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POLITICS AND CULTURE OF THE SOUTH

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- 25 Shut Up & Shut Down** ♦ *By Pat Arnow*  
Censored and defunded, artists in the South still hold their heads up.
- 27 Portfolio** ♦ Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art - Winston-Salem, North Carolina  
Maxine Henderson - Murfreesboro, Tennessee ♦ Mona Waterhouse - Mobile, Alabama  
♦ Isabel Zamora - Fort Worth, Texas ♦ The Road Company - Johnson City, Tennessee
- 37 White Only on Main Street** ♦ *By Emilye Crosby*  
When Mississippi Cultural Crossroads painted a mural, some Port Gibson townspeople saw red.
- 42 Out Loud** ♦ *By Jo Carson*  
The people of Colquitt, Georgia, are facing their own stories.
- 48 Not Whistling Dixie** ♦ *By Meridith Helton*  
Arts activists Nayo Watkins and John O'Neal talk about making art for social change.
- 50 Resources**  
Groups to keep freedom of expression alive.

## Features

- 5 Robert Franklin Williams** ♦ *By Timothy Tyson*  
When the author of *Negroes with Guns* died recently, the world took note — except in his home of North Carolina.
- 13 Fanning the Flames** ♦ *By Ron Nixon*  
The investigators seem to be missing what's right under their noses — who is responsible for church burnings and other acts of racial violence in the South.
- 19 Burning Memories** ♦ *By David Cecelski*  
A historian finds undercover documents about North Carolina's Ku Klux Klan in the 1960s.

## Departments

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>2 FROM THE EDITOR</b></p> <p><b>3 LETTERS</b></p> <p><b>6 ROUNDUP</b></p> <p><b>12 FOLLOWUP</b><br/><i>Hamlet Casualties Continue</i><br/><i>By Betsy Barton</i></p> <p><b>51 BLUEPRINT for Change</b><br/><i>Community Newspapers</i><br/><i>By Eric Goldman</i></p> <p><b>54 JUNEBUG: Southern Exposure's Storyteller</b><br/><i>Bo Willie Strikes Again</i><br/><i>By Junebug Jabbo Jones</i></p> | <p><b>56 VOICES from the South</b><br/><i>On Race, Rage, and the Underclass</i><br/><i>By Mansfield B. Frazier</i></p> <p><b>59 REVIEWS of Southern Media</b><br/><i>It Comes from the People</i><br/><i>By Jeanette Stokes</i></p> <p><b>62 STILL THE SOUTH</b><br/><i>Whiskey</i><br/><i>By Mary Lee Kerr</i></p> |
|--|---|

# SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

WINTER 1996

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From the Editor

We aren't exactly losing our freedom of expression in this country, but there are few places to use it. More and more media are falling into fewer and fewer hands, and those hands aren't likely to challenge the status quo. Our job at *Southern Exposure* is to cover stories that other media don't want to discuss, to challenge accepted ways of thinking, to get ideas out that others are unwilling — or unable — to express.

That is why in this issue we celebrate freedom of expression by featuring intrepid artists in the South who refuse to be shut up by censorship or shut down because of tight funding.

In this issue we also feature articles that bring to light materials you won't likely find in the mainstream media. Investigative reporter Ron Nixon, who is our associate editor, spent much of the past year looking into black church burnings in the South and uncovered inadequate official counts, explanations, and investigations.

Historian David Cecelski uncovered State Bureau of Investigation reports on Ku Klux Klan activities in North Carolina in the 1960s. Taken together, these articles show the daunting racism that has infused the region's culture — past and present.

We're about to enter our 25th year of publication. Over the years, we have exposed nefarious doings of businesses and industries that mistreat workers and pollute the land, water, and air. We have featured people's stories that simply would not be told anywhere else. A 1992 investigation showed who owned Southern newspapers, radio and television stations: We found that corporate giants controlled most major media, and that was before many of the big mergers.

We have a lot to do to keep our independent voice heard above the roar of that mainstream. As a nonprofit organization with a small staff that is always trying to do too much, it's a hard job. But recently we opened up our new Web Page, and with it, can reach a wider audience (and as more people gain access to the Web, this tool will prove more useful).

It is because of volunteers and (largely unpaid) interns that we are able to do as much as we do. Betty Meeler, who was a volunteer proofreader for *Southern Exposure* for several years, designed the Web page for us. Other volunteers have put in many hours to put together a catalog, an index of all the years of the magazine, and a brochure. They have helped research. We feature their names on the masthead, but otherwise they get little recognition.

It is a privilege to work with these thoughtful, dedicated volunteers, with our talented staff, and with writers, photographers, and artists from around the region. They make it clear that many people are willing to work to keep a free exchange of ideas possible.

— Pat Arnow

Our World Wide Web address: [http://sunsite.unc.edu/Southern\\_Exposure](http://sunsite.unc.edu/Southern_Exposure)

**"DIXIFICTION OF AMERICA" DRAWS VOLLEYS FROM SONS OF CONFEDERATE VETERANS**

Forwarded Message:  
 Subj: Heritage Violation:  
 Institute for Southern Studies Trashes  
 Confederacy and SCV Compatriots  
 To: SCVEcho@aol.com

The so-called Institute for Southern Studies publishes an impressive, glossy quarterly journal called "Southern Exposure: Politics and Culture of the South." In spite of the names, the journal and the institute are viciously anti-Southern.

With the SCV vocally defending many diverse minority groups, perhaps we ought to remember that charity begins at home. Perhaps the National Headquarters ought to issue a statement supporting the reputations of SCV compatriots [Trent] Lott, [Patrick] Buchanan, [Jesse] Helms, and [Strom] Thurmond who have been maligned by this national publication; and denouncing "Southern Exposure" as not being "Southern" at all, whose "exposure" is limited to the bigoted publishers' own posteriors.

Larry Beane  
 Commander, J.E.B. Stuart Camp 1506, SCV  
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What is it in your character that causes you to have such a dim view of the land of Dixie? Have you printed all this trash in your magazine about the Confederate States of America and their Cause as a result of your being deprived of Southern Culture or Southern Heritage? Is it that you have no knowledge of your grandparents or what they stood for? Have you been there in the city of violence and corruption long enough to have joined those Liberals over at Duke University who feel that they are the most learned and most intelligent humans on earth and have the solution to all the world's problems? What have us Southerners ever done to you to cause this condemnation of the South? Is it that you are just selling magazines and like



SONS OF CONFEDERATE VETERANS MEMBER TRENT LOTT

most journalists today, you just need a whipping boy?

Lawrence Watts Jr.  
 LWattsjr@aol.com

I sure liked the cover of your fall edition.

But the insides need a lot of help. Why do you make such hateful attacks on good people? The Senators you mentioned all have been absolute political model American Citizens in a time where Dennis Rodman and Bill Clinton are our role models. May God have mercy on our children.

Please search yourself for the truth that can and will save this great nation.

Thanks,  
 John Homman - ausc@ix.netcom.com

I believe if you check real history, you will find that the South did not want to conquer the North, but simply to achieve Independence. That's why the real name for the war is the War for Southern Independence. I know of course, that you are not interested in facts but only in changing history as only the Communists do so well. I hope everyone that reads your rag doesn't fall for the lying spin you put on history and the facts.

Pete Benfield  
 Sons of Confederate Veterans  
 kc5gxc@gw.n5uxt.ampr.org

*The South may not have wanted to "conquer the North" back in the 1860s, but the anti-big government, anti-tax, states' rights sensibility that dominated the powers-that-be in the South has certainly dominated the national political scene in recent years. However, we plan to persist in calling the conflict the Civil War. — Ed.*

We are not invading the North. They are just finally seeing the light. The light at the end of a Southern tunnel, and I for one say welcome, y'all! Come on in.

