18th century, England already imported an average of nearly 54,000 deerskins from the Carolina colonies each year. By the 1730s Charleston was shipping 80,000 deerskins annually, and by 1748 that figure had doubled. "There was a falling off in the early 1750s but another peak was reached in 1763," according to historian Verner Crane. "These exports, of course, represented a tremendous slaughter of deer, comparable to the great wastage, by a later generation, of the buffalo of the Great Plains."

As deer became more scarce, Indian hunters had to stay in the field longer, kill smaller animals, and carry their trophies over greater distances. In communities already diminished by disease, family members had less time for gathering strawberries, observing the Green Corn ceremony, or taking part in other activities that made village life meaningful and self-sufficient. By the 1760s, deerskins had even become an accepted medium of exchange

between Native Americans. "If one man kills another's horse, breaks his gun, or destroys anything belonging to him, by accident or intentionally when in liquor, the value in deerskins is ascertained before the Beloved Man," noted John Stuart, the English Superintendent of Indian Affairs. "If the aggressor has not the quantity of leather ready he either collects it amongst his relations or goes into the woods to hunt for it."

For years, Indians contained the harsh effects of the expanding deerskin trade through diplomacy. Traders from Virginia, the Carolinas, and the aggressive new colony of Georgia could be played off against one another. English agents could also be pitted against traders from Spanish Pensacola or French New Orleans to see who could offer the steadiest flow of high quality goods at the lowest prices. Since each European power wished to expand its markets, extend its territorial control, and secure its settlers from attack, skilled Indian negotiators were able to drive hard bargains. Many made annual trips to the coast to exchange gifts, benefiting

their people while reinforcing traditional ideas of collective and reciprocal gift exchange — an economic custom increasingly threatened by foreign notions of individual, capitalist acquisition.

Some leaders, like Old Brims of the Creeks, elevated diplomacy to a high art, pitting rival European

powers against one another much the way neutral Third World countries bargained between the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War. But as recent history demonstrates, when conflicts between superpowers recede, the bargaining strength of small nations is reduced. And in 1763, the balance of colonial power shifted dramatically in the South.

For generations, the French had built forts in the interior and recruited Indian allies in hopes of driving English settlers out of North America. But the greater numbers and superior trade goods of the English proved more powerful. In 1763, following the English victory in the Seven Years War, the French surrendered their claim to Canada and Louisiana. That same year, the Spanish ceded Florida to the British. After two centuries of colonial struggle, England suddenly claimed unrivaled control of eastern North America.

The implications were not lost on Indian leaders. Within months an Ottawa war chief named Pontiac had forged an alliance in the Northwest, hoping that warriors from the Huron, Chippewa, Iroquois, Shawnee, and other tribes could push the English back from the Ohio and Mississippi Valley before the French had fully vacated the region. Had Pontiac been able to sustain the initial successes of his dramatic uprising, he might have been joined by Southern Indians who also feared the withdrawal of England's European rivals. The "Indian War of Independence" failed, but it managed to frighten the young British king. In 1763, George III proclaimed that no colonist was to settle beyond the Appalachian divide, for fear of provoking Native Americans into a war that



would absorb the empire's money, endanger its subjects, and damage its trade.

DEBTS AND DEALS

The crown, however, could not enforce its royal proclamation. With the French threat removed, English settlers in coastal colonies were eager to move west beyond the mountains — and wealthy speculators were anxious to obtain title to frontier lands that could be sold to small farmers at a profit. Using debts created through the deerskin trade, plus the threat of force, syndicates of white investors with government connections negotiated a series of valuable land cessions.

Oconostota and other

Cherokee leaders conceded lands in treaties at Hard Labor (1768) and Lochaber (1770) in hopes of preventing further encroachments. The largest transfer occurred in 1773, when the Creeks ceded more than two million acres to Georgia to satisfy the de-

STUNG SERPENT

When the French began colonizing Louisiana in the 18th century, they encountered the highly stratified and centralized society of the Natchez Indians. The noble class was led by the family of the Great Sun, hereditary rulers thought to have divine ancestry. The Natchez still used the temple mounds of their Mississippian ancestors, and they continued a practice of sacrificial killing dating from Woodland times. When a member of the Great Sun lineage died, relatives and servants volunteered to be put to death to accompany the deceased.

A Frenchman named Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz lived among the Natchez for eight years before the war of 1729 destroyed their community and culture. He wrote in detail about everything, from language and religion to food and daily appearance. Le Page described the elaborate tattoos of the Natchez and commented:

"The youths here are as much taken up about dress, and as fond of vying with each other in finery as in other countries; they paint themselves with vermilion very often; they clip off the hair from the crown of the head, and there place a piece of swan's skin with the down on; to a few hairs that they leave on that part of their hair they fasten the finest white feathers that they can meet with; a part of their hair they weave into a cue, which hangs over their left ear."

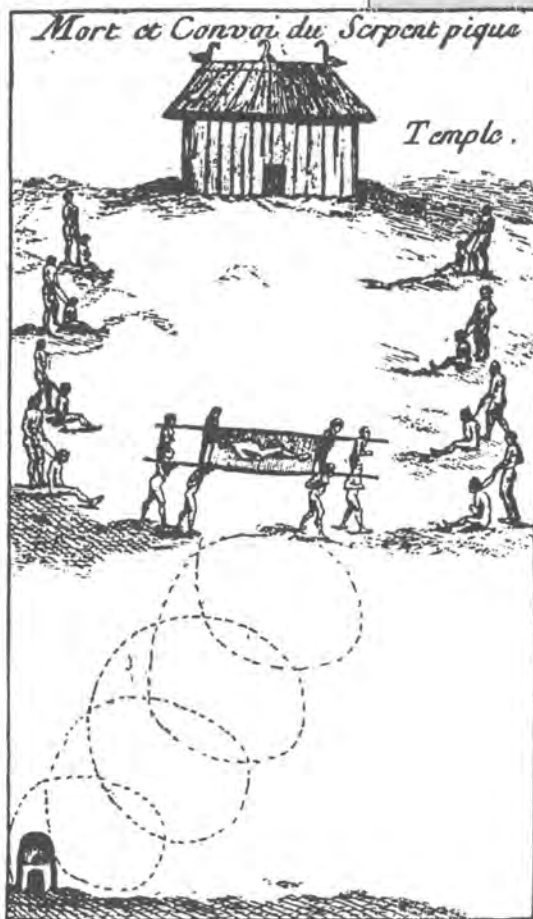
After his arrival in 1720, Le Page became well acquainted with Stung Serpent, sometimes called Tattooed Serpent — the elder leader of the Natchez and younger brother of the aged Great Sun. In his memoirs, Le Page relates how he "one day stopped the Stung Serpent" and sounded him out about his reactions to the French.

"We know not what to think of the French," the Indian replied. "Why, continued he, with an air of displeasure, did the French come into our country? We did not go to seek them: they asked for land of us, because their country was too little for all the men that were in it. We told them they might take land where they pleased, there was enough for them and for us; that it was good the same sun should enlighten us both, and that we would give them of our provisions, assist them to build, and to labour in their fields. We have done so; is this not true? What occasion then had we for Frenchmen? Before they came, did we not live better than we do, seeing we deprive ourselves of a part of our corn, our game, and fish, to give a part to them? In what respect, then, had we occasion for them? Was it for their guns? The bows and arrows which we used, were sufficient to make us live well. Was it for their white, blue, and red blankets? We can do well enough with buffalo skins, which are warmer; our women wrought feather-blankets for the winter, and mulberry-mantles for the summer; which were not so beautiful; but our women were more laborious and less vain than they are now. In fine, before the arrival of the French, we lived like men who can be satisfied with what they have; whereas at this day we are like slaves, who are not suffered to do as they please."

Not long after this encounter, Stung Serpent fell ill. Le Page recalls how his death was announced in the spring of 1725 "by the firing of two muskets, which were answered by the other villages, and immediately great cries and lamentations were heard on all sides.

"Before we went to our lodgings we entered the hut of the deceased, and found him on his bed of state, dressed in his finest cloaths, his face painted with vermilion, shod as if for a journey, with his feather-crown on his head. To his bed were fastened his arms, which consisted of a double-barreled gun, a pistol, a bow, a quiver full of arrows, and a tomahawk. Round his bed were placed all the calumets of peace he had received during his life, and on a pole, planted in the ground near it, hung a chain of forty-six rings of cane painted red, to express the number of enemies he had slain. All his domesticks were around him, and they presented victuals to him at the usual hours, as if he were alive. The company in his hut was composed of his favourite wife, of a second wife, which he kept in another village, and visited when his favourite was with child; of his chancellor, his physician, his chief domestic, his pipe-bearer, and some old women, who were all to be strangled at his interment. To

these victims a noble woman voluntarily joined herself, resolving, from her friendship to the Stung Serpent, to go and live with him in the country of spirits."



BURIAL OF THE STUNG SERPENT

mands of English traders for payment on previous debts. In 1774, Virginia speculators and frontiersmen used military power against the Shawnee leader Cornstalk and his allies at Point Pleasant to force the concession of lands in eastern Kentucky.

Many private investors simply ignored official warnings against the purchase of land beyond the Appalachian divide. At Sycamore Shoals on Tennessee's Watauga River in March 1775, Judge Richard Henderson and Daniel Boone of the Transylvania Company distributed six wagonloads of goods to the Cherokees. In return, Oconostota and several other elderly chiefs who had agreed to earlier land cessions signed over a huge tract of 17 million acres between the Kentucky and Cumberland Rivers, cutting off the Cherokees from their northern hunting grounds and the Ohio River.

As Henderson completed his illegal purchase, a group of younger warriors — defying the usual Indian protocol of bargaining by consensus and deferring to elders — walked out of the conference in protest. "You have bought a fair land, but there is a cloud hanging over it," their leader, Dragging Canoe, told the buyers. "You will find its settlement dark and bloody."

A month later the Battle of Lexington marked the opening of the Revolutionary War. Most Native Americans sided with the English, who desired trade, against the rebellious Americans, who wanted land. Dragging Canoe led a siege on the new Watauga settlement in July 1776, prompting a scorched-earth counter-offensive by the Americans in the fall. Their villages in ruin, most Cherokees felt obliged to accept neutrality, but Dragging Canoe led a band of holdouts

westward into the mountains around present-day Chattanooga. Joined by guerrilla fighters from other tribes, they became known as the "Chicamaugas" and carried on their resistance with supplies from British agents in Pensacola.

When the English finally lost the war, their Indian allies did not fare well at the peace table. The defeated British made no mention of Native Americans in the Treaty of Paris in 1783, ceding all the land north of Florida and east of the Mississippi to the new American confederation. Abandoned by the English, the Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chickasaws negotiated treaties with confederation officials at Hopewell, South Carolina in 1785, only to discover that the weak

central government could not protect them from aggressive states.

While Dragging Canoe and his Chicamaugas continued their armed resistance, others attempted to maneuver diplomatically. Alexander McGillivray, a mixed-blood Creek chief, tried to pull together a confederation of Southern Indians, with encouragement from Spanish officials at New Orleans and Chickasaw Bluffs, the site of present-day Memphis. But in 1790, George Washington's new government invited McGillivray to New York, showered him with money and honors, and successfully concluded a peace treaty with the Creeks.

Two years later Dragging Canoe died at the age of 60; his resistance movement outlived him by only a few years. But he and his generation had experienced more than one revolution. In the two decades since American independence from England, the native hunting grounds west of Cumberland Gap had been transformed by a flood of new immigrants. By 1790 there were suddenly more than 60,000 whites and 13,000 blacks living in what would soon become Tennessee and Kentucky.

The abrupt transformation in the west reflected far wider shifts in Southern population during the 18th century. At the start of the 1700s, Native Americans had been in the majority, numbering well over 130,000 people. But Indians were dying at a much faster rate than blacks and whites were arriving, reducing the population of the region to an all-time low. By 1776, the number of native Southerners had plummeted to fewer than 60,000.

After the Revolutionary War, the Indian population began to increase slightly. But the non-Indian population was growing

many times faster — and numbers translated into economic and cultural power. Throughout much of the region, English was becoming the dominant language, Protestant Christianity was emerging as the dominant religion, and, on paper at least, the newly adopted Constitution was the law of the land. "Indian Nations before the Whites," observed a Cherokee at Sycamore Shoals, "are like balls of snow before the sun."

By 1790 there were more than one million Europeans and half a million Africans living in the region — and the pressure for additional access to Indian land was continuing to build. For Native Americans, the withering Southern sun would burn ever more fiercely in the coming century.



From a drawing by Basil Hall

A GEORGIA SQUATTER AND A CREEK CHIEF. BY 1790 THERE WERE MORE THAN ONE MILLION EUROPEANS LIVING IN THE SOUTH.

17
18

92



Hold on to the Land

The town of Cowee in western North Carolina had been ravaged by disease and trampled by invading armies as the revolutionary era ended, but it remained in the hands of its Cherokee founders. A Shawnee Indian who had once been held prisoner there continued to admire the town after his release. One day, having returned to the area on a hunting trip, he spotted several Cherokees on a nearby hill and hailed them to ask, "Do you still own Cowee?"

"Yes, we own it yet," came back the reply.

"Well, it's the best town of the Cherokee," the Shawnee hunter shouted across the valley. "It's a good country; hold on to it."

In the 19th century the Cherokees and their neighbors would attempt, against formidable odds, to do just that. Though their population had been drastically reduced in the 300 years since Columbus, the Cherokees and other Southern Indians of the 1790s still inhabited a landscape which more closely resembled the terrain of the 1490s than that of the 1990s. The great virgin forests remained uncut except for small, scattered clearings; the swift rivers ran free, blocked only by fish weirs and beaver dams. Though George Washington and other investors were forcing slaves to dig an enormous canal that would drain Virginia's Dismal Swamp and open it to development, their scheme did not succeed, and most swamps remained untouched for generations.

But much was about to change. Soon the last Eastern buffalo would be killed and millions of passenger pigeons would be slaughtered — driven to extinction, along with the colorful Carolina parakeet. And soon, millions of tons of rich topsoil from small farms and large plantations would be washed off the Southern countryside forever. With its rolling hills, rapid rivers, and high seasonal rainfall, the region was especially vulnerable to erosion,

as the plowed fields of row-crop agriculture replaced natural groundcover. When huge warring armies foraged across the South in the 1860s, they only intensified the ecological disaster fostered by King Cotton.

The spread of intensive cotton farming depended on more than Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1793. The rising demand for cotton in the mechanized textile industries of England and New England played a crucial role. So did the willingness, on the part of those who had recently framed and ratified the U.S. Constitution, to retain and expand slavery. But raising cotton depleted the soil, and Southern planters could not capitalize on

the captive labor force and growing international demand without more acreage. And in the 1790s, the largest and best portion of the South remained in the hands of its original occupants.

END OF THE MIDDLE GROUND

For more than a century, the major Southern Indian nations had engaged successfully in diplomatic, economic, and cultural dialogue with Old World newcomers — occupying what Alabama-born scholar Joel Martin of Franklin and Marshall University calls a dangerous but viable "middle ground." In their reciprocal relations with Europeans and Africans, Indians had been hosts and visitors, allies and teachers, husbands and wives. They had shared foods, beliefs, words, remedies, tools, and beds in a tense but workable cross-cultural exchange.

In the half century after the creation of the United States, however, the exchange broke down. "Instead of engaging in mutual accommodation, white American settlers and planters determined to subordinate Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Muskogees, and other peoples of the Southern interior and to take and develop their lands," Professor Martin points out. "With the aid of complicit Indian individuals, they destroyed the Southern middle ground and established a new order characterized by political domination, economic dependency, and cultural imperialism."

The agents of the new order arrived in many guises. Some, such as William Panton of Pensacola, Florida, were aggressive merchants who led Indians into enormous trading debts and then turned a quick profit by arranging debt-for-land swaps with the U. S. government. Others, such as Reverend Samuel Worcester of Boston, preached a blend of Protestant Christianity and grammar school education. Still others, such as federal agent Benjamin Hawkins, were government employees who pressured Southern

nations to accept the “civilizing” influence of private property, foreign dress, written legal codes, and European farming practices.

Many Indians resisted these new ways. In 1811 the Shawnee leader Tecumseh traveled through the South, attempting to build a pan-Indian alliance to oppose U.S. encroachments in the West. Tecumseh condemned drinking and white customs, urging warriors to shun cotton textiles and return to wearing leather clothes.