Terry Boles  
 Dallas, Texas  
 TARHEEL72@aol.com

I would like ordering information to get a couple of copies of the Vol. XXIV No. 3 Fall 1996 issue. It is making the Neo-Confederates hopping mad. Since I

study them I want a couple of copies of the articles.

The Republican party has strong Neo-Confederate connections. I wrote a paper on it. Currently the Southern League has devoted an entire homepage to denounce my research, including an entire article of mine.

Crawfish  
<http://www.dixienet.org/shomepg/crawfish.html>



SONS OF CONFEDERATE VETERANS MEMBER JESSE HELMS

**NEXT, GLOBAL DOMINATION**

Greetings from the old world. I'm thinking about starting my own magazine... something to the tune of *Eastern Exposure*.

Noha  
 Cairo, Egypt  
 Noha Ragab was a 1996 summer intern at *Southern Exposure*. — Ed.

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**Philanthropy Journal**  
OF NORTH CAROLINA

# Robert Franklin Williams: A Warrior For Freedom, 1925-1996

By Timothy B. Tyson

When Rosa Parks spoke at Robert Williams' funeral in Monroe, North Carolina on October 22, 1996, she said those who marched with Martin Luther King Jr. in Alabama admired Williams "for his courage and his commitment to freedom. The work that he did should go down in history and never be forgotten." But the words of this champion of nonviolent protest may surprise those who know Williams believed in "armed self-reliance" and was "a very good friend" of Malcolm X.

Born in the small town of Monroe in 1925, Robert Williams was raised on stories from his former-slave grandmother Ellen and tales of his grandfather Sikes, who stumped North Carolina for the Republican Party during Reconstruction and published a newspaper called *The People's Voice*. Before she died, Ellen Williams gave young Robert the rifle which his grandfather had wielded against white terrorists at the turn of the century.

Williams came face-to-face with racism early on. As an 11-year-old in 1936, he saw a white policeman, Jesse Helms, Sr. beat an African-American woman to the ground. Williams watched in terror as North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms' father hit the woman and "dragged her off to the nearby jailhouse, her dress up over her head, the same way that a cave man would club and drag his sexual prey."

During World War II, Williams went North to find work. He fought in the Detroit Riot of 1943, when white mobs killed dozens of black citizens. Drafted in 1944, Robert served for 18 months, fighting for freedom in a segregated Army. He returned to Monroe and in 1947 married Mabel Robinson, who shared his commitment to social justice and African-American freedom.

As president of the Monroe NAACP in the late 1950s, Williams watched as members of his community were denied basic

rights, tormented by the KKK, and ignored in the courts. Seeing no other recourse, he began to advocate "armed self-reliance" in the face of the white terrorism. Members of his NAACP chapter protected their homes against the Klan with rifles and sandbag fortifications.

Williams' advocacy of violence made him into an example at the 1959 NAACP convention. He had been removed from his post as Monroe NAACP president, and he listened at the convention as 40 speakers denounced him. He responded that he had called for self-defense, not acts of war: "We as men should stand up as men and protect our women and children. I am a man, and I will walk upright as a man should. I WILL NOT CRAWL." His logic compelled Martin Luther King, Jr. to acknowledge that, "when the Negro uses force in self-defense he does not forfeit support — he may even win it, by the courage and self-respect it reflects."

As the debate over violence and non-violence raged in 1961, King dispatched "Freedom Riders" to organize a nonviolent campaign in Williams' hometown. But white mobs caused the nonviolent crusade in Monroe to disintegrate into violence, and Robert and Mabel were forced to flee to Cuba to escape the hundreds of FBI agents who combed the countryside for them. One of the agents reported his frustrations to J. Edgar Hoover: "Subject has become something of a 'John Brown' to Negroes around Monroe, and they will do anything for him."

In Cuba, Williams wrote *Negroes With Guns*, which was a pivotal influence on Huey P. Newton, founder of the Black Panther Party. He and Mabel aired a radio show and continued to publish their

Photo by John L. Williams



ROBERT AND MABEL WILLIAMS AT THEIR HOME IN BALDWIN, MICHIGAN, A FEW WEEKS BEFORE ROBERT WILLIAMS' DEATH.

newspaper, *The Crusader*, for thousands of subscribers. In 1965, Williams moved his family to the People's Republic of China, where they lived among the upper circles of the Chinese government during the Cultural Revolution.

When President Richard Nixon's administration launched secret contacts with China in the late 1960s, Williams bartered his knowledge of the Chinese government for safe passage home and a Ford Foundation grant to work at the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan. He played a significant role in the historic opening of diplomatic relations between the United States and China.

In his battle against Hodgkin's disease, Williams was as brave as he had ever been. His memoirs, *While God Lay Sleeping: The Autobiography of Robert F. Williams*, tell the compelling story of a man who risked his life for democracy and a humanitarian vision that was rooted in the finest traditions of African-American striving. Above the desk where he wrote hangs the ancient rifle that was a gift from his grandmother.

§

"1957: Swimming Pool Showdown" by Robert F. Williams appeared in *Southern Exposure*, summer 1980 in an issue on the Ku Klux Klan

Timothy B. Tyson is a North Carolina native and an assistant professor of Afro-American Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison. His forthcoming book, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*, will be published by University of North Carolina Press.

**BEAUTIFUL DOLL**

DURHAM, N.C. — Using four small plastic dolls from a local toy store, two black and two white, a 15-year-old high school student recreated a historic study on

white. Each child was asked to identify the doll's color and say which was nice, bad, fun to play with, etc. Clark found that many of the black children found the white doll more attractive and picked it as the one that

Photo by Peter Schumacher/Herald-Sun



FRANKYE RILEY SHOWS THE DOLLS SHE USED RECREATING THE FAMOUS BLACK DOLL STUDY.

black children's self-esteem. For five months, Frankye Riley spent school holidays and after-school hours interviewing three-to-seven year-olds at local elementary schools and day care centers to find out how they viewed the black and white dolls.

Riley chose the topic for a science fair after hearing about a historic research project conducted in the 1930s and '40s. "During middle school we watched the video, *Separate but Equal*, and they talked about the study," she says. "I wanted to see if African-American children have better self-esteem today than in the 1950s and since desegregation of the schools."

In social psychologist Kenneth B. Clark's study, black children were asked a series of questions about four dolls, two black and two

looked like themselves. The study seemed to indicate that black children developed a negative self-concept based on race very early in life.

Kenneth Clark's study was later cited in the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court case as evidence that racial discrimination and segregation have negative effects on the development of black children's self-esteem.

"I decided to recreate it to see if the responses had changed," says Riley.

Following Clark's study as nearly as possible, Riley interviewed 177 black children, asking the same questions about their preferences for black or white dolls. She found that the percentages had improved, but not as much as she hoped with only about a 10 percent or

**COMPARISON OF THE RILEY AND CLARK STUDIES**

Identify	Doll Identified	1996	1940s
Looks like you	Black doll	79%	66%
	White doll	21%	33%
	Don't know	0%	1%
Like to play with	Black doll	51%	33%
	White doll	49%	67%
	Don't know	0%	0%
The nice doll	Black doll	50%	38%
	White doll	50%	59%
	Don't know	0%	2%
Looks bad	Black doll	49%	59%
	White doll	51%	17%
	Don't know	0%	25%
Nice color	Black doll	56%	38%
	White doll	44%	60%
	Don't know	0%	2%

Black children ages 3 to 7 were presented with one black and one white doll and asked to reply to questions about the dolls in both the 1940s and in 1996 studies. Although Riley found more positive reactions to the black doll by black children in 1996, she had hoped to find greater changes.

less change on most answers. Half of the children found the black doll to be nice and fun to play with, and a little more than half (56 percent) said it was a nice color. But after 50 years, 44 percent of the black children still said the white doll was the nicer color and 49 percent said the black doll "looks bad."

"I thought there would be a great change, but really there wasn't much at all," says Riley. "I was disappointed at what I found. The way African-American children perceive themselves in society is basically the same."

There have been other replications of Clark's study between the time of the original experiment and Frankye Riley's present day re-creation. For example, a

study by Powell-Hopson and Hopson in 1988 initially suggested that black children had a preference for white dolls but after a half hour of positive stories about black dolls, two-thirds of black and white pre-schoolers preferred the black dolls. This study questioned whether the preferences reflect individual choices or societal influences.

Riley acknowledges that there are many factors which influence the development of a child's self-esteem. "Environment, school, parents, media, friends, and teachers that influence development," says Riley. "These factors as well as desegregation contributed to the positive improvement in the self-esteem of the African-American children."

Her initiative in under-



taking the study has put Riley on the path to a promising research career. During the spring of 1996 she won first place in the North Carolina Student Academy of Science statewide competition and took first place in the Navy-Marine Corps Distinguished Achievement Award competition, placing her in the running for a \$16,000 college scholarship. A University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill professor who is doing similar research has already invited the high school sophomore to work with him during her college years.

"I have an interest in this topic, and I'm sure I'll explore it in the future," she says, "but I have plenty of time to decide."

— Ann Duffy & Mary Lee Kerr

## O'WHERE?

**AUSTIN, Texas** — Though the nation's most notorious atheist and members of her family disappeared more than a year ago under mysterious circumstances, no one seems to be looking very hard for them.

American Atheists, Inc., founder Madalyn Murray O'Hair, her granddaughter Robin Murray-O'Hair, and her son Jon Garth Murray have been missing since September 28, 1995, when they were scheduled to protest the Pope's visit to New York.

The trio left unused plane tickets, and Robin Murray-O'Hair's abandoned car turned up this October at the Austin airport. There is no scarcity of explanations for their disappearance. Media have speculated that the atheist leaders have been murdered or abducted by religious fanatics, that they fled from the IRS (though a \$1.5 million bill for back taxes had been reduced to \$37,000), and that the three made off to remote locales with company funds.

In September 1996, a year after the disappearance, O'Hair's estranged son, William Murray, head of an organization called Citizens to Restore Voluntary School Prayer, filed a missing person's report, and the Austin police department began investigating. It was on behalf of Murray that his mother had filed a civil suit challenging prayer in the schools in 1963. The result was a historic Supreme Court decision abolishing school-sponsored prayer from American public schools. Murray later rejected his mother's cause and joined the opposition. His daughter Robin, who worked with American Atheists, Inc., was estranged from him and is one of the missing trio.

Austin police department spokesman Mike Burgess said that his depart-

ment hadn't looked into the disappearances earlier because no missing person's report had been filed previous to William Murray's. The Austin police department is handling the O'Hair case unassisted by federal or state agencies.

Orin "Spike" Tyson, acting director of American Atheists, Inc., said that he had not filed a report because Austin police told him that without evidence of a crime, only a family member could submit a missing person's report. And he said that the report filed by William Murray was not a missing person's report but a "report to find," which would entail only "a cursory examination of evidence."

The police department's Burgess told a different story. He said that anyone could file a missing person's report. He also said, "There is no such thing as a report to find." The department is treating the Murray-O'Hair disappearances as a missing person's investigation.

Burgess said so far in the investigation, "there is no evidence to suggest foul play." A search of the abandoned car turned up no evidence of a crime. To keep in check the prevalent belief that a crime is behind the Murray-O'Hair disappearances, Burgess said, "It is not against the law for an adult to be missing." He maintained that the investigation into the disappearance of the famed atheist, her son, and granddaughter, is impartial. "This case is being handled like any other missing person's case," he said.

American Atheists head Tyson disagreed. "If a local preacher came up missing, there would have been police on it right away," he charged.

— Eric Goldman

## WHEELCHAIR UPRISING

**ATLANTA** — Shirley Ailes of Louisville, Kentucky spent election night being arrested for civil disobedience. She was one of about 400 people from all over the country, the majority in



wheelchairs, who stormed the Marriott Marquis Hotel in Atlanta where the convention of the American Health Care Association (AHCA) was being held. Around midnight, 109 disabled people were arrested for camping and blocking doorways, elevators, and escalators.

That night was a sharp contrast to the 38 years of nights that Ailes, who has cerebral palsy, had lived through in nursing homes and state-run "schools" for the disabled. Life in those institutions had become devoid of meaning for her. "I did nothing, I felt nothing, numb, that's all," she says.

The nursing home staff rarely spoke to her and never offered her a choice about how and when her care would be administered. They put her in bed by 8:00 p.m. every night and gave her a shower only once a week. But today she lives in a community where atten-



dants give her the assistance she needs according to her direction. That's why she chose to spend election night protesting at the AHCA convention.

The convention is an annual fall ritual. Members of the disability rights group ADAPT (American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today) converge on whatever city the American Health Care Association chooses for its annual convention.

AHCA is the main lobbyist for the nursing home industry, which ADAPT says derives half of its more than \$60 billion in annual revenues from Medicaid.

ADAPT's primary demand is to eliminate the "institutional bias" inherent in federal Medicaid rules that fills the public money trough for nursing home owners and virtually gives them a blank check. There is no limit to how many tax dollars can be spent maintaining a Medicaid recipient in need of long-term care in a nursing home. States have the option of using the same money to supply people with in-home attendant services if they want to. Yet some states have no home-care options and others are restrictive, often forcing those who need even basic, non-medical care into institutions.

ADAPT leaders say that like any other big business, nursing homes have clout in Washington. Their bread and butter depends on the captive market the institutional bias creates, where the only guaranteed way to receive physical assistance is through institutionalization. If states were forced to give everyone an option of living at home or in a nursing home, it would cost the industry billions.

AHCA is the industry's mouthpiece, so ADAPTers aim to destroy AHCA's

power by destroying its credibility. Wherever AHCA goes, big negative headlines follow them as ADAPTers carry out intense civil disobedience that often leads to mass arrests. What ADAPTers want is passage of the Community Attendants Services Act, a piece of legislation that would set aside 25 percent of the Medicaid money now spent on nursing homes and redirect it for home care if people choose it. Newt Gingrich agreed for the third time to introduce the Act, and Bill Clinton promises to meet on the issue in early 1997, but ADAPT members know they have to keep the pressure on to ensure passage.

—Mike Ervin

## PEACE HARD TIME

**NEWPORT NEWS, Va.** — Michele Naar-Obed and Rick and Erin Sieber (a father and son) have begun serving their longest prison terms yet. Last year, on the 50th anniversary of the Hiroshima atomic bombing, the group, calling themselves the Jubilee Plowshares, poured blood on the fast-attack submarine, Greenville, at Newport News Shipyard. Two others poured their blood on a Trident II missile at the Lockheed Martin plant in Sunnyvale, California.

The target of their activities, Newport News Shipyard, where the nation's nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers are built, is the largest and most powerful private employer in the state. Within a hundred miles are 82 military bases, stations, and depots, including the world's largest naval base, various headquarters for Air Force, Army, Marine, Navy, and NATO forces, and a weapons base storing hundreds of nuclear warheads. War is the

lifeblood of the community.