“Accursed be the race that has seized on our country,” he told a council of leaders at Tukabatchi Town in Alabama. “Our fathers from their tombs reproach us as slaves and cowards. . . . Their tears drop from the wailing skies. Let the white race perish. They seize your land, they corrupt your women, they trample on the ashes of your dead! Back whence they came, upon a trail of blood, they must be driven.”

But when Tecumseh asked that “warriors of the Southern tribes unite with the warriors of the Lakes,” only the Red Stick (or Red Club) faction of the Creek nation followed his call. Taking advantage of American hostilities with the British in the War of 1812, the Red Sticks struck against frontier settlements, killing more than 500 people in their attack on Fort Mims north of Mobile, Alabama. General Andrew Jackson marched south with an army reinforced by Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw warriors. In March 1814 his force surrounded the Red Sticks on the Tallapoosa River, northeast of Montgomery. Over 800 Creeks died in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend.

The U.S. emerged victorious from its war with Great Britain, and Jackson went on to win the Battle of New Orleans, with aid from his Indian allies. But far from being rewarded for their loyalty, those who had sided with Jackson found their position in the South more precarious than ever. And those who had opposed him paid an even higher price. At the Treaty of Fort Jackson in 1814, the general blamed all the Creeks for the uprising of the Red Sticks, and as reparations the government claimed 22 million acres of Creek land in Georgia and Alabama.

Some of the defeated Red Sticks moved to Florida, where they joined 4,000 Seminoles and their runaway-slave allies who contin-

War and Pestilence!

HORRIBLE AND UNPARALLELED MASSACRE!



Women and Children

FALLING VICTIMS TO THE

INDIAN'S TOMAHAWK.

While many of our most populous cities have been visited by that dreadful disease, the Cholera, and to which thousands have fallen victims, the merciless Savages have been as fatally engaged in the work of death on the frontiers; where great numbers (including women and children) have fallen victims to the bloody tomahawk.

POPULAR WHITE TRACTS OF THE 1830s DEPICTED HELPLESS WHITE WOMEN AND CHILDREN ATTACKED BY INDIAN “SAVAGES” OR REBEL SLAVES.

protection, the Cherokees agreed to practice the ways of white Southerners. They acquired plows and livestock and accepted school teachers and missionaries. They drew up a Cherokee constitution, and a few even acquired African-American slaves, all in an effort to win continued acceptance and permanent rights in the changing South. In 1821, Sequoyah — a veteran of Jackson’s campaign against the Creeks, and the son of a Cherokee woman and a Virginia trader — devised an 86-symbol syllabary that allowed the words of the Cherokee language to be written. Immediately, according to one observer, this new tool began “spreading through the nation like fire among the leaves.” Hymns, prayers, laws, and sacred formulas were soon being written down and shared.

In an 1826 speech, Cherokee leader Elias Boudinot used his white education to invoke the phoenix of Egyptian mythology. “I can view my native country, rising from the ashes of her degradation, wearing her purified and beautiful garments, and taking her seat with the nations of the earth,” Boudinot told a Philadelphia audience. “If the General Government continues its protection and

ued to receive secret British aid. But in 1818, troubled by the alliance between blacks and Indians in Spanish-owned Florida, American politicians again unleashed Andrew Jackson. The general invaded Seminole land, claiming that his brutal attacks served to “chastise a savage foe” who had “combined with a lawless band of Negro brigands.” By 1821 the Spanish had ceded Florida to the United States, depriving the Seminoles of foreign support.

Taking up arms for or against the increasingly powerful U.S. government seemed a losing proposition, and many Native Americans looked instead towards white institutions — churches, schools, courts, and legislatures — as possible means for holding on to their country. “In former times we bought of the traders goods cheap; we could then clothe our women and children,” the Cherokee leader Bloody Fellow had explained to Secretary of War Henry Knox in 1792. “But now game is scarce and goods dear, we cannot live comfortably. . . . We must plant corn and raise cattle, and we desire you to assist us. . . . We rejoice in the prospect of our future welfare, under the protection of Congress.”

In exchange for federal

the American people assist them in their humble efforts, they will, they must, rise."

Two years later, Boudinot founded a bilingual newspaper called the *Phoenix* in the Cherokee capital of New Echota. On the masthead a phoenix — looking rather like an American eagle — rose through fire, while a banner above proclaimed "Protection." But that same year Andrew Jackson, drawing on his Tennessee roots and his reputation as an "Indian fighter," carried the Southern vote to win the presidency. Those who advocated removing Indians to the West were gaining ground.

REMOVAL TO THE WEST

Ever since Thomas Jefferson had purchased the vast Louisiana Territory from France in 1803, small groups of Indians had been exchanging Southern land for prop-

GHOSTS OF THE DEPARTED

"The removal of the Cherokee Indians from their life long homes in the year 1838 found me a young man in the prime of life and a Private . . . in the American Army," John Barnett of Tennessee wrote in his memoirs. "Being acquainted with many of the Indians and able to fluently speak their language, I was sent as interpreter into the Smokey Mountain Country." There, the ex-soldier recalled, I "witnessed the execution of the most brutal order in the history of American warfare. I saw the helpless Cherokees arrested and dragged from their homes, and driven at the bayonet point into the stockades. And in the chill of a drizzling rain on an October morning I saw them loaded like cattle or sheep into six hundred and forty-five wagons and headed for the West.

"The trail of the exiles was a trail of death. They had to sleep in the wagons and on the ground without fire. I have known as many as 22 of them to die in one night of pneumonia due to ill treatment, cold and exposure. Among this number was the beautiful Christian wife of Chief John Ross. This noble hearted woman died a martyr to childhood, giving her only blanket for the protection of a sick child. She rode thinly clad through a blinding sleet and snow storm, developed pneumonia and died in the still hours of a bleak winter night. . . .

"The long painful journey to the west ended March 26, 1839, with four thousand silent graves reaching from the foothills of the Smokey Mountains to what is known as the Indian Territory in the West. And the covetousness on the part of the white race was the cause of all that the Cherokees had to suffer."

"My people are scattered and gone," observed Chief Cobb of the Choctaw. "When I shout, I hear my voice in the depths of the forest, but no answering voice comes back to me — all is silent around me." Designated as "colonel" for his services with the army, Cobb had opposed the 1830 removal treaty at Dancing Rabbit Creek in Mississippi. Since the pact offered allotments of land to all who chose to stay, he remained near the ancestral mound of Nanih Waiya with 4,000 or 5,000 others. Most Choctaws — roughly 18,000 — emigrated beyond the Mississippi to a new homeland.

"Brother, when you were young, we were strong; we fought by your side; but our arms are now broken," Chief Cobb told Captain J. J. McRea at a Council in 1843. "You have grown large. My people have become small." Speaking for the Choctaws who remained in Mississippi, Cobb addressed McRea and the Council:

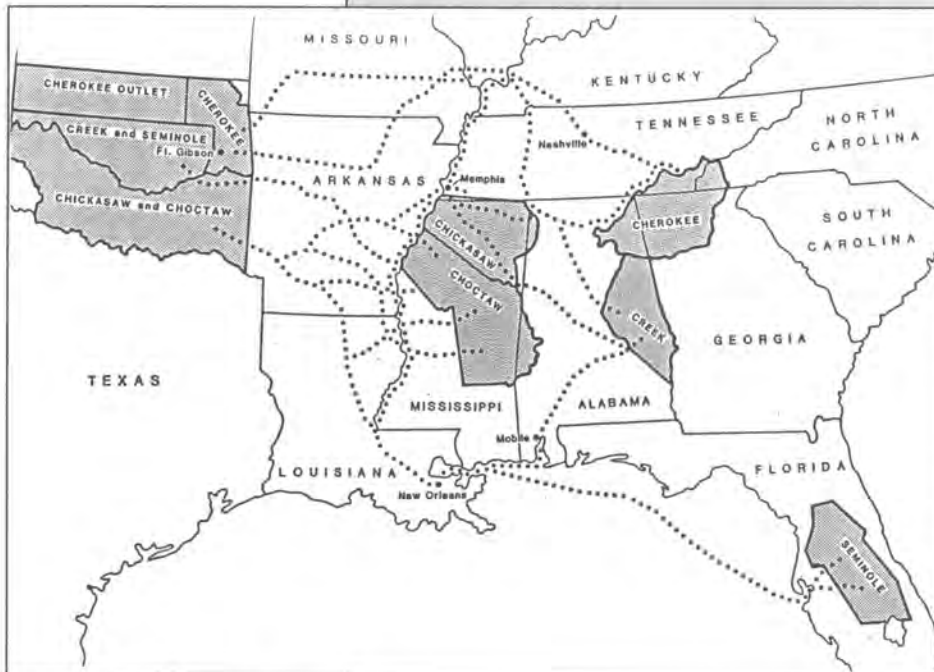
"Brother: My voice is weak; you can scarcely hear me; it is not the shout of a warrior but the wail of an infant. I have lost it in mourning over the misfortunes of my people. These are their graves, and in those aged pines you hear the ghosts of the departed. Their ashes are here, and

we have been left to protect them. Our warriors are nearly all gone to the far country west; but here are our dead. Shall we go too, and give their bones to the wolves?

"Brother: Our hearts are full. Twelve winters ago our chiefs sold our country. Every warrior that you see here was opposed to the treaty. If the dead could have counted, it could never have been made, but alas! Though they stood around, they could not be seen or heard. Their tears came in the raindrops, and their voices in the wailing wind, but the pale faces knew it not, and our land was taken away.

"When you took our country, you promised us land. There is your promise in the book. Twelve times have the trees dropped their leaves, and yet we have received no land. Our houses have been taken from us. The white man's plough turns up the bones of our fathers. We dare not kindle our fires; and yet you said we might remain and you would give us land."

Chief Cobb's plea fell on deaf ears. Several years later, another 3,800 Choctaws departed to join their relations in Oklahoma. There, near present-day Tuskahoma, their kinfolk had already erected a log council house with the sacred name of Nanih Waiya.



ROUTES USED TO REMOVE SOUTHERN INDIANS TO THE WEST, FROM THE ATLAS OF AMERICAN INDIAN AFFAIRS.

erty west of the Mississippi. But despite the increased violence and racism they encountered along the East Coast, most Indians resisted the idea of voluntary removal. They rejected the arguments of American courts that the British had earned title to the land by right of "discovery," and that the Americans had inherited that title in the Revolution. After all, Indians were the original "possessors . . . of the whole island," a group of Creek headmen declared in 1824. "No title can be equal to ours."

The following year, Secretary of War John Calhoun urged the government to limit Western settlement, much the way George III had issued his "Proclamation Line" prohibiting expansion beyond the Appalachian Divide in 1763. The new "Indian Line" would run due south from the headwaters of the Mississippi through Missouri and Arkansas. Indians would be encouraged to take up claims west of the line, where American settlement would be prohibited.

Eager to convert Indian lands into cotton fields, Southern states supported the "Indian Line." When plans for the boundary remained stalled in 1828, Georgia tried to force the government's hand. In six months, the state declared, all Indians in Georgia would become subject to state laws, regardless of any federal treaties. "The result," writes scholar Alice Kehoe, "was cleavage of the voting populace and its representatives into a Southern bloc championing states rights, slavery, and Indian removal, and a Northern bloc favoring stronger federal government, emancipation of slaves, and the Indians' right to their ancestral lands."

The pressure for removal intensified in 1829, when a white prospector discovered gold on Cherokee lands in the mountains of north Georgia. The state legislature passed a law prohibiting Cherokees from mining gold on their own land, and Georgia courts refused to let Indians file charges when 3,000 gold seekers invaded their property, breaking fences and stealing livestock.

Angry at Northern missionaries, Georgia also required whites teaching among the Cherokees to obtain a permit and take an oath of allegiance to the state. The Georgia Guard arrested offenders, and local judges put them in jail. But several, including Samuel Worcester, appealed to the federal courts for relief. When the Supreme Court ruled on *Worcester v. Georgia* in 1832, Chief Justice John Marshall declared Georgia's law null and void in the face of federal law and ordered the missionaries released.

"It is glorious news," Cherokee leader Elias Boudinot wrote to his brother Stand Watie when he heard the decision. "The question is forever settled as to who is right and who is wrong." But Georgia refused to release Worcester for nearly a year, and Jackson made no attempt to use his power as chief executive to gain his freedom. "John Marshall has made his decision," the President is said to have remarked. "Now let him enforce it."

The president preferred to use his power to aid the cause of



THE MASTHEAD OF THE *CHEROKEE PHOENIX*.

Southern landseekers. In 1830 he signed the Indian Removal Act, empowering the federal government to exchange districts in the West for valuable Indian lands within existing states. Congress allocated \$500,000 to reimburse Indians for improvements on their land, to cover their travel costs to the West, and to offset expenses during their first year in the new districts. But critics feared the money would be used for bribes, since the act did not *oblige* Indians to move.

In reality, it didn't seem to matter whether Indians opted

to stay or go. When more than 6,000 Choctaws applied for the right to remain in Mississippi, the government-appointed agent simply ignored most requests. But when the Indians accepted a treaty that endorsed removal in exchange for large reparations, Jackson convinced Congress to reject the pact on the grounds that the generous terms would set an expensive precedent. Federal negotiators then returned to the bargaining table at Dancing Rabbit Creek, reminding the Choctaws that they would face harsh Mississippi laws and repressive federal power if they refused to relocate.

The president got his way. "Our doom is sealed," Chief David Folsom lamented. "There is no other course for us but to turn our faces to our new homes toward the setting sun." By 1833, more than 18,000 Choctaws had been deported to the west.

TRAIL OF TEARS

The Chickasaws of northern Mississippi, like their neighbors to the south and east, had been losing territory piece by piece. In 1818, they had signed a treaty giving up their hunting grounds in Kentucky and Tennessee. In 1832, pressured by the Mississippi legislature, they agreed reluctantly to vacate their Mississippi lands once they located an acceptable home in the West. Five years later, emissaries to the new Indian Territory decided it would be best to settle with the Choctaws west of Arkansas. Chickasaw families and their African-American slaves began moving in the spring of 1837, and relocation proceeded steadily, despite an outbreak of cholera.

The much larger Cherokee nation was more deeply divided over the prospect of removal to the West. Georgia confiscated prime Cherokee lands to auction off in a lottery, and in 1834 the state militia smashed the printing equipment of the *Cherokee Phoenix*. The following year, several thousand mixed-blood Indians led by the wealthy Major Ridge, speaker of the Cherokee National Council, signed a treaty at New Echota and promised to migrate west within two years in exchange for \$5 million. But 15,000 Cherokees, led by Principal Chief John Ross, signed a petition rejecting the action of the Treaty Party and vowed defiantly to remain.

Early in 1838 the government dispatched soldiers to enforce

the New Echota Treaty. The troops rounded up entire families, looted and burned their homes, and conducted a forced march to the West that became known as the Trail of Tears. All told, roughly one-fourth of the 16,000 to 18,000 exiles died from violence, hunger, sickness, and exposure.

In the West, the bitterness that had divided the nation would live on for decades among survivors of the Trail of Tears. In the East, hundreds of Cherokees eluded the federal dragnet by hiding in the mountains. Remaining in their beloved region, they consolidated their holdings in the Qualla Boundary of western North Carolina and became known as the Eastern Cherokees.

Further south, the Creek nation was also divided by the threat of removal — and suffered heavily during eviction. After Chief William McIntosh betrayed the tribe by accepting a bribe to sign the Treaty of Indian Springs in 1825, angry Creek warriors set fire to his home and shot him to death. When another treaty was signed in 1832 under pressure from the Alabama legislature, most Creeks opted to accept allotments of private land rather than depart for the West.

But by 1836, constant harassment by white settlers led to organized Creek resistance, providing an excuse for federal troops to enforce removal. Men who had joined the so-called “Creek Rebellion” in self-defense were marched west to Indian Territory in chains during the dead of winter. One contingent of 300 drowned in the Mississippi when a leaky riverboat capsized. Within a year, 18,500 Creeks had been deported. More than 3,500 — many of them children — died on the way west.

The Seminoles in Florida also faced deportation, but they staged a fierce and lengthy resistance. An 1823 treaty limited them to the swampy interior north and east of Tampa Bay. Nine years later, the Treaty of Payne’s Landing obligated them to move west by 1835. But one faction, led by Osceola, chose to fight to “the last drop of Seminole blood” rather than accept removal. “The white man says I shall go,” Osceola declared, “but I have a rifle, and I have some powder and some lead. I say we must not leave our homes and lands.”