Even in the post-cold-war era, war still powers the nation. Defense corporations continue to amass record profits and fund elections, and last year Congress approved funding for stealth bombers despite opposition from the Pentagon. Since two of the largest defense contractors — General Electric and Westinghouse — own NBC and CBS, it has been hard for groups like Plowshares to reach the public.

The Christian Plowshares movement, dedicated to non-violent protest against the continued deployment of weapons of mass destruction, is despised in the Newport News area. The little bit of news coverage is overlaid with hate-filled letters to the

members, referring to the Biblical turning of "swords into plowshares." They employ no violence and ensure that damage to the war machines is minimal — only enough to get them a trial in which their case can be made before the public.

It is still hard to be heard. A group that included Naar-Obed had entered the Newport News Shipyard in Virginia on Good Friday of 1993, poured their blood on the nuclear submarine *Tucson*, and hit the ship with hammers. They charged the government with violating international law by making weapons of mass destruction and handed shipyard workers a written indictment. They welcomed their arrest, wanting the public forum of the

Photo by John Balkwill



**RACHEL KATHLEEN AND HER MOM, MICHELE NAAR-OBED**

court. But in court, most of their questions to witnesses were not allowed, and expert witnesses were not permitted to speak about violations of international law.

Naar-Obed had prepared a statement that she was not allowed to say in court. It told how she was copying the actions of Christ: "What about the scene where He overturned the money changers' tables in the temple—a sacred place being desecrated by greed? An act, by today's laws, that

editor. Those who speak or write anti-military statements have been threatened.

In every Plowshares action, participants pour their own blood on the weapons systems, symbolic of the blood that would be spilled if the weapons were used. They hit the weapons with ham-

would have landed him a property destruction charge — the same crime we're being charged with. We have to ask ourselves, 'What would Christ do if he were here, now? What would Gandhi do? What would Martin Luther King do if they were alive today?'"

## CITIZENSHIP PAYS DIVIDENDS

**T**hink voting doesn't make a difference?

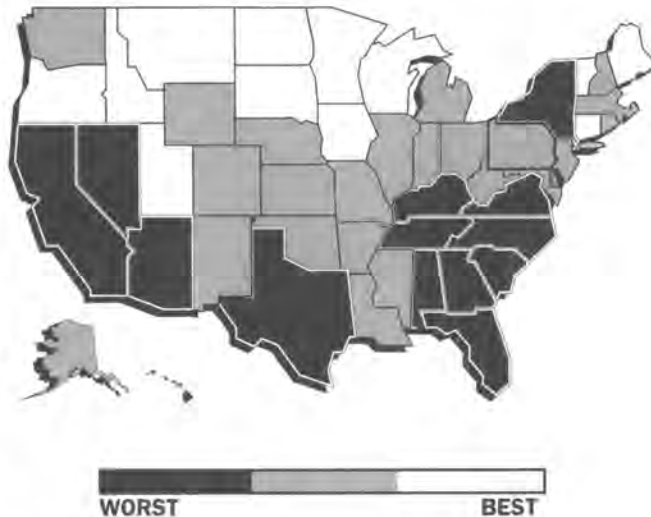
Well, think again. Economic and social equity improves when a larger share of adults vote, says a new report from Democracy South, an offshoot of the Institute for Southern Studies, publisher of *Southern Exposure*.

The states with the best 20-year record of voter turnout generally have fuller employment, a less regressive tax system, and a smaller income gap between their richest and poorest families. They also have less crime, a lower high-school dropout rate, and a higher potential for residents to reach old age.

These high-turnout states are not richer than those with the lowest voting rates — but they enjoy the smallest gaps in the nation between “haves” and “have-nots.” Ten of the top 12 states for turnout also rank among the top 12 states on a set of equity indicators compiled for the Democracy Index; 11 of the worst 14 for turnout are at the bottom on the equity scale.

The 14 worst turnout states (see map) include eight from the Old Confederacy and five others with large non-white populations — all states with histories of disfranchising people of color and often low-income whites. Even today, only one of these states allows voter registration within 29 days of election day.

**AVERAGE VOTER TURNOUT IN THE FIVE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS FROM 1976 TO 1992 RANGED FROM 69 PERCENT OF ADULTS (AGE 18+) IN MINNESOTA TO 41 PERCENT IN SOUTH CAROLINA.**



By contrast, the high-turnout states have long traditions of making voting easy. When more people feel included and motivated to shape their government, the benefits of jobs and public policy get spread around more evenly. As Oliver Woshinsky, a political scientist at the University of Southern Maine, recently told the Associated Press, “If everybody is voting, politicians cannot pursue elitist policy goals, or they’ll get punished.”

For a free copy of the Democracy Index, contact Democracy South, 604 Hatch Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27516; phone (919) 967-9942.

— Bob Hall

states: his home state of Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, West Virginia, and Vice President Gore's home state of Tennessee. He won 64 electoral votes in the South. Dole carried the other seven states of the South and won 96 electoral votes.

Both of the Senate seats the GOP gained were in the South. In Alabama the GOP gained the seat vacated by retiring Democrat Howell Heflin. Heflin was replaced by state Attorney General Jeff Sessions. Ironically, Heflin was one of many senators to vote against Sessions' appointment as a circuit court judge in 1986 after black citizens had accused the then U.S. Attorney of making racist remarks. With the election of Sessions, Alabama has two Republican senators for the first time in its history.

Bill Clinton wore no coat-tails; Arkansas sent its first Republican, U.S. Representative Tim Hutchinson, to the Senate to replace retiring Democrat David Pryor.

Democrats did hold on to the Senate seat vacated by retiring Senator Sam Nunn. Max Cleland, a disabled Vietnam veteran, beat Guy Millner, a conservative former candidate for governor.

Democrat Mary Landrieu won a close race in Louisiana, but in Texas, underdog favorite Victor Morales could not come close to beating conservative Phil Gramm.

In other Southern states, GOP senators retained a firm hold. In North Carolina and South Carolina, Democratic challengers failed to dislodge Senate fixtures Jesse Helms and the 93-year-old former Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond.

In congressional house races in the South, the GOP made a net gain of four seats. Republicans now hold 76 seats in the U.S. Congress, and the Democrats hold 53

When freed from jail, Naar-Obed went to Baltimore, where she lives between imprisonments in a community called Jonah House. It is headed by the famous peace activist Philip Berrigan and his wife Elizabeth McAllister. Both have been arrested many times and served time in prison for their nonviolent protests against the weapons' industry. Jonah House feeds the poor, but is best known for its anti-war actions that date back to the 1960s.

Over the past few years

Naar-Obed has continued her anti-military protests and has served more time in jail, pausing briefly in 1994 to give birth to her daughter, Rachel Kathleen. The Siebers, when not in jail, live in Philadelphia.

In September, the three members of the Jubilee Plowshares group were sentenced to up to 18 months in prison and three years of probation. They can be reached through the Jubilee Plowshare Support Group, 1321 W. 38th St., Norfolk, VA 23508.

— John Balkwill

## GOP SOLIDIFIES SOUTH

While some Democrats regained ground — or simply held on — in the South in the 1996 election, the GOP solidified its hold on the region. “The GOP continued its conquest of the Old Confederacy, albeit at a slower pace than in '92 and '94,” said Hastings Wyman Jr., in the newsletter he publishes, *Southern Political Report*.

President Clinton and Bob Dole split the South. Clinton carried just six Southern

(not counting the two seats to be decided in the December runoff election in Texas).

Perhaps most surprising was that two black representatives, Cynthia McKinney and Sanford Bishop, from formerly majority black districts, handily won reelection despite running in districts that had become predominately white. While many critics of majority black districts see the victories as proof that white voters will elect black candidates, Dr. Rickey Hill, chair of political science at South Carolina State University said, "Incumbency was the determining factor in these races. The GOP was unable to field winnable candidates." It should be noted that Bishop is an extremely conservative Democrat.