Even the deceitful capture of Osceola under a flag of truce, and his premature death in a South Carolina prison in 1838, could not end the Second Seminole War. When the government finally called off the conflict in 1842, federal officials had spent \$20 million and had lost 1,500 men in order to transport 3,000 Seminoles to the West — a cost of \$66,000 and five soldiers for every 10 men, women, and children removed. The few hundred Seminoles who remained moved to the swampland of south Florida and proudly proclaimed themselves “the unconquered people.”

SLAVERY AND TIED MULES

Whether Indians resisted successfully or suffered removal, their lives were shaped in large part by the demands of Southern planters. “Native Americans in the South cannot be understood apart from the plantation regime and its aftermath,” notes historian Theda Perdue of the University of Kentucky. “Southern Indians have had to contend with a society whose economy was based on the cultivation of crops which could produce enormous profits and on the exploitation of nonwhite labor. They also have had to contend with a people obsessed with the issue of race.”

After 1830, Southern planters responded to abolitionist argu-

ments against black slavery with ever more strident assertions of white superiority, making it difficult for free non-white Southerners to defend their rights. In state after state, Indian residents lost the right to vote, to serve on juries, to bear arms, or to marry across racial lines.

Beyond such civil rights restrictions lay a broader menace: Free Indians, like free African-Americans, could be threatened with exposure to an unjust court system. Whites who coveted Indian land, for example, regularly allowed livestock to stray onto the desired property, and then threatened to bring a case for theft when the owner tied up their animal. This “tied mule” tactic could force Indians, fearful of the decision of a white court, to surrender land so that charges would be dropped.

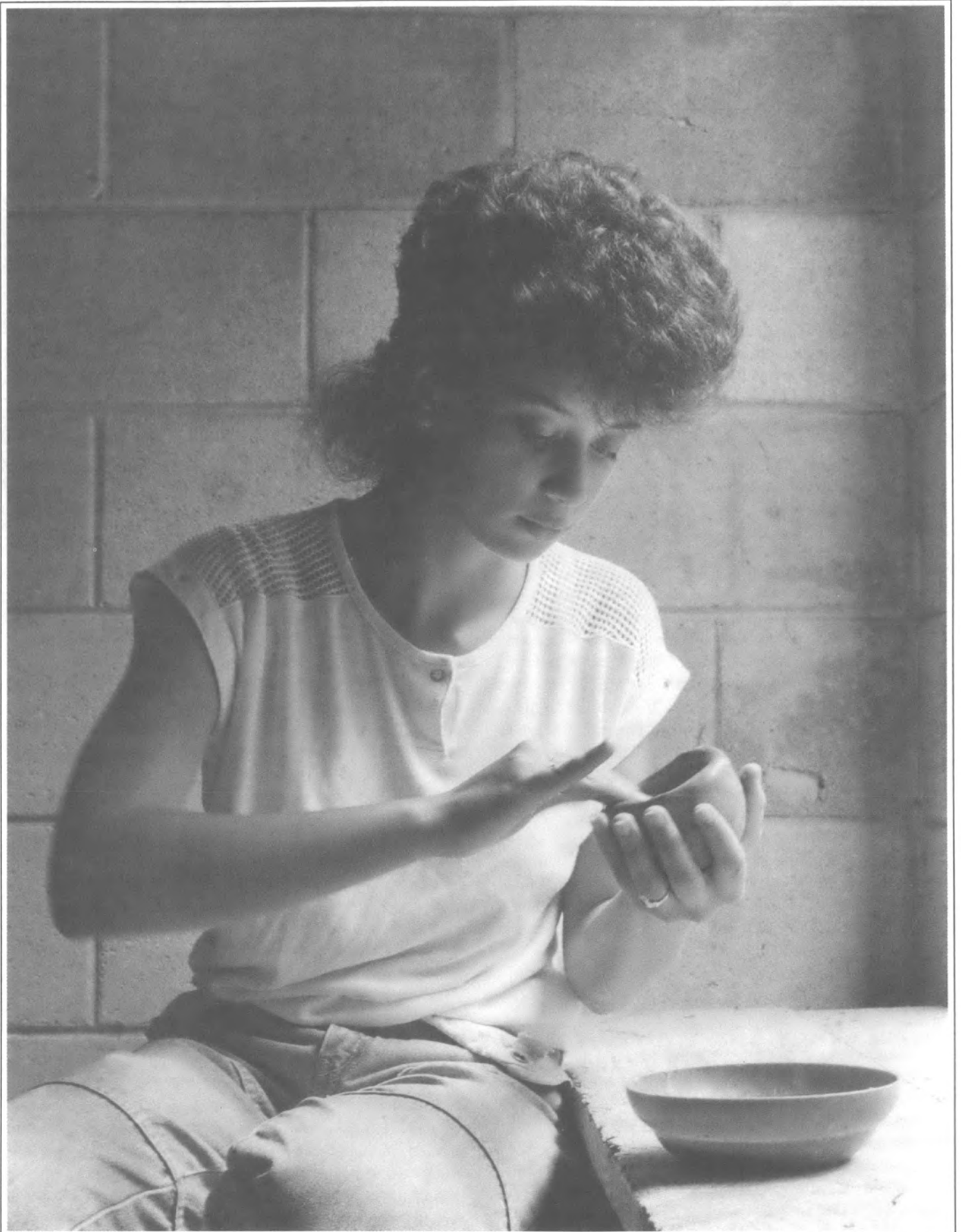
The outbreak of the Civil War increased racial pressures on Indians. Some — including wealthy slaveowners of mixed-blood ancestry and their followers — promptly joined the planter cause. But most resented Confederate efforts to draft free Native Americans into labor camps alongside slaves, and many hid in the mountains and swamps to avoid service. In Robeson County, North Carolina, the ten sons of Allen Lowrie, a Tuscarora descendent, avoided conscription by entering the swamps of the Lumber River and raiding plantations for food. One son, Henry Berry Lowrie, led a guerrilla band that continued to battle the conservative Home Guard and protect the interests of local Indians well into the era of Reconstruction.

After federal troops withdrew from the South in the 1880s, the increased persecution of black Southerners prompted many Indian groups with diverse ancestry to reaffirm their Indian identity. The Catawbas of South Carolina continued their traditional pottery-making, while also accepting missionaries from the Mormon Church. In North Carolina, the Indians of Robeson County were denied admission to white schools and refused to attend black schools. To win their political support, Democratic lawmakers passed an act confirming their Indian status and providing them with separate, Indian-run schools.

As the 1880s drew to a close, the U.S. Army was concluding a generation of warfare against Indians in the West with a concerted campaign against the Apaches and their legendary leader, Geronimo. After evading 5,000 armed troops, Geronimo was captured through deceit, as Osceola had been. In 1886 he and 500 other Apaches were deported from Arizona to Florida — a reverse Trail of Tears.

New train lines were opening Florida to visitors, and hotel operators and railroad interests lobbied hard for access to the Apache prisoners at St. Augustine and Pensacola. Eager visitors came on special excursions — sometimes more than 400 per day — to gawk at Geronimo and Naiche, the son of Cochise. “I had good luck today. . . . Saw Geronimo,” wrote one tourist. “He is a terrible old villain, yet he seemed quiet enough.”

In the century to come, the descendents of those who had so violently displaced Geronimo and other Native Americans would come to view them as intriguing objects of study, noble emblems of nature, and profitable sources of tourism. Nevertheless, Indians would remain a significant and diverse presence in the 20th century — even in the South, where so many had been stripped of their land and systematically expelled. The Indian people, dismissed as a “vanishing race” in the 19th century, would rise like the Cherokee phoenix in the years ahead.



INDIAN TRADITIONS LIKE POTTERY-MAKING CONTINUE TO PROVIDE AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF IDENTITY AND INCOME FOR A NEW GENERATION OF NATIVE SOUTHERNERS.



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Just to Be Recognized

As the 1880s drew to a close, “Buffalo Bill” Cody was touring America and Europe with a contingent of handsomely dressed Plains Indians. One of his biggest crowdpleasers was the elderly Sioux leader Sitting Bull, now a featured attraction in a “Wild West” show.

The Apache prisoner Geronimo, relocated from Florida to Oklahoma, suffered a similar fate. The aging leader was put on display at the 1898 Trans-Mississippi Exposition in Omaha, the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, and the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis. Geronimo sold his hand-made bows and arrows, posed for pictures, and pleaded unsuccessfully with authorities to allow him and his family to return to their beloved Arizona.

The Indian, it seemed, had become a symbol of the national heritage, a vanishing emblem of the heroic past to be idealized, honored, and remembered. By the 1890s, the American frontier had virtually disappeared. The four centuries of warfare that Native Americans had conducted to protect their homelands was coming to an end. In November 1890, Sitting Bull was killed during federal attempts to suppress the Ghost Dance religion in Dakota Territory. A month later, the U.S. Seventh Cavalry surrounded several hundred Indians at Wounded Knee Creek and raked the encampment with their rapid-firing Hotchkiss guns, killing 150.

For Indians in the South and elsewhere, the Massacre at Wounded Knee represented the close of one era and the beginning of another. The 20th century would be marked by continuing struggles over physical resources and constitutional rights — and

by new struggles over the image of Indians being projected by the modern media.

THE INDIAN IMAGE

In 1892, despite the ravages of removal, the South was still home to a diversity of Indian cultures. Those who remained had mingled for centuries with black and white Southerners, at times preserving elements of their own heritage, at times adopting the ways of the surrounding society. The Houmas of Louisiana, for example, continued to live in isolation along remote bayous. But many other Indians lived in cities, traveled widely, and had more non-Indian than Indian relatives.

The range of diversity was striking. In 1911, Americans were startled by the news that a Berkeley anthropologist had encountered an Indian named Ishi, the sole survivor of a Stone Age tribe in northern California. The following year, Jim Thorpe — a descendant of the Fox chief Black Hawk — won the Olympic decathlon and pentathlon in Stockholm.

But politicians and publicists were gradually reducing this remarkable variety to a single, confining stereotype. A generation of photographers was helping to shape an ethnic image of the noble Indian in a feathered headdress; Edward Curtis took thousands of portraits of solemn Indians in traditional dress. Cartoonists contributed as well, sketching caricatures of Native Americans wearing warbonnets and carrying tomahawks.

Rodman Wanamaker, a department store executive, captured the mood of the nation by suggesting a huge bronze statue at the entrance to New York Harbor to honor the passing of the Indian. The 165-foot figure of a young Indian, one hand raised in a sign of peace, would stand opposite the Statue of Liberty, rising 15 feet higher than the symbol of European immigration.

On George Washington’s Birthday in 1913, Wanamaker and other dignitaries gathered at Staten Island for a groundbreaking ceremony on land donated by Congress. Surrounded by 32 Indian chiefs transported to New York for the event, President William Howard Taft dug up the first shovelful of dirt and proclaimed that the proposed statue “tells the story of the march of empire and the progress of Christian civilization to the uttermost limits.”

The statue never materialized, but the U.S. Mint used the occasion to release its new Indian Head nickel. Iron Tail, an Oglala Sioux described as “America’s Representative Indian



COMIC BOOKS LIKE *THE LONE RANGER* CREATED CRUDE "WESTERN" STEREOTYPES OF INDIANS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE WHITE HERO.

Chief," served as one of several models for the stoic image, and his promoters later advertised him as "The Indian Chief That Made the Nickel Famous." As if to link two endangered species, the Mint put a bison on the other side of the coin.

Many Americans who had never seen an actual Indian were spending their nickels attending early "Westerns" at the picture show. "With the coming of movies, the Indian was ensnared, then filmically embalmed, by a coincidence of history," observes Raymond Stedman in his book *Shadows of the Indian*. Memories of the Plains Wars in the West remained fresh in the public mind as the motion picture industry assumed a commanding place in popular culture.

In 1908 moviegoers saw D. W. Griffith's *The Redman and the Child*. Other directors followed with *On the Warpath* in 1909, *The Indian Raiders* and *Saved from the Redmen* in 1910, *The Flaming Arrows* and *Incendiary Indians* in 1911. That same year, representatives from four Western tribes traveled to Washington to protest the treatment of Indians in the popular new industry, but they were too late. Powerful media stereotypes regarding "good Indians" and "bad Indians" were already firmly in place.

LONG LANCE

In the South, these powerful images intersected with the reality of a world deeply divided by racial antagonism and misunderstanding. Consider the unusual case of Sylvester Long. He had been born in North Carolina in 1890, just days after the death of Sitting Bull and before the Massacre at Wounded Knee. His parents were former slaves whose ancestors apparently included white and black Southerners as well as Cherokee Indians.

Living in a poor section of Winston-Salem, the Long family attended a white church until they were turned away and sent to worship with the African-Americans. While his father worked as a janitor at a white school, young Sylvester would slip into the library and read about Indians, trying to connect the romantic stories in the popular press with the narrow limitations of his own life. He visited the small Wild West shows that passed through North Carolina, and he learned a few words of Cherokee.

Adopting the name Long Lance, Sylvester gained admission to Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Carlisle was the best known of the boarding schools established by zealous reformers, who believed they could assist Native Americans by stripping Indian children of their past identity and forcing them to learn the ways of white culture. For Long Lance, Carlisle provided an opportunity to live with "real" Indians from the West and to see the complexities of their interaction with mainstream society.

Sylvester proved a fast learner. He ran races against his schoolmate, Jim Thorpe, and he watched as authorities cut the long hair of Geronimo's son Robert and challenged his pride in being an Apache. In 1915, after a stint as the token Indian at a white military academy, Long Lance obtained an appointment to West Point from President Woodrow Wilson. Afraid that his mixed ancestry would be discovered and eager to enlist in the First World War, the bright student purposely failed his entrance exam and headed for Canada. The Canadians had already entered the war and were accepting American recruits. Soon Sergeant Long Lance was training in England.

Ironically, African-Americans and Indians like Long Lance who faced discrimination at home were among the most eager to enter the Great War. The service provided an escape from poverty and second-class status, and it offered a way to prove patriotism and skill to a doubting white public. As the U.S. entered the war in 1918, the percentage of Indians enlisting far exceeded that of whites.

Predictably, the press showed special fascination for Native Americans willing to fight the Germans. "Many of the Indians who are on the front or in training camps," asserted the *Baltimore Star*, "are sons of famous chiefs who so bravely and hopelessly opposed the march of civilization." The *New York Evening World* proclaimed, "The war whoop of the greatest natural fighter the world has ever known — the American Indian — will be shrilled over the red fields of France. With a machine gun instead of a tomahawk, with new weapons but the old craft and courage ... the red tribes are on the warpath for the Germans."

One "new weapon" that the Army exploited was the language of Indian troops. The 142nd Infantry used Choctaw-speaking soldiers

to operate field telephones and confuse German intelligence. But if Indians “carried into battle the glorious bravery of their race, their indifference to physical injury and stoicism in moments of peril,” as one newspaper claimed, their personal valor did not protect them from shrapnel and mustard gas. Often given the most dangerous assignments, five percent of all Indian servicemen died in action — five times the rate for American forces as a whole. Many more died of influenza as the troops were returning home.

Long Lance escaped with only shrapnel wounds, but he refused to return to the South, where whites were lynching blacks at a rate of more than 100 a year. His brother Walter had accepted a black identity and settled in Winston-Salem, but Sylvester headed west, living among the Blackfeet in Canada and emerging as a spokesman for Native Americans.

To emphasize the legitimacy of his Indian heritage, Long Lance began presenting a false nativity: “I was born, child of the teepee, during a blizzard on the great plains of Montana.” Handsome and articulate, he gained attention

as an Indian actor before a newspaper publicized his mixed ancestry and brought an end to his career. It would not be the last time a Southerner would gain popular recognition by projecting an Indian identity (see sidebar, below).

WHO WAS LITTLE TREE?

In 1986, the University of New Mexico Press reissued a 10-year-old book by Forrest Carter entitled *The Education of Little Tree*. The heartwarming autobiography — dedicated to the Cherokees — tells how an orphan boy learns from his Indian grandparents to respect the beauty of nature and the diversity and self-reliance of human beings. Suited to the environmental concerns and anti-government beliefs of the late '80s, the tale of the Tennessee mountains quickly gained a wide following.

UNM Press found it had an all-time moneymaker on its hands, with 600,000 copies in print and another 200,000 on order. In 1991, the story reached the top of the *New York Times* Bestseller List for Non-Fiction. Hollywood wanted the film rights.

Then a Southern historian made a startling discovery about the true identity of “Little Tree.” “This guru of new-age environmentalists was actually a gun-toting racist,” announced Dan Carter, professor of history at Emory University. While working on a biography of George Wallace, the segregationist governor of Alabama, the professor had discovered that Forrest Carter was actually Asa “Ace” Carter, a bombastic right-wing orator and speech writer in the fight against desegregation.

Could it be? The book’s original editor, Eleanor Friede, sent a hasty fax to the author’s widow, India Carter: “I think I deserve to know how this all came about.” Back came a faxed reply: “I thought you knew — it just did not occur to me that you didn’t know.”

Friede told the press the story had surfaced in 1976 when the book first appeared, but had died quickly. “When I asked Forrest Carter about it then,” she said, “he told me it was mistaken identity and I believed him.” Elizabeth Hadas, the director of UNM Press, issued a press release conceding that the author “was indeed Asa Carter and that he was not an orphan, so we will remove the label ‘a true story’ from the book’s jacket.”

Journalists probing the author’s true identity found that Carter was more than a minor contributor to Wallace’s oratory in the heated days of 1963. Speaking from the capitol steps in Montgomery — where Jefferson Davis had taken the oath of office to lead the Confederacy — the new governor had delivered a fiery inaugural address crafted by Carter: “Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!” When Wallace went to Tuscaloosa to prevent integration by “standing in the schoolhouse door,” Carter again drafted the script.

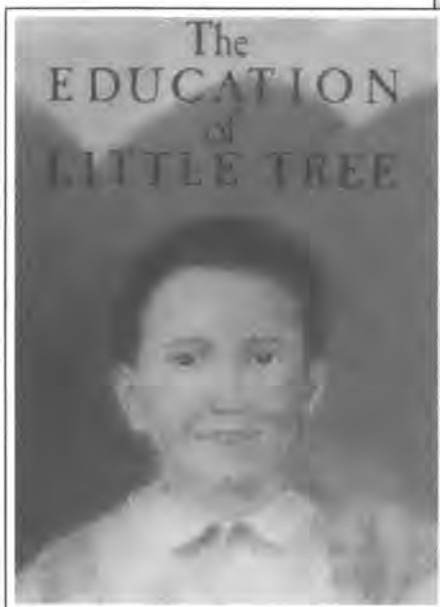
In the February issue of *Texas Monthly*, Dana Rubin reports that Asa Carter spun so far to the right in his political beliefs that even George Wallace backed away from him. During the 1950s Carter had been a hard-drinking racist, ranting on radio and in print about the threats posed to the South by “Jews, Niggers, and Communists.” By the early 1970s, embittered by the success of the civil rights movement, he renounced politics, moved to Texas, and began writing fiction under his son’s name, Forrest — as in Nathan Bedford Forrest, founder of the Ku Klux Klan.

Carter died in 1979, so readers will never know exactly why he wrote the book. Some speculate that the tale reflects an idealized version of his relation to his own grandfather in north Alabama. Others see the story as an effort by Carter to atone for his hate-filled former life. Those who knew him suggest that he was baiting the liberal elite. According to one Alabama friend, Carter’s attitude was: “I’ll show you who’s so damn smart.”

Whatever his motives, Carter is by no means the first person to play on an assumed Indian identity. The long tradition is best represented by Grey Owl, an Englishman who, as a popular author and lecturer in the 1930s, claimed to have been raised by an Apache mother in the Southwest. For five centuries, non-Indian writers and readers have been drawn to a mystical ideal of Indians as extensions of their better selves.

But Carter’s strange career reminds us of the flip side as well. Generations of white Southerners, proud to claim mythical descent from Pocahontas and other Indians, could also exude hostility toward African-Americans and Jews. In this sense Carter epitomized his complex Southern roots — even if, as his brother Doug now claims, there was no Indian heritage in the family.

Do recent revelations detract from the appeal of *Little Tree*? Readers will have to decide for themselves. As for the *New York Times*, the editors simply moved the book from non-fiction to fiction on their bestseller list.



UNEARTHING THE PAST

While Hollywood directors were creating one kind of Native American, university scholars and museum curators were creating another. The turn of the century brought the flowering of natural history museums in major American cities and the creation of anthropology departments on university campuses. In the wake of Darwin, modern science would be pressed into use to discover and explain the ancient origins and current differences among human beings.

The market for Indian artifacts rivaled that for dinosaur bones, and museums paid pot hunters to scour the landscape. "I shall make a trip through western North Carolina this spring," A. J. Osborne announced in a circular, "at which time I purpose buying all 'INDIAN RELICS' which you may have collected."

Just as they had adjusted to white demands for deerskins in previous centuries, Southern Indians now adapted to the growing pressure for relics. Enterprising Catawbans carved soapstone imitations of the scarce items that Osborne desired, and the relic hunter delivered some of their replicas to the Valentine Museum in Richmond, Virginia, where he presented them as originals.

As the competition for artifacts continued, it gave rise to a subculture of amateur relic diggers and grave looters. Federal lawmakers were slow to protect Indian burial sites. The Antiquities Act of 1906 safeguarded artifacts on federal land, but contained no felony provision. In 1979, Congress finally passed the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, making it a federal crime to vandalize historic sites or transport artifacts across state lines.

Undaunted by the new law, pot hunters paid \$10,000 to the owner of the Slack Farm in Uniontown, Kentucky for the chance to pillage more than 600 Indian graves dating from Mississippian times. The for-profit destruction prompted Congress to enact a tougher law protecting Native American graves in 1990.

Scholars who excavate gravesites have also been pressured to be more respectful of Indian remains. "Archaeologists used to gather up all the bones they could find," says anthropologist Stephen Davis of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "But now we are careful about what materials we take to analyze, and we work with the State Indian Commission." When Davis and his colleagues unearthed the 17th-century Indian town of Occaneechi on the Eno River near Hillsborough, the discovery encouraged several local residents to look into their Eno-Occaneechi ancestry.

From their earliest days, anthropologists have supplemented material evidence with oral traditions. At the beginning of the century, scholars like Frank Speck and John Swanton devoted their lives to recording diverse details of traditional Indian life in the South. James Mooney lived with the Cherokees and compiled extensive notes on their myths and sacred formulas. Mooney's chief informant was a man named Swimmer who had been born in 1835, shortly before removal. He spoke no English, and "his mind was a storehouse of Indian tradition." When Swimmer died in 1899, Mooney wrote: "Peace to his ashes and sorrow for his going, for with him perished half the tradition of his people."



AFTER IRON TAIL APPEARED ON THE "INDIAN-HEAD NICKEL," WHITE TOURISTS EXPECTED SOUTHERN INDIANS TO DON WESTERN GARB.

THE TOURIST TRADE

During the 1920s and '30s, interest in Indian arts and crafts spread beyond museums to encompass tourists, designers, and collectors of all kinds. Assistant Chief Fred Sanders of the Catawba Nation recalls that his grandmother supported the family during the Great Depression by selling pottery outside the gate of Winthrop College in South Carolina.

Strengthened by the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, many Southern Indian groups consolidated their present by drawing on their past. The Mikasuki Seminoles of southern Florida, forced to modify their subsistence life when drainage began on the Florida Everglades in 1906, exploited the increasing tourist trade to nearby Miami. With the opening of Great Smoky Mountain National Park in western North Carolina, the Cherokees also found themselves in a position to sell traditional goods to a seasonal flow of tourists.

But tourism has proved a mixed blessing to the Cherokees and other Indians, much as the deerskin trade had for their 18th-century ancestors. Although the steady flow of visitors has provided a much-needed market for traditional arts and crafts, it has also reinforced patronizing stereotypes of what constitutes a proper Indian. The Cherokees have discovered, for instance, that many tourists want to be photographed beside an Indian wearing the warbonnet headdress and buckskin costume of the Plains warriors they have seen in the movies.

The Mississippi Band of Choctaws has also relied on tourism to survive, but it has provided a meager existence. Having staved off efforts to move them to Oklahoma at the start of the century, the Choctaws gained official recognition of their Mississippi territory in 1918. Enduring depression agriculture and segregated education, they watched as their Neshoba County was torn apart by the violence used against the civil rights movement in the early 1960s. In 1964 several Choctaws found the charred remains of the car in which three civil rights workers — Schwerner, Goodman, and Cheney — had been murdered by Klansmen. In 1966 the average Mississippi Choctaw family had a yearly income below \$1,000.

Since then, however, conditions have improved. In 1968 the Choctaws joined with the other federally recognized Indians of the region — the Cherokees and Seminoles — to organize the United Southeastern Tribes of American Indians. Government grants and new businesses — such as Choctaw Electronics, which makes speaker components for Chrysler cars — have brought money into the reservation. Conditions remain poor; one in every eight Choctaw families still made less than \$3,000 in 1986. But the number of Choctaw high school graduates has more than tripled in the past 15 years. The Choctaw language is currently being taught in three reservation schools, and the ancient Choctaw stickball game is being played in an intramural league.

Creek rejuvenation has been equally steady, thanks in part to the efforts of Calvin McGhee, a descendant of the Creek guide who earned a large tract of land as his reward for assisting Andrew Jackson. In the late 1940s, McGhee and others sued their local school board for a decent education for their children. The legal battle

resulted in a judgment by the Indian Claims Commission that brought money and renewed pride to the 600 Eastern Creeks living around Atmore, Alabama. In 1971, a year before McGhee's death, the tribe incorporated as the Creek Nation East of the Mississippi.

“A HIGH MOUNTAIN”

Other Indian groups that lived in even closer contact with black and white Southerners have had more difficulty reasserting their identity. The 80,000 Native Americans in North Carolina constitute the largest Indian population of any state east of the Mississippi, yet many have no group identity beyond the name of their location, such as the Person County Indians or the Sampson County Indians. In 1965 the Indian residents of rural Halifax and Warren Counties combined the two county names to create a “tribal” name — Haliwa.

Farther south, ethnic identity in Robeson County is even more complicated. In the 1880s a white politician and amateur historian linked local Indians to those who had met the “Lost Colony” of Sir Walter Raleigh and gave them the name “Croatan.” But within a generation, non-Indians had shortened the name to “Cro” and were using it as a slur. In 1911 the state legislature shifted the designation to “Indians of Robeson County.” The title was soon modified to “Cherokees of Robeson County,” and later to “Siouan Indians of Robeson County.” Census takers simply listed one-third of the county's people as “Indians.”

Finally, in 1953, a community referendum prompted the state to change the name to “Lumbee,” a reference to the nearby Lumber River. Five years later, several of the newly designated Lumbees made national headlines when they broke up a Ku Klux Klan rally near Maxton. During the 1970s the Indian community challenged white domination of county politics, eliminating a biased system of “double-voting” in school elections and helping to elect the first non-white county officials. Though long-recognized at the state level, Lumbee Indians failed last winter to obtain federal recognition through an act of Congress.

Today Robeson County maintains an unusual balance among the forces that have shaped the South over the past five centuries. The population is almost evenly divided among blacks, whites, and Indians. Most of the Native Americans consider themselves part of the Lumbee community, which numbers roughly 30,000 — but great diversity remains. Struggling to rediscover their own heritage, some Indians continue to explore their personal links to earlier tribes such as the Saponi, Cheraw, Hatteras, and Tuscarora.

Leola Locklear lives in the town of Maxton in Robeson County. A short, determined woman in her sixties, her cupboards are full of records and clippings dealing with her Hatteras-Tuscarora ancestors. “If we could ever set down our history,” she tells visitors, “that would be a high mountain.”

Like thousands of Southerners descended from Native Americans, her heart is set on achieving official acknowledgment and public respect for her Indian status before she dies.

“Just to be recognized,” she says in her quiet, thoughtful murmur. “That would mean so much.” □

**ONE IN
EVERY
EIGHT
CHOCTAW
FAMILIES
STILL
MADE LESS
THAN
\$3,000 IN
1986**

BONNIE

By Tim Parrish

I had dragged the box full of toys from the garage onto the driveway and was dividing its contents into three piles — keepers, junk, and Salvation Army. Deep in the box I was finding things that went back to when my older brother had lived at home, back to when I was much

younger than thirteen, what I was at this time. I pulled out a cracked New Orleans Saints helmet, a ragged Davy Crockett coonskin cap, and two large tin cans with straps which we had used as Steve Canyon rocketpacks. My father had told me he was tired of clutter around his work counter. He was irritable when working the three-to-midnight shift, but I usually liked this shift because it left my mother and me alone to go out for milkshakes or play Chinese checkers or just talk. Lately, though, we hadn't done many of those things because she was still recovering from an illness which had put her in the hospital and kept her bedridden for a month.

I laid the tin cans on the junk pile, then saw three kids, a boy and a girl about my age and a younger boy, coming across the yard next door. We lived in a small neighborhood in Baton Rouge where news traveled fast, but these kids were new and I wasn't sure where they had come from. The older boy led the way, smiling and smoking a cigarette. He wore an Army shirt with cut-off sleeves. Blackheads peppered his face.

"I'm Blane," he said, his Cajun accent so heavy it took me a second to understand his words. "This my little brother Roland and my sister Bonnie."

"I'm Jeb," I said.

Roland was shorter and chunkier than Blane, and stood with his hands plunged into his pockets, his shoulders slumped. As he stared at the toys on the concrete, his eyebrows slanted in a frown toward the bridge of his nose.

The girl, Bonnie, hung back, wiry inside a faded paisley summer dress. Her short black bangs were pulled to the side and held by a plastic barrette. Her nose was pointy, her

LEDET

cheeks sunken below high ledges of bone. Now that she was nearer, I saw that she was probably the oldest of us.

"Our old man and us, we just moved in," Blane said, then ground his cigarette on the drive.

"My momma won't like it if you smoke around here," I said.

"That's cool," he said, and pointed at my basketball lying on the grass. "You mind if I shoot?" he asked. "Roland, he ain't good as me."

"Kiss my ass, Blane," Roland said.

He and Blane started shooting, their movements awkward and foot heavy. Bonnie stood about fifteen feet away, hugging her waist as she inspected my house and yard, her head slightly tilted toward the ground as though she were afraid of getting caught.

"Where are y'all from?" I asked her.

She looked sideways at me, her eyebrows arched, "Dulac."

"Where's that?" I said.

She rubbed her forearm and bit her lip.

I asked, "Is it close to New Orleans?"

"It's down by Houma. Close to the Gulf."

"I've never been to Houma."

Blane yelled, laughing, and bounced the ball hard off Roland's head. Roland ran after him, but Blane held him at arm's length.

"Fucker," Blane said. I thought they were about to fight. Bonnie sat and crossed her legs in the thick, early fall grass. Her skirt slid midway up her thighs, pale and muscled. She plucked blades of grass and tossed them to her side in small, violent movements until there was a fist-sized divot in front of her.

"When did y'all move in?" I asked.

"Yesterday," she said.

"Where was the moving van?"

"Why you need to know?"

I shrugged. "Just asking."

I heard the front door open behind me, my mother coming out to sweep the porch. Bonnie stood, smoothed her skirt over her thighs, and touched her fingers to her barrette.

"Blane, Roland, time to go," she said.

"You go on," Blane said.

"Daddy ain't gonna like it, we not there when he gets back."

"Fuck Daddy."

The sweeping stopped. I stood.

"Blane," Bonnie said. "Don't get me in trouble."

Blane spat into the grass. They started home.

"Come by and get us for school," he said to me. "We live around the corner." Bonnie was already walking away, her hands clenched at her sides. With each step she took, the curve of her hips showed through her dress. At the corner Blane saluted, then punched Roland in the shoulder, but Bonnie didn't look back.

"Who were they?" my mother asked, close to me, her arms crossed. Her hair rose in a bouffant, a style she'd started after her illness. She thought it made her face less gaunt, but it only brought out the circles under her eyes.

"They just moved in one of the rent houses," I said.

"They're coonasses."

"Don't say that word," she said.

"Mr. Badaeux says it." He was our next-door neighbor.

"It hurts people's feelings. You don't say it."

She knelt next to the pile of junk on the driveway and picked up a toy-car garage whose rusty decks were concave from where I'd sat on it when I was two. Momma ran her fingers over the surface,

blue veins standing on the back of her hand.

"I remember the look you had on your face," she said, smiling. "You thought crushing this was the cutest thing. I wish your daddy didn't want to throw these out."