In state offices, the GOP also made gains throughout the South. Charlotte Pritt, the first woman to run for governor of heavily democratic West Virginia, lost to the GOP's Cecil Underwood.

In Florida, a penny-a-pound sugar tax that would go to clean up the Everglades failed. Two other amendments to clean up the Everglades passed. One will make polluters pay for cleanup, and the other establishes a trust fund for the Everglades.

—Ron Nixon

## TEEPEE TOWN TENSION

**ST. AUGUSTINE, Fla.**—When controversy erupted in July over two mannequins outside the Teepee Town shop, compromise did not seem likely.

"My mannequins are my McDonald's Golden Arches," says the shop's owner Fred Harris, a non-Indian. "People see the mannequins and say, 'It must be an Indian shop.'"

American-Indian groups, including the Florida Chapter of the American Indian Move-

ment, protested for four weeks, claiming the shop used "racist stereotypes and deceptive practices." The mannequins, fixtures outside the shop since 1975, are popular with tourists who sometimes pretend to scalp them.

Florida AIM says this proves their point. A letter to Harris signed by Executive Director Sheridan Murphy complains, "Stereotyping indigenous people may help you market the wares you sell that come from Taiwan, but they denigrate indigenous people."

"The mannequins can disappear," says Harris. "It's up to them to come up with something appropriate [to take their place], something equally eye-catching [as the mannequins] and to identify the building and the business," he says. But it took only one sentence from a Native American protester to open Harris' eyes, he says. "He told me, 'My children can't look at those mannequins, and feel good about [being Indian].'"

Florida AIM also alleges

that the store violates the federal Indian Arts and Crafts Act because Harris cannot document the authenticity of the items he sells, as required by law, and advertises Taiwan crafts as American Indian made.

"I've got some nice beadwork from Japan," Harris says. "It's identified and sold as a replica of American Indian work. I also sell beautiful squash blossom jewelry made by the Begay [Navajo] family."

Harris admits that some of the charges made by Florida AIM are valid, and he has taken steps to correct these complaints. He improved his identification of merchandise, and changed some displays and signs. But he says he cannot afford to stop selling Japanese beadwork until he finds a comparably priced Native American source.

Harris has his own complaints. "They [Florida AIM] crossed the line [when they charged] racism, fraud, and misrepresentation," he says. "It's been played on its emo-

tion instead of facts."

During the protests, Florida AIM representatives said that Harris' initial unwillingness to remove the mannequins indicated, "a deep-rooted hostility toward indigenous people." Customers were urged not to shop at his store because he and his employees were part of the Ku Klux Klan.

This angers Harris. "I'm being lumped into a category that is not true," he says. "[If they] want to deal with racism, find a racist. Find someone who doesn't welcome American Indians into their shop."

Harris has a condition of his own that must be met before he will agree to replace the mannequins. "[I want] a formal written apology and an admission that the tactics used against me were off track," he says. Until this happens, "They get nowhere with me."

—Lois Tomas

Florida Times-Union



AMERICAN-INDIAN ACTIVISTS PROTEST IN FRONT OF TEEPEE TOWN.

## MOVING FROM MOUNT DIOXIN

PENSACOLA, Fla. — For years black residents of the northern section of Pensacola have lived in a polluted neighborhood. Because local and federal officials had done little to address the problems, the largely black community has charged discrimination or environmental racism. In the center of the community sits an abandoned chemical company and a mountain of contaminated dirt called "Mount Dioxin" by local residents. The two sites are widely believed to be the cause of numerous ailments affecting the community which is exposed daily to pesticides, lead, arsenic, and dioxin. For the past several years residents have fought to be relocated.

In October 1996, they got their wish. In a landmark decision, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that it would pay to relocate the community. The EPA decision came after almost two years of legal battles with the agency and a threat of lawsuit by the community group Citizens Against Toxic Exposure (CATE).

The EPA will relocate all private homeowners and



## ARMED AND DEREGULATED

HICKORY, N.C. — When U.S. Congressional representative Cass Ballenger (R-NC) saw a poster featuring his picture and the headline, "Wanted for Conspiracy to Maim, Injure and Kill American Workers," he launched an investigation into the organization that produced the message. He asked a Congressional oversight committee to look into the North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Project, a nonprofit organization, to see if they received any funding from the U.S. Department of Labor.

NCOSH produced the poster to focus public attention on Ballenger's efforts to gut worker protection under the Occupational Safety and Health Act. "Even if we have received federal funding, we still have a right and an obligation to our members to speak up for working people," said NCOSH staffer Betsy Barton to the Raleigh News & Observer.

The committee found that NCOSH had received a grant from OSHA. However, the investigation "fizzled" because attacking work place safety was not a good idea in an election year, said Barton.

Ballenger, who represents a largely working class district, was re-elected by a wide margin. Barton expects Congress to take up

work with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to relocate residents of public housing facilities. Originally the EPA had only proposed relocating private homeowners.

Environmental justice groups hailed the EPA decision. "This victory belongs to the citizens of Pensacola living near these Superfund sites for years," says Selena Mendy of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, a legal advice group representing the Pensacola community. "They banded together in a pledge to seek protection for every member of the community, and they refused to be divided."



anti-regulatory legislation again.

Far from backing down from attacking Ballenger's stand, NCOSH has reissued the Ballenger poster with new words stamped across it, "Re-elected 11-96. Still at Large. Armed with Dangerous Legislation."

— Amanda Picha

Mendy says the decision is important for another reason as well. "This is the first time that a community of color has been relocated under the provision of the Superfund law," she says. Superfund was established in 1980 to pay for cleanup at the nation's most toxic sites and to relocate surrounding communities if necessary. The law was created in response to the relocation of a white community in Love Canal, New York, which had been built on an abandoned landfill.

Other communities of color are closely watching the EPA decision in what they hope will be the beginning of a new policy of environmen-

tal protection. Studies have shown that white communities are more likely to have their environmental concerns addressed than their counterparts in other communities. "The EPA decision in this case provides long-awaited recognition that people of color are disproportionately impacted by environmental pollution," says Thomas Henderson of the Lawyers Committee. "For the first time, the EPA has determined that the public health, welfare, and civil rights laws require that all citizens regardless of race are entitled to equal protection from environmental toxins."

— Ron Nixon

# Hamlet Casualties Continue

The 1991 chicken processing plant fire is still taking its toll.

By Betsy Barton

Nearly five years to the day after the fire at Imperial Food Products in Hamlet, North Carolina, the death toll has risen to 26. On September 2, 1991, 25 workers died and 56 were injured when they were trapped behind locked fire doors at the chicken processing plant. Plant owner Emmett Roe had ordered the doors locked because he thought workers were stealing chicken. In 11 years of operation in North Carolina, the plant had never been inspected for worker health and safety violations.

On September 17, I drove down to Bennettsville, South Carolina, for the funeral of Mary Bryant, an Imperial Foods worker who had survived the fire five years ago. She died at the age of 50, and according to her friend and co-worker Conesta Williams-Player, her death was related to injuries sustained in the fire. Massive exposure to the choking black smoke in the plant caused Bryant to suffer from neurological damage and other health problems.

Bryant had many identities in her community: mother, adult nursing student, church member. I knew her only in her role as someone who had survived the fire. I remember her story in the documentary video, *Hamlet: Out of the Ashes*, where she recalls that someone saved her life by calling out "if you can hear me, follow my voice. Just follow my voice." In the panic of the fire she did, and someone pulled her out of the smoke-filled plant through a hole in the wall. She survived, and wanted to tell her story to educate the public, so that this would never happen to another worker.

Although he became eligible for parole after only three years, Emmett Roe remains in prison on 25 counts of involuntary manslaughter. His parole will be reconsidered again in February 1997. Recently his family made an appeal for his early release due to a diagnosis of colon

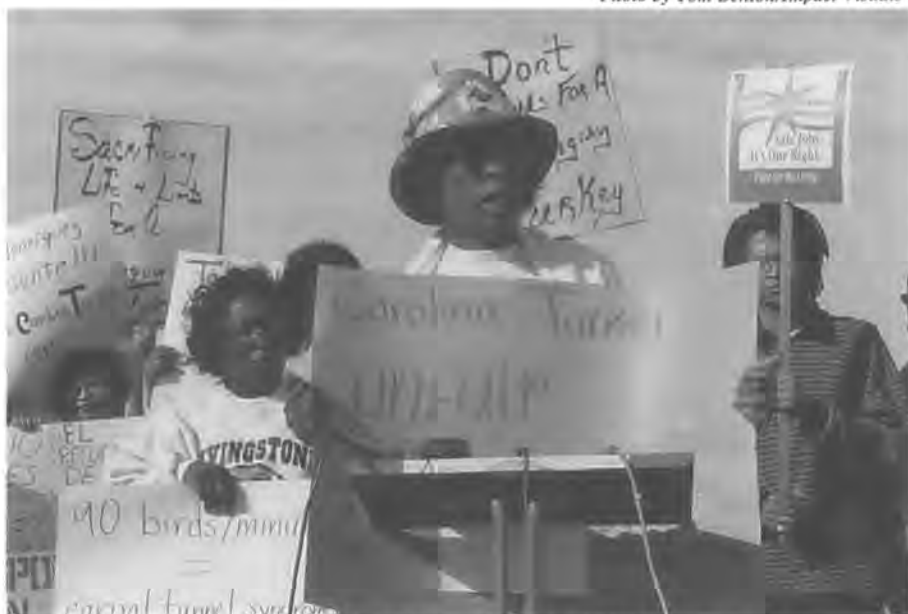


Photo by Tom Benton/Impact Visuals

CAROLINA TURKEY WORKERS PROTEST UNSAFE WORKING CONDITIONS AT A PRE-THANKSGIVING PROTEST AT THE PLANT SITE IN NOVEMBER 1994.

cancer. Fire survivors have a hard time with that. Williams-Player says, "We all still have problems, and now Mary is dead — why should he get out of jail? He did this to us."

The fire at Imperial Foods has been a wake-up call for people in the South about dangerous working conditions, and what many workers endure just to get food on the table for their families. What people don't want to see is the larger picture, the one where corporate greed runs the show. Since a package of reform legislation was passed in 1992, North Carolina is being hailed as a model for the rest of the nation. The numbers show a decline in worker deaths, and injury rates have dropped. But recent events indicate that there are still many problems.

Just last August, 18-year old Solomon Velasquez was killed at Lundy Packing Company in Clinton, North Carolina when he was pulled into an "industrial-sized blender" which was allegedly still in operation as he cleaned it. And yet

Lundy Packing CEO Annabelle Fetterman has been widely praised for her business acumen and won an award from *Working Women* magazine in 1994, the same year that a brucellosis outbreak sickened workers at Lundy's hog processing plant because they were slaughtering contaminated hogs. U.S. Senator Lauch Faircloth (R-NC) is a major stockholder in the company.

A worker is killed on the job almost every day in North Carolina, and more die every year from workplace-related diseases. Others live with debilitating conditions like repetitive motion illness, neurological disease resulting from chemical overexposure, or back injuries. We need to go beyond legislative reform, and to keep pushing for a fair and just society where worker injury and death are not just costs of doing business.

SE

Betsy Barton is a staff member at the North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Project (NCOSH), a labor-based worker advocacy group now in its 20th year.



# FANNING THE FLAMES

As a volatile mix of hatred and hard times sparks the destruction of Southern black churches, investigators downplay racism as the fuel behind the fires.

By Ron Nixon

**O**n August 4, 1994, at just past 2:15 a.m. in the northern Tennessee town of Clarksville near the Kentucky border,

the sound of breaking glass shattered the tranquillity of the early morning hour. A Molotov cocktail — a bottle of gasoline with a burning rag stuffed in the top — crashed through the window of James and Wilma Johnson's home, setting the house on fire. Seconds later gunshots rang out. A bullet passed inches from the window to the room where the Johnsons' young daughter Stephanie slept. As the family tried to escape, a group of young white men belonging to a neo-Nazi group called the Aryan Faction drove back and forth in front of the house taunting them. Finally the assailants fled, but not before leaving a note in the family's mail box. "Dear Johnson, AF wants you to leave our white community. You Coons! Coon hunting season is open." The note was signed "AF."

The next day a firebomb destroyed a black church in the community, the Greater Missionary Baptist Church. Investigators did not catch the culprits, but they suspected the Faction because street signs in the area bore the same racist graffiti that the group would later use in other attacks.

Nine days later the Aryan Faction attacked another black family in the same neighborhood. The group broke into the home of William Ewing and Georgia O'Hara. They shattered the couple's fish tank with a shotgun blast, smashed family pictures, and ransacked the residence. They also stole personal items and set the house on fire with Molotov cocktails. A spokesman for the group then called the local newspaper and took credit for the arson. He told the paper the organization "wanted all niggers out of Montgomery County" and threatened to kill black residents.

In the early hours of August 18, two group members burned the Clarksville Benevolent Lodge No. 210, a meeting place and community center since the 1880s. They spray painted a barbecue pit behind the burned building with racist graffiti. "AF strikes again!" the graffiti read. "Niggers leave or die."

Members of the group eventually were caught and convicted for the attack on the black residence and lodge though not for the church destruction. But even with the perpetrators behind bars, the attacks in Clarksville terrified black communities across the South. Their fears were well-founded. Within a year, many had experienced similar arson attacks on their churches. According to the FBI and other federal and state law enforcement agencies that comprise the National Church Arson Task Force, fires damaged or destroyed 230 churches in the 21 months following the Clarksville bomb-

sparking the blazes for a very simple reason: They haven't looked. A six-month investigation by *Southern Exposure* shows that most Southern states do not keep a record of church burnings by race of the congregations. Those that do often fail to share the little information they have with other law enforcement agencies. Local officials fail to investigate adequately many of the fires. Some investigations target church members themselves as suspects, even when evidence points in a different direction.

"In many of these cases, they have no idea who's burning these churches," says

**Black leaders say many of the church fires are sparked by "a deep-seated hatred of blacks reinforced by a climate that make it O.K. to go out and do these things."**

ings. In the South, more than half of the arsons involved black churches — even though African-American congregations comprise only a fifth of churches in the region. Eighty percent of those arrested for the fires were white.

Law enforcement officials, while admitting that some of the arsons have been inspired by racial hatred, attribute most of the burning of black churches to teen vandals, drunks, and copycat arsonists inspired by news accounts of the fires. Widely cited articles in the *New Yorker*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Associated Press* also dismissed the epidemic of black-church burnings as exaggerated. They downplayed racism as the fuel behind the fires, emphasizing that some of the arsonists were black parishioners or mentally disturbed individuals. By most estimates, less than one percent of the crimes have been committed by white supremacists.

But the rush by investigators to rule out racial hatred as a cause of the church burnings highlights the fundamental failure of the investigations themselves. Federal and state officials have no way of knowing what role racism played in

Rose Sanders, co-founder of the National Voting Rights Museum in Selma, Alabama. "How do they know it's not racism if they are not looking?"