"I'm just throwing out the broken ones. I'm keeping all the good things."

She stood and scratched the place on her hand where small blood clots still lay beneath the skin. The doctors had thought the rash was an allergic reaction to insect repellent Momma and I had used at a drive-in movie late that summer, but later we realized it had been the first sign of her lupus. She moved her hand against the grain of my hair, then down my face to my neck. She squeezed, the ends of her long nails slightly digging in. It was an odd way for her to touch me, and I recoiled a little.

"I want you to keep that," she said, and pointed at the crumpled garage. "I know it's trash, but it makes me think of when you were younger."



he next morning I walked to school between Bonnie and Blane. Bonnie wore a brown dress that fit too tightly everywhere except underneath her arms, where I could see her beige brassiere. Blane smoked a cigarette and asked if there were any girls in the neighborhood, if I had a friend with a car, if I'd ever been drunk.

"My brother gave me some wine once," I said.

"I been drunk about a hundred fucking times," Blane said.

"I get drunk all the time."

"You lying, Blane," Bonnie said.

"No, I ain't. I love to get fucked up."

"Quit saying that word," she said.

Blane leaned over and gave me a mock whisper. "Bonnie think she our momma."

"Shut up, Blane. You ain't funny." Bonnie hugged her notebook. The morning sun exposed a light sideburn of down on her face.

"Check it out," Blane said, pointing. Up ahead was the Stop N Go parking lot where boys with homemade ink tattoos and long hair and girls in hip-hugger jeans smoked cigarettes before school. "See y'all," Blane said, and headed off.

"Blane," Bonnie said. "Daddy wants you to go to school."

"Y'all tell me about it later." He winked at me.

Bonnie's jaw muscle flexed. "You know them people?" she asked me.

"Some of them. They go to school sometimes."

"Blane always looking for trouble. Something loose in his head."

I laughed, and after a second Bonnie smiled.

"I wish Blane didn't say that in front of your momma yesterday," Bonnie said. "She's pretty."

"She was real sick a month ago. She had to quit her job at Penney's." I remembered her in the hospital, her face so puffy her eyes were slits, her skin so sore I could only touch her hair.

"She's well now?"

"She's better. She still gets tired. Her skin hurts her, too." I was about to ask about her mother, but a girl screamed and ran past us, a boy making monster grunts chasing her until the crossing guard halted them at the corner. Bonnie covered her mouth and laughed, her eyes wide. It was the first time she'd seemed my age.



n Louisiana History, Bonnie sat in the row next to me one seat ahead. While the teacher lectured about explorers, I noticed how in profile Bonnie's chin and nose

UP AHEAD
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AND LONG
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SMOKED
CIGARETTES

curved ever so slightly toward each other as if trying to touch in front of her lips. I traced the swell of her calf, studied the movement of her shoulder blades beneath her dress, followed the lay of the fine, dark hair on her forearms. Her body was older than most of the other eighth-grade girls, and when she leaned and reached inside her desk, I saw the cone of her bra pointing away.

After school we walked to her house. She stopped at the end of the driveway. I was hoping she would ask me in, but she stood until I asked if we could sit on the porch. Her eyebrows dipped together, and she did a slow take on her house as though she expected to see someone she hadn't seen before. Then, without speaking, she walked to the cement steps, sat, and pulled her knees close to her chest.

"Your mamma didn't move down with y'all, did she?" I asked.

"She died when I was nine," Bonnie said, then watched to see my reaction. "I had to stay home, take care of Roland cause Daddy was gone so much."

"Is that why you're in eighth grade?"

"Yeah, that's why. Something wrong with that?"

"I just thought you were older than me, that's all."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I thought you meant something."

"Why was your daddy gone?"

Bonnie focused on the ground, moving her eyebrows up and down as if working the words into her mind. "He had a boat," she said slowly, not looking at me. "One of them big fishing boats people pay to go on."

"Cool," I said. "Does he still have it?"

"It got tore up in a storm. That's why we had to move down here." She rocked back and forth, then stood. "I got to get dinner."

"You mind if I ask you something?" I said. She shook her head. "What happened to your mamma?" Her gray eyes pierced me. "I'm just wondering."

"She drowned. She was out on the boat and something happened. She got knocked over the side."

"Really?"

"You don't believe me?"

"I believe you. It sounds terrible."

Bonnie unlocked the door.

"Was your daddy there?" I asked.

"He didn't see it. They didn't find her." She turned the doorknob.

"You mind if I ask you something else?"

"Depends on what it is."

"Do you ever get mad at her?"

"At my mother?" She searched the porch as if she'd dropped the answer. "I used to. Once in a while, I guess. It was a long time ago." She disappeared inside.

I looked at the grainy concrete of the steps. I thought of my mother dead, covered with a sheet in her bedroom. My mouth went dry.

At home I found Dulac in the atlas, a tiny circle near the end of a thin map road far south of Baton Rouge.

"What're you looking at?" Momma asked, laying a hand on my shoulder. Her nails were dark red.

I pointed at the map. "That's where Bonnie's from."

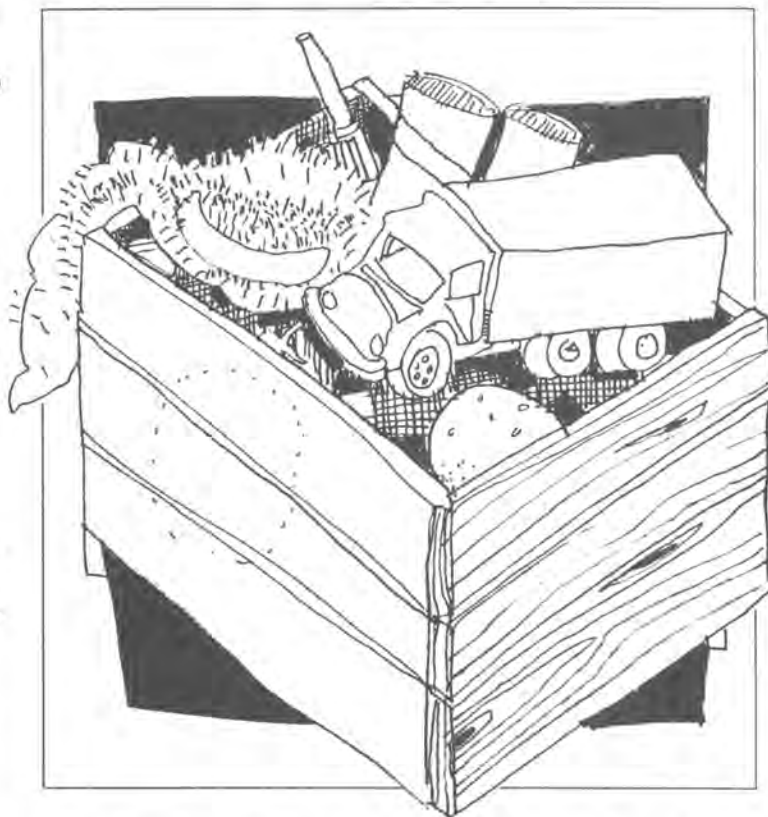
"That girl from yesterday?"

"Yes, ma'am. I walked to school with her. I like her."

"Have you been down at her house?" I nodded. Momma took her hand from my shoulder, stepped around to my side. She had on a brightly flowered blouse I hadn't seen in a long time. She clicked her nails on the tabletop. "Were her parents there?"

"Her daddy wasn't. Her mamma's not alive anymore."

Momma's blue eyes widened for a moment. "How old is this girl?"



"I think she's almost fifteen. She's in my grade, though."

Momma touched her throat. "Well, I don't want you in that house when her daddy's not home."

"We were just on the porch."

"I said in the house." Momma put a hand to her temple. She shut her eyes.

"You okay, Momma?"

She patted my shoulder. "I'm just tired. I went through my closet and got rid of some of my drab clothes." She posed a moment like a model, showing off her blouse, then touched her forehead. "I think I'll lay down a little while. Maybe later we can go get a hamburger."

After she left the room, I stared at the atlas again. I imagined Mr. Ledet's boat, a sleek yacht with Bonnie standing near the bow, her hair blown back, a school of dolphins leaping from the water. After a while I tiptoed down the hall to

Momma's room and peeked in. She lay flat on her back, her arms at her side, her mouth open, snoring. I wanted to turn her on her side. Instead I sat on the wooden floor and thought of being on that boat with Bonnie, its sharp prow cutting the green waves as we headed from shore.



I waited for Bonnie after school, scheming to get her to invite me inside her house. Over two weeks had passed since we had met, and even though we had been walking to and from school every day, I still hadn't been further than her porch. I was thinking maybe I could start coughing and tell her I needed some water when a familiar car horn sounded. Parked in the circular drive behind the last school bus was our Galaxie 500, my mother waving to me as kids strolled past. I glanced to see if Bonnie had come out of the building yet, then walked over.

"What are you doing, Momma?" I asked through the passenger window. Thick make-up gave her face an unnatural beige color. Heavy streaks of rouge angled like warpaint across her cheeks.

"I was out shopping, and I thought I'd take you and your friend to the bakery." She hadn't taken a friend and me to the bakery since fourth grade. Bonnie came out, and I waved to her.

"I don't know, Momma. I kind of wanted to walk."

"It'll be fun, Jeb. Plus I'll get to meet this Bonnie you've been talking about."

Bonnie stopped several feet from the car. I told her what was happening.

"I better not," she said. "My daddy's supposed to be home early."

"It won't take long," Momma said. "I can explain it to him. Here, y'all get in the front."

Bonnie exhaled through her nose, then slid onto the seat between Momma and me. In the car my arm and leg tingled against Bonnie's, but she stared straight ahead. The odor of Momma's hairspray filled the car, and I kept my nose to the window, wondering if Bonnie would think my mother taking us to the bakery was queer. When we passed the Stop N Go, we saw Blane kissing a girl in a purple tube top.

"Has Jeb told you anything about me?" Momma asked, smiling.

Bonnie glanced at me. "He said you been sick."

"He did?" Momma said, her smile leaving. "Well, I'm as good as new now. I'm going to get another job soon." She turned on the radio and hummed along until we reached Delmont Pastries. Momma ushered us in, then stood slowly scratching the back of her hand as she examined the cakes and pastries on display behind the glass counter.

"Jeb, Bonnie, come see," she said.

I touched Bonnie's hand, and we walked over. Momma pointed at a cake with buccaneers and a wooden ship on top.

"Remember your pirate birthday?" Momma asked. "We

put your presents in a treasure chest and had chocolate that looked like gold coins."

"Let's get something, Momma. Bonnie needs to go home."

Momma ordered three chocolate eclairs, and we sat at a small table. "Jeb told me your daddy came here to find work," Momma said to Bonnie. "What did he do down there?"

I had already told Momma what Bonnie had said, and I hoped she was making small talk, but her tone made me shift in my seat.

"He worked some different jobs. He worked on drilling rigs sometimes."

I set my eclair on my plate.

"And your mother passed away?"

Bonnie cut her eyes at me. "She died in a car wreck. Her and my daddy was out one night."

"I know that's hard," Momma said. "My mother died when I was a little girl. My older sister raised me. You must be very strong." Momma laid a hand on my wrist. "Did Jeb tell you he took care of me when I was sick?"

"Momma," I said.

"Sorry," she said. "But it's good we're close. A lot of families aren't."

Bonnie pressed a napkin to her lips. "I got to get home," she said and pushed her chair back.

"I can drive you," Momma said, but Bonnie was already going toward the door. "Go catch her," she said to me.

"Why'd you ask those questions?" I said. "I already told you about all that."

Momma wiped her mouth, leaving a red stain on the napkin. "I didn't believe what she told you," she said.

"You wanted to catch her in a lie."

"I wanted to hear it myself."

I wheeled and went out after Bonnie. As I crossed Winbourne Avenue I heard Momma call my name, but I didn't look back. Bonnie was striding across the school ground. When I fell in beside her, she didn't look at me. I wanted to apologize for my mother, but seeing Bonnie's frown made my anger shift to her.

"Why'd you lie?" I said.

"I got to get home," she said. "My daddy don't like me being late."

"Tell me why you lied."

She stopped and faced me. "I like what I told you better. It ain't no big deal."

We walked again, a little slower. Momma slowed as

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she passed in the car, but when I wouldn't look at her, she drove away.

"Your momma don't like you with me," Bonnie said. "Why'd you tell her what I said?"

I almost told the truth, that I eventually told Momma most things that happened to me, but I didn't say anything. Neither of us spoke again until we stopped in the street at her house.

"Why don't you ever ask me in?" I said. Her daddy's green Malibu sat in the driveway. Her jaw muscles worked in and out.

"Daddy don't like nobody in the house," she said. "Maybe when he's gone."

"I want a glass of water," I said.

The screen door opened, and Mr. Ledet stepped onto the porch. Khaki pants were all he had on. He was short and stocky, his muscular chest black with hair. He had Bonnie's pointy nose. He held a cup of coffee in his hand. Half of his index finger was gone. "Bonnie," he said, but it sounded like "Bon A."

"I got to go," Bonnie said. At the door she had to duck under her father's arm. His eyes went right into her. Mr. Ledet sipped from his cup, his face expressionless as he looked at me. "You go home," he said, then went back in.

I walked fast, away from the Ledets' house and ours, toward Hurricane Creek, a deep drainage ditch that snaked through our neighborhood. When I was younger, I used to go there almost every day during the summer to catch tadpoles or explore the huge dark pipe that ran beneath the road.

I shimmied down the steep side and sat on the slanted concrete near the bottom. A stench hovered above the stagnant water. The mouth of the pipe was snarled with trash — tree limbs, a broken chair, a deflated football — washed there by the rush of storm water. I hurled a chunk of concrete into the water. A week after Momma had come home from the hospital, her fever had returned, rising even after I'd put cold cloths on her and given her aspirin. I had wanted to call Daddy at work, but Momma said he'd missed too much work already, and I held her head as she vomited into the crescent-shaped pan, the acid odor burning my nose. Her flushed face went pale, even the raspberry welts, and I kept talking to her, stroking her hair, hoping she would open her eyes again. When she finally looked at me she said, "Goddamn this. Goddamnit, I thought I was okay," words like none I'd ever heard from her, words which made me certain she was going to die.



was dribbling my basketball a few days later when Blane came up the driveway, smiling, a cigarette dangling from his mouth.

"You know where Roland at?" he said. "His school called Daddy at work, said Roland beat up some kid. Daddy mad as hell." Blane flicked ashes, then cupped the cigarette to hide it.

"I haven't seen him," I said.

"Boy must've fucked with Roland. Roland don't start things. He finish 'em, though."

"There he is," I said, and pointed at Roland, who was coming out of a clump of tall hedges across the street two houses down. His thumbs were hooked in his pockets, his jaw shoved forward.

"Shit, he was hiding," Blane said. "Roland, you was in them bushes?"

"I was thinking," Roland said.

"What that boy did to you?"

"Told me I couldn't read."

"Daddy gonna whip your ass," Blane said.

"Shit on Daddy," Roland said. "Give me a cigarette."

"Jeb's momma don't want us smoking here."

"How long are you suspended for?" I asked.

"A whole fucking week. Principal say she going to teach me to act good. I told her I still ain't taking no shit."

"Boy, Daddy gonna hit you," Blane said. "Bonnie ain't gonna be able to stop this."

Roland stared straight ahead, tears welling up, then walked off toward their house. Blane wiped a fake tear for my sake, then went after Roland. Blane nudged him, tried to put an arm around Roland's shoulder, but Roland blocked it.

"Jeb, come here a minute," my mother said from the backyard corner of the house. Her left hand was covered with black soil, her right hand held a small rake with three claws. She'd been turning dirt in her garden and had overheard everything we'd said. I banked a shot in, then slapped the ball into the grass before I walked to her. It was a warm day, and there were pink splotches on her face as though she had fever again. Her blouse stuck in wet patches to her chest and the tops of her breasts.

"I don't want you near that house anymore," she said. "It's not good for you."

"You don't like Bonnie, that's it."

"She doesn't have a mother. Most of her life she's been by herself with those boys and a man who hits them. That girl knows a lot more than you do, Jeb."

"That's why I like her."

She pointed the hoe at me. "I'm telling you not to go down there. End of talk." She walked back to the garden, lowered onto her knees, and stabbed the dirt.

I
SHIMMIED
DOWN THE
STEEP SIDE
AND SAT
ON THE
SLANTED
CONCRETE
NEAR THE
BOTTOM. A
STENCH
HOVERED
ABOVE THE
STAGNANT
WATER.

"You can't stop me," I said.

She looked up. "I'm your mother," she said.

"Then why don't you act like it?"

She narrowed her eyes at me and started shaking. I took a step forward, wanting to take back what I'd said, but I didn't.

She scooped up dirt with her free hand and crumbled it.

"Leave me alone," she said.



he next morning I waited in front of Bonnie's house past the time when she was supposed to show. The Malibu was in the driveway, but I knocked anyway.

After the third knock, I heard heavy footsteps and moved back a little, bracing for Mr. Ledet. The venetian blinds on the front window rattled, a dark slit opened and closed, then the footsteps receded. I made a fist to hit the door once more, then jumped off the porch and stormed toward school.

That afternoon, Bonnie was on her porch, wearing shorts and a low-cut shirt that showed freckles on her chest. Tied on her head was a red bandana which hid her hair and caused her eyes to stand out from her face when she pulled on her cigarette, something I'd never seen her do.

"Daddy said don't bang on the door." She pressed the arches of her bare feet together.

"Why didn't you answer? I wanted you to go to school."

"I ain't going to school no more. It's stupid. What you learned there?" Bonnie struck a match, raised it near her eyes, blew it out. "Your momma's jealous."

"No, she ain't. She's my mother."

"So?" Bonnie took a last drag, then thumped the cigarette into the yard.

"Is your daddy here?"

"Work called him at noon." She tugged at the legs of her shorts. On her thigh I saw three bruises, each the size of a fingertip.

"Where's Roland?" I asked.

"Daddy ran him off hitting him." She examined my face. "You want to come in?"

"Inside your house?"

She laughed and stood. Their house was hot and stale, without the exotic smells of roux and etouffe and fried garfish like those at our neighbors, the Badaeuxs. In the living room was a portable TV and a worn vinyl recliner with strips of silver duct tape on the seat. The walls were blank except for a framed photo of the family when Mrs. Ledet was still alive. Bonnie's mother looked like Bonnie except with a more rounded face. She looked younger than my mother, and I touched the glass without thinking. When I turned Bonnie's lips were tight.

"You want some water?" she asked, and walked off.

While Bonnie was in the kitchen, I wandered down the short hall. Through an open door I saw her father's room, his queen-sized bed covered by a tangle of sheets, four pillows

twisted and crushed. Bonnie brushed past me, shut the door, and handed me my water.

"This is my room," she said, leading me across the hall. The only furniture was a wooden chair, a single bed without sheets, and a small chest-of-drawers. On top of the chest sat a round hand-held mirror, a pair of scissors, and a bottle of rubbing alcohol. On the floor lay clumps of hair.

"You cut your hair?" I asked.

"No, it just fell out." Bonnie unscrewed the lid of the rubbing alcohol, sniffed it, and recoiled. "You want a sip?" she asked, then shoved it under my nose, but I pushed it away. She closed the bottle and dropped it back in the drawer.

"Let me see your hair," I said.

"Why should I?"

"I want to see what it looks like."

She took a transistor radio from one of the drawers, turned it on and moved across the room. "Your daddy ever hit you?"

"He used to whip me with a skinny belt," I said.

"Where he hit you? On the ass?"

I nodded. "Did your daddy hit you?"

Bonnie snapped her fingers to the music.

"You like to dance?" she asked.

"Dance?"

"Come on." She grabbed my wrist and pulled me across the hall into her father's room, my glass sloshing water. A basket of dirty work clothes reeked of sweat and chemicals. Next to the basket lay a white nightgown and some girls' underwear. When I looked at Bonnie, she had the radio pressed to her chin, her fingers white from gripping it so hard. She snatched the glass from my hand and made me stand on the bed with her. She turned up the music, kicked the covers and pillows to the floor, squeezed my wrists, and bounced. I grasped her hands and we flew, our heads almost touching the low ceiling, the bed creaking as Bonnie's wild laughter spilled over me. As we jumped I spun us, and we turned a slow circle, gripping each other tighter.

Suddenly she stopped, put a hand to my mouth, and turned off the radio. Down the hall came footsteps. Blane stuck his head around the corner.

"What you doing?" he asked Bonnie. "You know it ain't cool Daddy catch him in here."

"Shit on Daddy," Bonnie said.

Blane flung his hair away from his glassy eyes. "Where Roland went?"

"He left this morning," Bonnie said.

THROUGH
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PILLOWS
TWISTED
AND
CRUSHED.

"Damn. Where Daddy at?"

"He went to work. Leave us be."

Blane smiled at me. "Don't let my old man catch you," he said, and knocked twice on the door frame. We heard him slam the front door.

"I know Blane stoned," Bonnie said. "I hope Roland don't start that." I stepped off the bed, but Bonnie stayed. She touched the depression at the base of her throat. "You like me."

"Yeah," I said. "I like you a lot."

She put her hand on my shoulder and hopped down. Her hand still on me, she reached with the other and removed her bandana. Her hair was mutilated, the same length as before in some places, her scalp visible in other places, as if someone had ripped out hanks of it.

"Your daddy did that?" I said.

"I did it. To show him. You like it?"

"No I don't like it. Why did you do that?"

She looked at the bed, then jerked her head as though she'd been slapped. She took my hand and ran it over her head, the bristles sharp, the longer hair soft and fine. The bandana was still knotted, and she slid it onto my head, her thumbs pressed to my temples.

"You ever kiss a girl, Jeb?" she asked.

"Not really."

"You want to kiss me?"

I nodded. She placed her mouth on mine. When her lips opened, I opened mine too, let her tongue, thick and dry, come inside, the taste of cigarettes bitter and sharp. The second time I tried to use my tongue, but she took a step back, glanced over my face as if looking for some small thing, then gently pushed me so that I sat on the bed. She sat sideways on my lap. I put my arms around her and hugged her, the small circles of her breasts against me, the warm skin of her cheek on mine.

"You can touch me," she said, and I slid my hands under her shirt, over the tense muscles of her back and the knobby ridge of her spine. Her breathing was loud and close to my ear, and I felt wild and bigger than I was, moved my hands up to her shoulder blades, then around to her breasts, firm and soft at the same time, like nothing I'd ever felt. She made a slight noise like pain and gripped me tighter, but her cheek moved from mine and she stood by the bed.

"You got to go," she said, and a bolt of lightning went through my head.

"Is somebody here?" I asked. There was a swirl around her. She took the bandana from my head, put it back on hers and went to her room. I followed her, but she kept her back to me.

"You didn't like it?" I asked, confused, thinking there was something I should do, but only wanting to touch her again. I took a step toward her, and she turned and pointed two fingers. "Go on," she said.

"Your daddy made those bruises on your leg, didn't he? He hit you like he hit Roland. I want you to come to my house."

Bonnie smiled, hugging herself, but it was a smile close to crying. She put her hands on her head. "I did this. I took my scissors and did it. That fucker's gonna see. Get on out."

As I went down the hall I heard her start crying. The feel of her skin and hair was still on my hands, the taste of her mouth still in my mouth. I walked out of her house and down her street toward mine, the world around me shut away as though I were in a tunnel. Inside our garage I stopped. Through the wall came the muffled babble of the TV like a voice beneath a blanket. I imagined Mr. Ledet's hand swinging hard against Bonnie's face. He pushed her to the floor, his hand gripping her thigh, his heavy body on top of hers.

I threw a punch into the wooden wall, then another and another, then I was kicking a metal gas can and plastic jugs of toluene, punching the wall again. "Stop it!" I heard Momma's voice yell and her hands pulled my arms, but I flung them off and kicked the washer, the hollow metal booming until she grabbed my shirt.

"Leave me alone!" I said, jumping back. "Don't touch me!"

"You stop it!" she said and held out her flattened hand as if to strike me. She balled her fists. "You've been at her house!"

I backed away. "What's wrong with you?" I said. "Quit it. You're scaring me."

She stopped. She opened her fists and raised her hands in front of her. There was disgust on her face. She walked over to the steps by the kitchen door and sat. She looked tired, as if she'd been running ever since the rash had bloomed on her.

My hands were bruised and bleeding, my arms quivering. I walked over and sat next to her. After a minute she touched my hands with her fingertips.

"We need to put something on that," she said, but we didn't move.



Before school the next morning I knocked at Bonnie's, even though the car was in the drive, then did the same again that afternoon. Later that night, after my father had come home and gone to bed, I snuck out to Bonnie's house, the night humid and cool. Mr. Ledet's car was still there. The porch light was off, but the inside lights burned yellow through the blinds. I listened beneath the high windows on the side of the house, but all I heard was the distant sound of traffic.

The following day I knocked again, but when no one answered, I banged, twenty or thirty times. Blane jerked open the door. He was in his underwear. One eye was cut and swollen. "Shit! What you want?" he asked, a hand laid flat on his ribs.

"Jesus. Your old man did that?"

"You always asking questions." He rubbed a hand over his face. "I tried to stop him hitting Roland, so he switched off."

"You hit him back?"

"I tried. He's a tough fucker."

When I didn't say anything, he motioned me inside and led me to the kitchen. The linoleum floor was cracked and peeling. Blane turned on the burner beneath the coffee pot.

"You drink coffee?" he asked. I shook my head. "Bet my

old man wish he didn't." He took an apple from the fridge, cut it with a thin-bladed filet knife and gave me half. We sat.

"Where's Bonnie?" I asked.

I WANTED TO
TALK TO
MOMMA
ABOUT
BONNIE,
WANTED TO
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THAT
BONNIE HAD
CARRIED
THEM ALL.

"Does he know Bonnie did it?" I asked.

"She told him. His stomach cramped real bad, and when the ambulance pulled up, she said she wasn't gonna take him messing with us no more." Blane poured the coffee into his cup. We each ate our apple half until Blane looked at me with the most serious expression I'd ever seen on his face. "You know my old man and Bonnie do it," he said. "That's why we had to move here. Neighbors found out. The sheriff told Daddy to go."

I tossed the rest of the apple into the garbage. Roland came in and sat with us, his face relaxed, the most like a kid's since I'd met him. "How you like Blane's new face?" he asked me. "You shoulda seen how bad he thought he was till Daddy knocked him."

"Saved your little ass," Blane said.

"Blane told you what Bonnie did?"

Roland asked. "Too bad she didn't kill that bastard."

Blane sipped his coffee and stared at the wall like he hadn't heard Roland. He had lit a cigarette, but it was already halfway burned in the ashtray, and he hadn't touched it.

"Why did she go to the hospital with him?" I asked.

Blane looked at me from the corner of his eye as though I'd asked the most ridiculous question.

"Cause he's our daddy," he said.

"At the hospital."

"She's hurt?"

"She's with Daddy." He smiled. "You fucked her?"

"Shut up, Blane."

He laughed, then grunted like an old man when he stood to pour the water.

"Did you hurt him when you hit him?" I asked.

"No, man. Bonnie put rubbing alcohol in his coffee. Fucked him up."

"Is he going to die?"

"Nah. He's too mean to die."

Blane took a cup from the sink and turned on the hot water. He scrubbed the rim with his finger.



"How are your hands?" Momma asked. It was before school two days later. She hadn't said anything about the Ledets since I had punched the wall. I held out my bruised knuckles. She laughed. "You better be glad

your daddy didn't see you trying to knock a hole in his garage."

"Thanks for not telling," I said.

"I'm going job hunting today," she said. "Being around this house all the time's making me crazy."

"You look pretty," I said, and she gave me a smile.

"Daddy knows you're looking for a job?"

"We talked about it last night when he came in. I guess that's why he's still asleep—I kept him up so late." She lifted her coffee cup with both hands, blew on it, and sipped. "He starts days soon, and you and I haven't even gone out for a milkshake." She sat back. "Have you seen Bonnie?"

"She hasn't been home."

She waited for more, then nodded. "It's confusing sometimes, isn't it?" She forced a smile, then stared at the table.

I downed my juice and said, "I've gotta go."

"I could drive you," she said, but I didn't answer. I wanted to talk to Momma about Bonnie, wanted to tell her that Bonnie had carried them all—Mr. Ledet, Blane, Roland—had carried them without any of them knowing it, maybe without knowing it herself. I kissed Momma, and she hugged me before I headed outside.

The last two days no one had come when I knocked on Bonnie's door. This morning it was ajar. I eased inside and called out, but my voice rang through the house and died without answer. In the living room a few dust balls were all that remained. I went down the hall to her father's room, the morning light harsh through the uncurtained windows, the smell of his clothes still heavy. I remembered Bonnie and me on his bed, her lips on mine, my hand on her hair. In a way it seemed a long time ago. I looked in his empty closet, then crossed the hall. I stood in the center of Bonnie's room and

breathed in. I walked to the corner where her chest-of-drawers had been and knelt on her floor, hoping to find something, a button, a string, a bit of her hair, but every trace had been swept clean. □

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Alex Haley Remembered

An interview with Anne Romaine

When Alex Haley died of a heart attack on February 10, the South lost one of its most important authors. Indeed, no other writer has done more than Haley to diversify the range of Southern voices represented in the mainstream media. His Autobiography of Malcolm X has sold over six million copies, and Roots introduced a wide audience to the African-American oral tradition, forcing the entire nation to confront the brutal legacy of slavery through the story of a single black family.

For the past six years, historian and musician Anne Romaine has been working on a biography of Haley. A veteran of the civil rights movement and the director of the Southern Folk Cultural Revival Project, Romaine organized the Haley House Museum in Henning, Tennessee. She spoke with us from her family's home near Gastonia, North Carolina.

Southern Exposure: *Haley traveled the world in search of his roots. How did he develop such a passionate interest in his own family history?*

Anne Romaine: Alex was the product of an unusual family. When he was born in 1921, his father was studying

agriculture at Cornell University in New York, and his mother was studying piano at the Ithaca Conservatory of Music. His parents were part of a generation of young people looking forward to a bright future after the First World War. But it was his grandmother, Cynthia Palmer — his mother's mother — who told him the stories of his slave ancestors and the African, Kunta Kinte.

His grandmother lived in Henning, Tennessee, 50 miles north of Memphis. Chicken George, Kunta Kinte's grandson, had led the family there from a plantation in Alamance County, North Carolina in 1873. Alex spent a lot of time in Henning in the summers and considered it home.

Alex talked about how his grandmother would hug and kiss him and cook for him. Her love stayed with him. It gave him what I call a "grandmother spirit" — a person who straddled the older traditions and the more contemporary. It also gave him a longing to be a part of that older culture and to give it life.

As a young child, Alex sat on his grandmother's front porch and listened to the stories from her and her sisters. His mother tried to discourage him from putting any value on those stories — she

thought he should forget about slave times. But those stories fired up his imagination. He used to go to Sunday school and listen to the stories about Noah and Jacob and Moses, and he mixed them up with the tales his grandmother told about Kizzy and Chicken George and Kunta Kinte. To him, they all seemed like great people who were part of the same story.

SE: *What rekindled his interest in those stories as an adult?*

AR: Many things. It was 1965. Malcolm X had just been assassinated, and Alex was walking in front of the National Archives. Suddenly, he heard a voice say, "Go in there." So he went in and asked for all the census records for Alamance County for the 1870s. He started turning the handle, and there were the names of his great-grandparents and great aunts, all the names from the front porch. It was like a light exploded in his head.

Alex was transformed. Up to then his life had been predictable and controlled, as much as a writer's life can be. But *Roots* put him in touch with his inner direction. It was this passion that led him on that amazing journey — a 12-year search for the links that bound together the generations of his family.

Although he was in terrible debt, Alex scraped together the money to make 25 trips to Africa. He ended up in a remote Gambian village, where an elderly *griot* or historian recounted the history of the village and gradually came to the name of Kunta Kinte, who had gone out one day to chop wood and was taken by the slavers.

SE: *People sometimes ask, why is Alex Haley so important? After all, a lot of people have written books about slavery and black history.*

AR: I feel like the abiding quality that kept Alex before the public was his authenticity. People felt like his stories came from the heart. He was someone you could identify with. He had his own values and beliefs, but first and foremost he was a storyteller.

In the larger sense — that of the role



ALEX HALEY SIGNING A COPY OF *Roots*.

of the artist in our culture — he was what you might call a keeper of the myth, the interlocking stories and rituals that define a people. That's what he did — he unlocked hidden myths of African-American culture, myths that the larger culture had tried to undermine.