The slipshod approach to the arson investigation has outraged many in the black community who vividly recall the cross burnings and church bombings of the 1960s. "It's like we can never move past this type of thing," says Jo Anna Bland, also with the National Voting Rights Museum. "We're always fighting the same old racism."

Bland and other black leaders say the narrow focus on whether white supremacist groups are behind the church fires has blinded authorities to the volatile mix of racial hatred and extreme poverty that serve as a backdrop to the blazes. For many black Southerners, little separates the burning of black churches from other recent attacks on African Americans. In Mississippi, more than 40 black men died in mysterious hangings in jails over a two-year period during the early 1990s. In North Carolina, white soldiers with neo-Nazi ties killed a black couple in Fayetteville a year ago. In Tennessee, the home of a black bus driver in



Chattanooga was set ablaze shortly after he filed a complaint of employment discrimination. In South Carolina, a group of white men fired several shots into a crowd of blacks following a rally to keep the Confederate flag flying above the statehouse. In Florida, a group of white teens went on an arson spree and then planned to dress in Disney costumes and shoot blacks. And across the South, more than 20 people were arrested for more than 30 cross burnings last year alone.

"There is no doubt in my mind that there is a connection between these incidents," says Jim Evans, a Mississippi state representative and president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. "The connection is a deep-seated hatred of blacks reinforced by a climate that makes it O.K. to go out and do these things."

### WHO'S COUNTING?

The pattern of fires at Southern black churches did not come to light until the Center for Democratic Renewal, an Atlanta-based watchdog group, drew national attention to the arsons in 1995. President Clinton responded by forming a federal task force to investigate the blazes, but authorities charged with solving the crimes have consistently failed to document the most basic information of all — the race of parishioners whose churches have been attacked.

Data for the past six years collected from agencies in 12 Southern states where churches have been burned reveal a dearth of reliable information. Although most states do track the total number of church fires, six states keep no information by race — Texas, Arkansas, Kentucky, Virginia, Louisiana, and Florida. Georgia lists some, but not all, of its church arsons by race of the congregations.

To make matters worse, information is not always shared among the agencies that track church fires. Some states do not require local fire departments to report arsons. In Virginia, for example, reporting fire incidents to the state Department of Fire Programs (DFP), the agency that gathers information on arson and other fires, is not mandated by law, says Marion Long, information systems man-

ager at the DFP. According to Long, the DFP gathers information on only 55 percent of all fires in the state each year.

Even when information is collected, it is not always comprehensive. A review of data available at the state and local levels reveals some glaring inconsistencies.

In Mississippi, two churches that burned in 1992 as part of a well-publicized arson spree are not listed on the state fire marshal's report on church fires. In North Carolina, two churches burned in the early '90s, but these fires do not appear on the list compiled by the State Bu-

*Photo by Lewis Watts*



PARISHIONERS ARRIVE AT THEIR BURNED CHURCH, RISING STAR BAPTIST CHURCH IN GREENSBORO, ALABAMA, IN JUNE 1996.

the early '90s, but these fires do not appear on the list compiled by the State Bureau of Investigation.

"We were lucky to get the data that we have," says Special Agent in Charge Mike Robinson. "The data are just not kept in one place where you can get your hands on them, and not all fires are actually reported. Anyone in North Carolina can investigate a church fire, but they don't always report it to us or the fire marshal's office. So there might be some churches that we miss in our count."

Accurate data are equally hard to come by at the national level. "If you look at the way data have been kept over the years, you wouldn't find a difference in the way we classify a barn or a church," says a spokesperson for the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF). "All you would find is that we investigated an arson."

The most comprehensive list of fires is kept by the National Fire Protection Association, a Massachusetts-based group that has been widely cited as an authority on the recent outbreak of church arsons. According to the group, the number of church fires nationwide fell steadily from more than 1,420 in 1980 to about 520 in 1994, the last year data were available. But the statistics are misleading. The NFPA, by its own admission, records only between one third and one half of all fires each year — and none of the information is collected by race of the victims.

The NFPA bases its numbers on information provided by the National Fire Incident Report System (NFIRS), which is run by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. But because the system is voluntary, only 14,000 of the 30,000 fire departments nationwide bother to report. Some fire departments, especially in the South, shun the system out of an aversion to big government and unfunded mandates. Many volunteer and smaller departments are unable to participate, given the sophisticated coding and data systems required by the system. And fire departments that do report don't always do so on a consistent basis.

To fill in gaps, the NFPA conducts its own surveys. Fire departments serving large populations generally respond, but smaller departments seldom do. Accord-

ing to the NFPA, less than 25 percent of departments serving 2,500 to 5,000 people participate in the surveys — omitting data from precisely the kind of small communities and rural areas where many black churches have burned.

The lack of complete and reliable information has clearly resulted in the underreporting of arsons at Southern black churches — which in turn prevents authorities from considering the extent to which racial hatred serves as a motive for the crimes. Even the NFPA recognizes that its data has been misused to downplay the role of racism. "People have made a lot of comments using our data," says David Katter of the association. "We have not made any comments concerning the arsons at black churches concerning the motivation. We just collect the information."

### NO HEAT, NO LIGHT

Inconsistent and inaccurate information is not the only thing hampering investigations into the church fires. Many congregations at burned churches also question the way the probes have been conducted. Investigators have repeatedly neglected important evidence, failed to follow up on leads, and harassed members of the congregations whose churches have been attacked.

In South Carolina, authorities originally told the Reverend Terrace Mackey of Greelyville that the fire at his church was an accident. Later investigators determined that the fire was indeed arson, and that at least one of the men who set the blaze was a member of the Klan. In Arkansas, officials told Reverend Spencer Brown that an electric water heater caused a fire at his church in 1995. The only problem, says Brown, is that the heater was not hooked up at the time. Brown reported the information to the state fire marshal, who promised to pass the information on to the FBI and the ATF. So far, Brown says, neither agency has responded.

Next door in Mississippi, just one federal agent is assigned to work on possible civil rights violations involving 14 black church fires in the state. According to Hal Nielson, a spokesman for the FBI in Jackson, the bureau conducts no systematic

investigation of white hate groups in the area to determine if they have any connection with the arsons. "It would not be fair to say that we should go out and question members of these groups every time a church burned in the area," Nielson says.

Officials have shown no such reluctance to interrogate members of burned churches. "In many cases church members themselves have been questioned about the fires, even when there is clear evidence of racial motivation," says Rose Johnson of the Center for Democratic Renewal.

When the Inner City Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, was firebombed last January, officials found the racial slurs "Die Niggers" and "Die Nigger Lovers" painted on the walls. The associate pastor, football star Reggie White, had received phone threats, and local police discovered a letter from the "Skinheads for White Justice" threatening violence. But instead of tracking down white supremacists in the area, local and federal investigators questioned all 400 members of the congregation about their whereabouts during the fire, gave many of the parishioners lie-detector tests, and subpoenaed church financial records. The minister of the church, Reverend David Upton, was questioned at least 10 times in connection with the fire.

Members of black churches destroyed in other Southern states have also been targeted as suspects. The congregation of a black church burned in Selma, Alabama, had to hire an attorney after investigators subpoenaed church records and began questioning church members at their jobs — even though the fire had been ruled accidental. When the Little Zion Baptist Church and Mt. Zoar in Greene County, Alabama, burned last January, officials suggested that black teenagers were responsible for the blaze.

"It was a real disgrace to suggest that perhaps they'd burn down their own churches," says the Reverend James Carter, an assistant pastor at Little Zion and a former county commissioner. "In this community, our churches are as sacred as our parents. I cannot see a bunch of black teenagers going out and burning churches for fun."