SE: *He also showed us that the lives of ordinary people are as much a part of history as the accomplishments of "great men."*

AR: That's true. We're taught in school about the heritage of kings and presidents, but Alex emphasized that the stories of common people are as powerful as those of great leaders. That may not seem like a very revolutionary idea, but it is. Coming after the civil rights movement and the great social upheavals of that period, the story of *Roots* gave people a feeling that family ties would survive all the social changes.

SE: *Do you remember where you were when you saw *Roots*?*

AR: I had just moved to Nashville. I was amazed by how much excitement it created. There were parties and get-togethers — everybody had to be somewhere to watch *Roots*. It drew the largest audience in television history.

Though it was a seemingly innocent story, it presented a shattering image of black slavery. Through *Roots*, Alex lifted up a vision of a different reality — not only for blacks, but for everyone. He showed that the most dispossessed people can look back to where they come from and find truth and power in their own story, their own myths. His story was a hero-journey that other people

identified with.

SE: *But like any hero he had his own troubles.*

AR: Of course. In fact, the irony of his personal life is that he was someone who represented family values on a national level, but he himself couldn't keep a family together. He was married three times and in later years seldom saw his family and grandchildren. He taught people the importance of roots, but he called himself a rolling stone.

Alex was tormented that he couldn't write more and do more. Like a physician, he couldn't always heal himself. He was a very gentle, loving person, but he had his own way of moving through the world. As his little grandson said at the funeral, he was a man who had good intentions.

SE: *How did you hear about his death?*

AR: I got a phone call in the early morning hours. I was shocked and grieved; it was totally unexpected. His funeral was a stunning celebration. It was held in a very large CME church in Memphis. On the first of three days on which his body lay in state, 7,000 people came to view it.

He was buried in Henning, in the front yard of his grandmother's home. An African drummer played, and there were ambassadors from Gambia and other African countries in attendance. There was a worldwide outpouring of love and affection for someone who had been a symbol for a people and a time.

Alex Haley represented reconciliation. That's what he felt his life was about. He could not bear to talk about conflict and confrontation. He viewed

himself as a healer of cultures.

The week before he died, I saw him on TV on the 700 Club, of all places. The interviewer asked him about racism, and he said, "I usually don't like to focus just on American racism." Then he added with great conviction: "But I will tell you this. In America, we are quick to rush to the aid of white Europeans when they are in trouble, but when Haitians come over here, we send them back."

You probably don't think that's any big thing — I mean, Jesse Jackson speaks out like that all the time. But Alex Haley considered himself an observer of life. He moved quietly through it all — the bitter humiliation and racial scars of segregation. By focusing on what was real in his own life — on his family story, on an uncontested truth — he was able to build toward a worldwide reconciliation on the shoulders of the civil rights struggles and the black nationalist movement.

His status as a folk hero was highlighted in a story he told me about a recent visit to Nashville. He was walking down the street when an older woman stopped him and spoke harshly to him for wearing polyester pants. She said, "Don't you understand? A man of your stature who represents success for those of us who are black should dress like he is *somebody* — not like some ordinary, old-timey man."

Alex asked me later, "What's wrong with polyester?" I explained that people who had a sense of style and fabrics prefer natural fibers. He said, "The problem is, I just ordered seven more pairs from the Sears catalog. I got them in every color. I like them because they come already hemmed to my length."

I miss him. We were close friends for six years. We sometimes got together for interviews late at night, when he was relaxed and unguarded. I remember once last summer when he asked me to meet him at twelve o'clock midnight. So I showed up at his house at midnight, set up my tape recorder, and sat across from him. The light was turned low, and he lay on the couch looking at the ceiling. He talked for two hours about his life in a reflective way, as you would only do late at night.

His stories were always poignant. I miss knowing that he's in my world. □

Anne Romaine's music appears on the Rounder and Flying Fish labels.



SCRANTON, N.C. — Georgina Ramirez and Brenda Cota came to the Carolina coast to work in a crab house. The bus trip took five days and nights from their home in Juan Jose Rios, Mexico, but they were excited by the journey. It was their first time in the United States, and they planned to make enough money picking meat from blue crabs to support their families back home.

After all, that's what Monica had promised them in Mexico. They knew Monica Del Crois from the crab house where they worked in Los Mochis, and she told them they could make \$1.30 a pound picking crabs for Carl Doerter in North Carolina — triple their Mexican wages. Carl himself even came to Mexico, loaned them each \$200 for the bus trip, and accompanied them to the border.

But not long after they arrived at Capt'N Carl's Seafood, Ramirez and Cota found themselves snared in a modern-day version of indentured servitude. Doerter put them to work from four in the morning to two in the afternoon, six days a week, with only a 10-minute break for breakfast each day. He housed them above the crab factory, two to a room, with plywood walls and curtains for doors. He took their passports and forbade them to leave the camp.

"We once had a meeting with Carl about going shopping or dancing," recalls Ramirez, speaking in Spanish. "He told us to give up on the idea of leaving. He told us if we left we would be picked up by immigration or shot on sight by Americans, because Americans do not like Mexicans."

When it came time to collect their first paychecks, the women were in for an even bigger shock.

**By Lane
Windham and
Eric Bates**

A FEDERAL PROGRAM IS HELPING CRAB HOUSES DRIVE AWAY LOCAL WORKERS AND IMPORT MEXICAN WOMEN TO DO THE DIRTY WORK.

After working a 60-hour week, Ramirez found \$30 in her pay envelope. In addition to tax deductions, Doerter had charged the women money for food, rent, toilet paper, travel expenses from Mexico — even \$2 for the gloves and \$5 for the knives they used to pick the crabs.

Brenda Cota fared even worse. “I was not paid at all that first week,” she says. “We were supposed to be paid \$1.30 per pound, but I never really made enough money to send any home.”

What happened to Ramirez and Cota is part of a recent and dramatic shift in the Southern seafood industry. Each spring, 42 crab houses in North Carolina employ approximately 1,750 workers — and today more than 500 of them are Mexican, up from only 30 in 1989. Most are young women trying to support their families. They stand at long tables all day from April to November, cutting heads off shrimp or scraping meat from crabs. Most are paid by the pound, many earning far less than minimum wage.

In fact, the hours are so long and the pay is so low that many Southerners say they simply cannot afford to work in the seafood factories. But instead of forcing the industry to improve wages and working conditions, a federal program known as H-2B allows owners who claim they can't find anyone to fill their jobs to import foreign “guest workers” for up to a year.

Unlike agricultural workers from Mexico, the crab pickers and other factory workers receive no written contracts, no set hours, and no guaranteed wages. They are essentially prisoners of their employers: If they leave to look for other work, they can be deported. Quitting their jobs means quitting the U.S.

“These workers are at the total mercy of their employers,” says Pam DiStefano, an attorney with Farm Workers Legal Services of North Carolina. “The H-2B program enables seafood owners to displace local workers with people from Mexico who are desperate for any kind of work. It is a prescription for abuse.”

FOUR HOURS OF SLEEP

Mexican workers aren't the only ones suffering. While other Southern industries have abandoned their workers by moving their plants to Mexico, crab houses have hurt local labor by bringing Mexican wages and hours to the South. Seafood

jobs — once the domain of black women from small towns along the coast — are slowly being filled by Mexican women forced to work longer hours for less pay.

Viola Davis has seen the change. A mother of three, Davis has picked crabs for nearly a quarter of a century, including 17 years at Sea Safari, Inc. in Belhaven, North Carolina — “the Blue Crab Capital of the World.” When she started working at a crab house at age 16, the plant was full of other black women. “At first I wouldn't

Cuts from knives and the razor-sharp edges of crabs are common, and many workers suffer from infections. “My hands sting at the end of the day,” Davis says. “Most of us soak our hands in bleach when we go home after work to make our hands stop stinging.” The high-speed, repetitive motion of the processing line can also cause crippling diseases of the hands and wrists known as cumulative trauma disorders.

Although federal law requires all em-

Photos by Robert Miller courtesy News & Observer



WORKING LONG HOURS FOR LOW PAY, MEXICAN CRAB PICKERS ARE BECOMING A MAINSTAY OF THE SOUTHERN SEAFOOD INDUSTRY.

pick half a pound all day long,” Davis recalls. “But my aunt kept encouraging me and pushed me and pushed me. Then my pounds kept going up and up. Now I can pick 90 pounds of crab a day. You just sit there and do it.”

Working conditions are miserable. The crab plants are cold and wet; workers must dress in layers of clothing to stay warm.

employers to pay at least minimum wage, crab workers are paid a piece rate so low that only the strongest and fastest can hope to pick enough pounds to earn \$4.50 an hour. Low piece rates combined with a short crab-picking season mean paychecks too small to support one person, let alone a family. Many crab workers earn as little as \$4,500 a year —

among the lowest manufacturing wages in the nation.

But over the years, Davis and other working mothers managed to carve out a significant amount of autonomy for themselves. They controlled the pace of their work, setting their own hours to care for their families. "I've seen women just walk out of the factory at eight-thirty in the morning to take their kids to school," says David Cecelski, who helped crab pickers to organize in the early 1980s. "Then they could leave again at four to take their Mom to the doctor." Crab pickers have protested workplace policies by vacating the factory for "extended cigarette breaks."

Sea Safari, the crab house where Viola Davis works, is especially notorious for mistreating workers. Employees have complained regularly about harassment, unhealthy conditions, and unfair layoffs. The U.S. Department of Labor fined the company for failing to pay the minimum wage and for using child labor.

By the late 1980s, conditions were so bad that many local blacks preferred to commute 30 miles to other crab houses or fast-food restaurants rather than work at Sea Safari. Unable to recruit enough local pickers, the company received support from an unexpected source — the U.S. Department of Labor. Under the H-2B program, Sea Safari simply declared a "shortage" of domestic labor and began importing Mexican workers. The result was fewer hours for local women like Viola Davis, and more workplace control for the company.

To make ends meet, Davis works a second job as a nurse's assistant at Pungo District Hospital. "I work from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. at the hospital, then I come home," she says. "My youngest child is a diabetic, so I get her up, give her her shot, and get her ready for school. I get to Sea Safari about 8:30 and knock off about noon. When I get home, I take a nice long shower, take a couple of Advil, and then sleep about four hours. That's all I need to keep going. With children, you just got to push yourself to do it."

TIME CLOCKS AND CONTROL

Sea Safari is "more or less typical," says David Cecelski, who recently investigated the industry in the Pamlico Sound area of North Carolina. "Local workers

are not being fired and replaced by Mexican workers, but their hours and shifts are being reduced. Since they are paid by the pound, most local women can't get enough hours to make a living wage."

Workers who don't make minimum wage often quit, or are fired by their employers. Capt'n Neill's Seafood in Columbia, North Carolina had no problem recruiting local labor when it opened for business in 1987. Unemployment in Tyrrell County consistently ranks among the highest in the state, and local workers gladly accepted minimum wage jobs during a six-week trial period.

But all that changed when the trial period ended. "For the first couple of weeks the company paid the minimum wage," says Priscilla Ricard of the Tyrrell County Economic Improvement Council. "But after that they paid by the pound." Disappointed by the low wages and poor conditions, local workers drifted away, often commuting more than 50 miles to service jobs in motels and restaurants. Capt'n Neill's declared a shortage of local labor, and hired more than 50 Mexican workers under the H-2B program.

Observers also say the state has helped the industry create the illusion of a labor "shortage" by fostering racial and sexual segregation in crab houses. Local offices of the state Employment Security Commission (ESC), for example, reportedly grant white workers unemployment benefits even when jobs are available at crab houses. When Carl Doerter applied for H-2B certification, the ESC office in Hyde County wrote a letter attesting that there was "very little in the way of labor for industry needs." The local unemployment rate in Hyde County is currently 13.5 percent.

Replacing local employees with Mexican workers gives owners more than a source of cheap labor — it gives them greater control over the entire workforce. Gone are the flexible work hours and wildcat labor protests organized by Viola Davis and her co-workers. The arrival of Mexican workers was accompanied by time clocks and strict breaks. Since crab house owners control the housing and off-hours of H-2B employees, they are ensured a ready supply of workers at a moment's notice.

Such complete control has led to widespread abuse. Mexican workers at both Capt'n Carl's in Scranton and

Capt'n Neill's in Columbia tell similar stories of mistreatment. According to Ramon Ramos of Texas Rural Legal Aid, who interviewed workers at both plants, the women started picking crabs each morning before dawn, but were never allowed to see their own time cards. They were paid less than minimum wage, and the owners kept their passports "to prevent the workers from skipping out on them."

Living conditions were crowded and smelly. The housing provided by Capt'n Carl's "seemed a bit raunchy," Ramos reported after visiting the factory. "It was right above the processing plant, on the water's edge, and didn't look too healthy."

Carl Doerter disputes such descriptions. "This is the best migrant housing in the state of North Carolina," he boasted to one reporter. Whatever the conditions, it may well be the most expensive housing in the state. Last year, Doerter packed 30 women into 15 tiny, windowless cubicles and charged them each \$25 a week for rent — pocketing \$3,000 a month in rent money for one large room divided by particle board and curtains. Officials are investigating whether Doerter is charging too much for rent.

Doerter insists that he confines his workers to the barracks for their own safety. Some of his employees are as young as 16. "These girls have never been out of the Mexican villages where they live," he told the *Raleigh News and Observer*. "They can easily be beguiled and used by wolves. I made a vow to their parents that I would protect them."

To many workers, however, Doerter's paternal promise belied his true intentions. Alicia Asuna says she remembers one night when Doerter came into the communal kitchen. "We were having a little party for ourselves," she says. "One woman was playing with him and inviting him to dance. He laughed and went over to turn out the lights. He called her and told her to come over and was making obscene movements. She told him to go to hell." Other women report that Doerter offered them more money if they would sleep with him, and say he deported one worker who refused.

HOURS AND POUNDS

Fifteen Mexican women are suing Doerter and others in federal court in Maryland, saying they were paid less than mini-

mum wage, forced to live in substandard living conditions, and "held in virtual involuntary servitude." Doerter acted as labor broker for the crab house named in the lawsuit. The U.S. Secretary of Labor has also filed a complaint against Capt'N Carl's for withholding back pay and for failing to pay overtime.

Pay stubs show that the company paid workers on a piece rate. Under the "Hours" column, Doerter recorded the number of pounds of crab each worker picked that week. Although most employees worked at least 60 hours a week, they seldom collected more than \$50 in wages.

"While I began slowly, I was among the faster pickers at the end," Alicia Asuna swore on a Labor Department affidavit. "I'd pick 33 to 34 pounds a day." But even at that rate, Asuna seldom made much money after deductions for rent and other expenses. "I left because I was not making enough money to have anything to send home," she added. "Only twice did I send money orders home."

Georgina Ramirez told investigators that "one week we worked from 3:30 a.m. until 6 p.m. — four days in a row. We told Carl we were tired. We couldn't keep working these hours. He said from then on we'd stop between 2:30 and 3:30."

Workers say Doerter and his recruiter, Monica Del Crois, told them to lie to inspectors about their hours and wages. "Carl and Monica got all of us together and said inspectors would come around," recalls Brenda Cota. "They told us what to say. If the inspector spoke English, we were to tell them we didn't speak English. If they spoke Spanish, we were to say we worked 40 hours a week. Carl said if he were fined, he would make us pay for it out of our paychecks."

Brenda Cota and Georgina Ramirez

say Doerter fired them for protesting the long hours and low pay. "Carl told us we would have to leave, but we had no place to go," Ramirez says. "So Carl drove us to Raleigh, put us on a bus, and gave the driver instructions in English." The women had no idea where they were being sent.

A Mexican passenger heard Doerter tell the driver not to let the women off the bus. She advised them to stay in the area and to contact friends. They got off the

her own children back in Mexico. She wears a t-shirt from work under a worn flowered apron and fingers a thin gold necklace which her boyfriend gave her for Valentine's Day.

Since she filed the lawsuit, Ramirez often has nightmares about Doerter. "I am afraid of him," she says. "My mother told me he might hire someone to hurt me. Brenda tells me to forget about it, but I cannot."

Crab pickers may have good reason to be afraid, especially as competition in the seafood business heats up. Demand for blue crabs is rising steadily, and the industry is profiting from the boom. A pound of crabmeat can cost \$15 at the supermarket — 10 times what workers are paid to process it.

But the U.S. supply is threatened by overfishing, pollution, and coastal development. As overseas competition from China and Mexico increases, industry insiders are predicting a "shake out" that will bankrupt several U.S. firms in the next few years. With tougher times ahead, crab houses in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and Louisiana

are likely to speed up their transition from local crab pickers to H-2B workers.

But some observers say the industry would be better off if it organized a stable, domestic workforce instead of importing less experienced foreign labor. The problem, local workers say, is that crab picking simply doesn't pay enough to attract good employees.

"To me, it seems the slow pickers need to be put on the hour instead of being paid by the pound," says veteran picker Viola Davis. "They aren't going to make enough right at first. A lot of young girls get that check at the end of the week and see \$50 or \$60, and they



THE LABOR DEPARTMENT HAS FILED A COMPLAINT AGAINST CAPT'N CARL'S SEAFOOD FOR MISTREATING MEXICAN WORKERS, MANY OF THEM TEENAGERS.

bus in Fayetteville and made their way back to Raleigh. "Fortunately, we had the number of friends who had worked with Capt'N Carl," says Ramirez. "We called them and found out the same thing had happened to them."

SHAKE OUT

Ramirez is still in North Carolina, waiting for the case against Capt'N Carl's to go to trial. She stays with friends in a Mexican community and works at a textile plant, where she earns \$6.70 an hour.

Sitting in a crowded mobile home, she comforts her friend's son, younger than

think they should have a lot more. So then they don't come in as much."

Pam DiStefano of Farm Workers Legal Services says the abuse will continue unless employers are required to provide written contracts and pay minimum wage to all workers, local or foreign. Until then, she says, crab house owners will

continue to use the H-2B program to treat workers like machinery.

"They don't recognize that workers are human beings with families and obligations," she says. "Instead, they just import people from Mexico, a country so poor that people will work for anything. They bring in people who will work and

work and work like mules until they're spent — and then they replace them with the next 16-year-old who's willing to try her luck." □

Lane Windham is an editorial assistant and Eric Bates is managing editor of Southern Exposure.

SHUCKERS AND PEELERS

By David Cecelski

In 1911 Marie Kriss, a seven-year-old Polish girl, shucked oysters on the Mississippi coast for 25 cents a day. Sixty years later she still recalled with fondness the savory aromas of the breads, kielbasa, and potato dumplings that her mother prepared in their migrant camp.

Cooked on outdoor ovens that her father handcrafted from clay and straw, these traditional Polish foods had made the foreign saltmarsh smell like home. But their memory had not left Kriss with any delusions about her childhood visits to the South. "It was," she remembered, "like slavery days."

Mexican *campesinas* are not the first migrant workers to labor in the Southern seafood industry. From 1890 to the 1920s, several thousand European immigrants traveled to the

region from Baltimore each winter to work in oyster and shrimp canneries. Like the Kriss family, most had emigrated from Poland. But Bohemian, Italian, Serbian, Dalmatian, German, and Irish immigrants also made the journey, work-

ing in dozens of remote fishing villages from Swan Quarter, North Carolina to Houma, Louisiana.

Before 1890, the oyster industry in the South was relatively small. But as Chesapeake Bay oysters were depleted in the late 19th century, the great canning companies based in Baltimore began to open branch plants along the Gulf and South Atlantic coasts. Recruited largely from the impoverished Baltimore canning districts of Fells Point and Canton, European immigrants worked in the South for three to six months every winter. They returned north in the spring to pick crops in Delaware and Maryland, finishing in time for the peak season at the oyster, vegetable, and fruit canneries clustered on Boston Street in Baltimore.

Photography Collections, University of Maryland Baltimore County



PHOTOGRAPHER LEWIS HINES FOUND SEVEN-YEAR-OLD ROSIE SHUCKING OYSTERS AT A CANNERY IN BLUFFTON, SOUTH CAROLINA IN 1913.

The arrival of the “Baltimore workers” along the Southern coast grew into a seasonal rite of passage as regular as the late summer mullet runs or the autumnal shift in prevailing winds. In the early years, though, local residents found the migrants strange and exotic. The *Biloxi Herald* noted on January 11, 1890 that Gulf Coast residents stared with open mouths at their first sight of the migrant workers. The newcomers wore peasant clothes, spoke little or no English, and had Old World bearings which — in the case of the Polish workers — were etched by years of famine and Russian despotism.

For the new arrivals, the South must have been lonely and no less strange. The Polish workers had left Baltimore neighborhoods where they were often in the majority. There they could read Polish newspapers, patronize Polish stores, and confess to Polish-speaking priests, easing their sense of dislocation from their homeland and its customs. But in Mississippi and the Carolinas they found no such community. “They were,” in the words of one Mississip-

pian, “only Bohicks” in a Jim Crow world not disposed to subtle distinctions. Many inevitably longed for St. Stanislaus Kostka, the Catholic church in Fells Point around which much of Polish life revolved, as well as for the social clubs and self-help associations spawned by the Polish National Alliance and Polish Home.

Nevertheless, the newcomers struggled to maintain a sense of community in the South. On Sundays a rosary and the *Pasterka* substituted for mass at “St. Stan’s.” Polish music, festivals, and sacraments were all transplanted to the company settlements, where local citizens occasionally joined the celebrations. “On Saturday nights,” recalled an elderly Biloxi resident who visited with the Poles in his youth, “they played accordion music and had dances, right in the camps.” Another Biloxian remembered attending a Polish wedding during the oyster season, as well as a traditional Polish wake — an all-night celebration of the dead’s passage into Heaven — for an oyster shucker and her baby who died in childbirth.

STRIKES AND ALLIES

Workers needed these communal bonds to face the rigors of migrant labor in the canneries. Six days a week, in damp sheds, the European immigrants and their children pried apart steamed oysters for twelve- and thirteen-hour shifts. Often they started at three o’clock in the morning. Observing their “hard work — deadening in its monotony, exhausting physically, irregular,” documentary photographer Lewis Hine was “reminded forcibly of sweatshop scenes in large cities.” Children like Marie Kriss might shuck only 25-cents worth a day, but even adults needed stamina and skill to take home five or six dollars a week.

Working conditions were also dangerous. Paid “by the pot,” oyster shuckers worked hard and fast. They frequently cut themselves with the wet, razor-like shells and powerful knives. In 1919, investigators from the U.S. Children’s Bureau discovered that three-fourths of cannery families reported a recent injury. They also documented chronic “weariness and back-

ache and aching feet ... from the constant standing and bending, and illness from getting wet and cold.”

Shrimp peeling caused the worst pains. Within a few hours the crustacean’s natural acidity — potent enough to corrode canning tins and rot work gloves — scorched fingers till they bled. The immigrants regularly soaked their hands in alum to ease the pain, and in peroxide to preempt infections. The Children’s Bureau investigators found that few

Photography Collections, University of Maryland Baltimore County



OYSTER SHUCKERS IN DUNBAR, LOUISIANA IN 1911 WORKED IN DANGEROUS CONDITIONS — NOT UNLIKE THOSE OF MODERN-DAY CRAB HOUSES.

shrimp peelers could work more than two days without taking a day off to allow their hands to heal.

Child labor — usually legal — was widespread and often critical for family survival. In 1911 and 1916, Lewis Hine photographed hundreds of immigrant children under the age of 12 working in shrimp and oyster canneries in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. While fathers and older boys worked on the dredge boats, mothers brought younger children to the cannery, carrying infants in cradles fashioned from crude boxes. The smaller children cared for the babies and shucked oysters when they nursed and napped. The older girls often returned to the camp once or twice a day to prepare coffee and bread to carry back to their families. "Everybody works here," an 11-year-old shucker named George Boshorvisky told a Biloxi visitor in 1913. "I know I must help because we're poor."

Company housing was no better than the working conditions. In Biloxi, Marie Kriss and her family slept 10 people in two unheated rooms. In Port Royal, South Carolina, 50 oyster shuckers stayed in a row of shacks, eight or more to a room. Open sewage, vermin, and bad drinking water were prevalent. In Swan Quarter shuckers actually lived on the second floor of the cannery, which reeked of foul oysters.

Abusive *padrones*, or crew bosses, kept workers in virtual peonage, sometimes forcing them to buy all their food from company stores. The complete control over workers was the greatest advantage to hiring migrants over local residents. "We blow

the whistle and they have to come," a cannery owner explained, "else we'll run 'em out of the camps and refuse to pay their fare back."

Migrant workers periodically fought back. Between 1908 and 1915, waves of wildcat strikes swept many Southern canneries. In the best documented protests, oyster workers struck for higher wages and more regular work at camps in Biloxi, Mississippi, Morgan City and Houma, Louisiana, and Apalachicola, Florida. In 1913, for example, Polish oyster shuckers in Morgan City twice walked out of the cannery of Dunbar, Lopez, and Dukate, and workers on the oyster dredgers refused to return their boats from the reefs until the company raised their wages.

In their struggles to improve working and living conditions, migrant workers often found local allies, especially among Southern women. During the First World War, for instance, Mrs. J.W. Dampf and other Civic League activists in Pass Christian, Mississippi campaigned successfully to have the local cannery improve migrant housing and provide a playroom for children at work. In 1919

they also charged the town clerk with sexually harassing six cannery workers. Similarly, a cannery foreman in the midst of a Morgan City strike was outraged when "people from the village" had workers "come to town and gave them bread and other food."

Such gestures of solidarity helped break the isolation that enabled canneries to exploit migrant workers. As communities extended their support to migrants in the late 1910s and early 1920s, the families of Marie Kriss and other Eastern European immigrants began to settle permanently along the Southern coast. Many of them still live in the fishing communities where their ancestors once worked — and where migrant women from Mexico have inherited their struggle for better working conditions. □

David Cecelski is a research fellow at the Institute for Southern Studies. This essay is written in memory of his grandparents, Nana and Dziadzi, with special thanks to Richard Cecelski, the Biloxi Public Library, and Dr. Linda Shopes for sharing her pioneering work on Baltimore cannery workers.

Photography Collections, University of Maryland Baltimore County

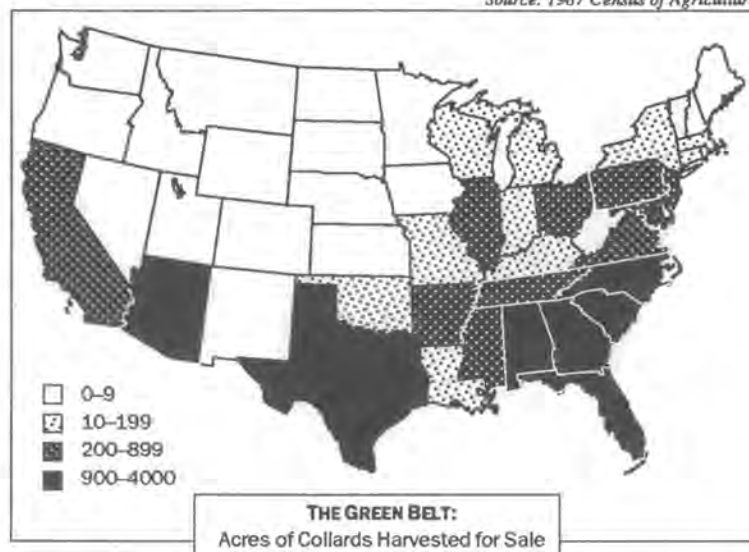


HINES CALLED THE HOUSING CONDITIONS IN THE DUNBAR MIGRANT CAMP "BETTER THAN AVERAGE."

Collard Greens

By Mary Lee Kerr

Source: 1987 Census of Agriculture



Perhaps more than any foods save corn bread and barbecue, collard greens have come to symbolize the distinctive tastes of the South. The tough, broad leaves of the collard fed the region through slavery and civil war, and the inexpensive vegetable still serves as a staple on Southern farms and dinner plates.

A member of the cabbage family rich in vitamin A, the collard has nourished humans since the days of ancient Greece. The vegetable eventually wound its way across Europe and through England and Africa to the American colonies. Southern slaves cultivated collards to supplement their diets, and wealthy planters and poor whites alike survived on the hardy greens after Sherman decimated food supplies during the Civil War.

A cheap vegetable with a long growing season, the collard, along with cornpone and fatback, still serves as a standby for many poor rural families — especially during hard times. Even “pot likker,” a rich broth left over from boiling collards with salted pork, is considered a nutritious delicacy and aphrodisiac.

“Collard greens have always been my number-one item,” says James Shackelford, a farmer in Greene County, North Carolina. “We have collards when we can’t have anything else.”

According to Jimmy Green, executive director of the North Carolina Coalition of Farm and Rural Families, greens provide year-round crops and a steady source of income for small farmers. North Carolina, in fact, is home to more collard-growing farms than any other state, and the South harvests a whopping 70 percent of the nation’s 15,201 acres of collards.

Georgia tills the largest acreage of collards for sale, and six other Southern states rank among the top ten producers. The region also leads the nation in acreage devoted to other greens, farming 68 percent of all turnip greens, 53 percent of mustard greens, and 54 percent of kale.

Its economic and dietary importance has made the collard a true symbol of the South. Jazz great Thelonious Monk, a North Carolina native, sported a collard in his lapel when he played New York clubs, and North Carolina playwright Paul Green commemorated the leafy vegetable in a “Collards and Culture”

symposium in 1950.

The mythic status of the collard is renewed each year at several local festivals. Gaston, South Carolina held its 10th-annual celebration of the vegetable last year, raising \$4,000 for the town recreation center and museum. Jennifer Poole, co-chair of the event, says festival-goers consumed over half a ton of collards — along with 2,000 squares of cornbread, 100 pounds of black-eyed peas, 3,000 yams, 500 pounds of ham, and 100 gallons of tea.

The town of Ayden on the North Carolina coast hosted its 17th-annual collard festival last year — a six-day affair that drew 15,000 people. The highlight was the yearly collard-eating contest; according to the rules, victory goes to whoever eats the most greens in 30 minutes and “then keeps them down long enough to receive the trophy and prize money.” The world record was set in 1984 by Mort Hurst, who swallowed 7.5 pounds of boiled greens.

The Ayden festival also inspired two professors at East Carolina University to publish *Leaves of Green*, a collection of 129 “collard poems.” Sixteen-year-old Kai-I Chung of Tarboro, North Carolina conveyed her distaste in a ballad entitled “Algae-Green Scum,” and M.L. Poole of Greensboro penned the shortest entry: “I think/They stink.”

But Cicely Browne of Raleigh eloquently captured the regional affection for the plant in her poem “Collard Rhyme”:

From age to age the South has hollered
The praises of the toothsome collard.
Our parents’ precepts we have follered,
And countless messes we have swallered.
When times were hard, a single dollar’d
Buy ample potfuls of the collard.
Full many a happy hog has wallered
In luscious leaves of wilted collard.
Yes, keep your cordon bleu — By Gollard!
I’d trade it all for one big collard! □

Mary Lee Kerr is a research associate with the Institute for Southern Studies. Leila Finn contributed to this article.

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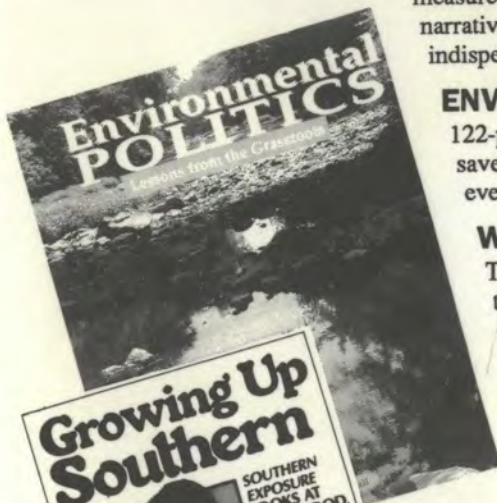


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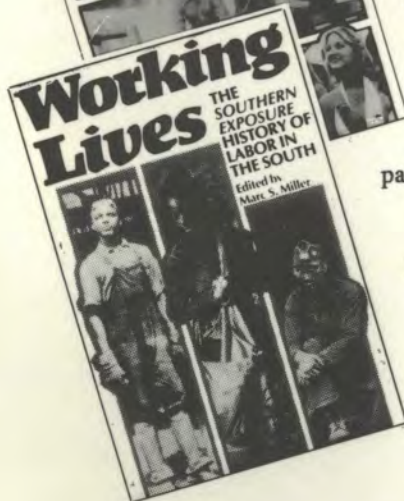
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