## "A SOLID CITIZEN"

Perhaps no one embodies this pattern of targeting the victims better than James Ingram, who is coordinating the investigation of church fires in Mississippi. As director of public safety for the state, Ingram downplays the seriousness of the recent attacks. "We haven't had the same problem with church fires here in Mississippi that other states have had," he insists.

On the surface, Ingram seems to have the perfect credentials for investigating hate crimes. As head of the FBI in the state during the 1960s, he investigated the burnings of several black churches — as well as the murders of civil rights workers Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman. Many say that the heroic FBI agent portrayed in the Hollywood movie *Mississippi Burning* was based on Ingram.

But Ingram has a little-known history of working to undermine black citizens in Mississippi. At the same time that he was supposedly investigating racially motivated attacks during the '60s, Ingram also served in the FBI Division Five "Racial Intelligence" Section which carried out the notorious counterintelligence program known as COINTELPRO. The purpose of the program, according to a 1967 memo by then-FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, was to "disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize black nationalist hate-type organizations." The program targeted black leaders such as Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, Elijah Mohammed of the Nation of Islam, and the Black Panther Party.

After details from COINTELPRO were released, Ingram was sued for violating the civil rights of Muhammed Kenyatta, a student activist at Tougaloo College. Ingram and two other FBI agents forged a letter to Kenyatta from a student group threatening him with physical harm if he set foot on campus. The forgers spelled out their intent in an FBI document obtained under the Freedom of Information Act: "It is hoped that this letter if approved and forwarded to [Kenyatta] will give him the impression that he has been discredited at Tougaloo College and is no longer welcome there." The document

concluded: "It may possibly also cause him to leave Mississippi."

Kenyatta received the forged letter a

victed of burning a church in the state of Mississippi.

"Ask Mr. Ingram how many church

**"It was a real disgrace to suggest that they'd burn down their own churches."**



Photo by Lewis Watts

**RISING STAR BAPTIST CHURCH, GREENSBORO, ALABAMA, JUNE 1996**

few days after someone fired shots into his car. He left Mississippi shortly afterward.

Ingram offers no apologies for his role in the counterintelligence program. "I was an employee of the FBI for more than 30 years, and during that time there were certain duties that we were asked and instructed to do," he says. "And one was the counterintelligence program. But that's long past history. But at the same time, ask any individual in Mississippi, and certainly the black community, and you'll find that Jim Ingram has been a solid citizen to them."

Black leaders disagree. "Did you ask him to identify any black leaders he had a good relationship with in the state of Mississippi?" asks Obie Clark of the NAACP in Meridian. "I don't know who he's talking about."

Others point to Ingram's poor record of investigating crimes in the black community. Until the 1993 conviction of three white teens, no one had ever been con-

vinced of burning a church in the state of Mississippi," says Charles Tisdale, publisher of the weekly black newspaper *The Jackson Advocate*. "I don't trust him to find anything."

## PROTEST BY PROXY

Despite the shoddy work by investigators, evidence of racial motivation has emerged in a number of attacks on black churches. A review of arrests from federal and state records over the past six years shows that at least 30 arsonists charged with burning black houses of worship were driven by racial hatred.

John David Knowlton, a 57-year-old small engine repairman, was arrested in July for burning the Evangelist Temple Church of God in Christ, a black church in Marianna, Florida. Knowlton, who had lived next door to the church for eight years, filed a complaint in 1993 claiming that members "beat drums late into the night." A prosecutor refused to press charges, and court records show that the minister agreed to muffle the

drums "so that the music wouldn't disturb Knowlton." Although Knowlton claimed no knowledge of the church fire, several eyewitnesses saw him leaving the church with a gas can shortly before the blaze. Police later found racial slurs — including the word "Nigga" — scrawled on the walls of Knowlton's former home. One of Knowlton's children later told investigators a member of the family had previously talked about the Evangelist Temple, saying, "The place should have burned down."

In other cases, attacks on black churches have been orchestrated by white hate groups. In the Greelyville, South Carolina, incident, police charged four men in 1995 with burning the Mount Zion A.M.E. Church as well as the Macedonian Baptist Church in Bloomville. Police said one of the men carried a card in his pocket identifying him as a member of the Christian Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

Although some blame a conspiracy of white hate groups for the fires at black churches, those who have studied the crimes say the real culprit may be more elusive — and far more dangerous. "I wish it were only a few hardened hate mongers," says Dr. Jack Levin, director of the Program for the Study of Violence and Social Conflict at Northeastern University and co-author of *Hate Crimes: The Rising Tide of Bigotry and Bloodshed*. "We'd have a particular enemy to go after."

Levin says that law enforcement officials won't find racism as the root cause of the black church fires if they use the convictions of white supremacists as their barometer. Research conducted by Levin and co-author Jack McDevitt shows that members of organized groups commit less than one percent of hate crimes. Most are committed by "thrill offenders" — criminals often dismissed by police as just kids causing trouble.

But according to Levin, the real motivations are rooted in widespread racism and economic insecurity. Levin, who has prepared profiles of church burning suspects for several law enforcement agencies, says his initial review suggests that the "overwhelming majority of the arsonists can be blamed on young, mostly white men." Some of the perpetrators

have certainly been exposed to racial hatred, says Levin, but most are probably motivated by resentment over their bleak economic future. Blacks are targets because they "stand in for the real enemy." When these young people who aren't doing well see affirmative action or attention to the underclass, they feel quite ignored," Levin says. The burning of black churches is "protest by proxy."

Racial hatred also plays a role in the so-called "copycat crimes," says Levin. Those who mimic acts of violence motivated by hatred are themselves inspired by that hatred. "They are participating in a second-generation hate crime."

### HEEDING THE MESSAGE

The findings by Levin are echoed in the history of black communities across the South. "That's why these skinhead groups are rising," says Reggie White, associate pastor of the church that burned earlier this year in Knoxville, Tennessee. "Those racist attitudes are still out there, and too often we've forgotten our history. We don't want to think about lynchings; we don't think about the burning churches."

The role of racism in sparking the church fires is also confirmed by the results of a three-month study released in October by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, the federal agency charged with promoting voting rights and equal opportunity in housing, education, and employment. The commission found racism rampant in the states where the black church burnings occurred.

"It's depressing," says Melvin Jenkins, director of the commission's central region, which includes much of the South. "I think the fires were simply a message, even if some are not racially motivated. It was a message that we need to discuss race—honestly, particularly in those Southern states."

Joel Williamson, a humanities professor at the University of North Carolina and a scholar of Southern history and violence, sees an even broader message in the church burnings. "It's a sign to the controlling elites that something is wrong," he says. "Downsizing, growing disparities between rich and poor, the burnings, and other attacks are a shot

across the bow — a warning. It's amazing that no one has been killed."

So far, though, authorities have failed to heed the message. Even when law enforcement officials arrest a suspect in a church burning, they often fail to consider racism as a motive. "Many take the viewpoint that you have the person in jail, so why look for another motive for the crime?" says Barron Lankster, a district attorney in Demopolis, Alabama. "In the South a suspect would almost have to say, 'I did this because the person was black' before people would believe it's a hate crime."

The tendency of authorities to downplay racism as a motive makes it unlikely that many of the arsonists will ever be caught — and even more unlikely that those who are apprehended will ever be prosecuted. National figures show that only 15 percent of all arson cases actually end in arrest. Most of those are inside jobs. According to federal data, only 5 percent of ATF cases referred to the Justice Department are for arsons. And only 5 percent of all civil rights cases are ever prosecuted by the Justice Department.

Although black leaders who have called attention to the crimes have been blamed for sparking further violence, groups like the Center for Democratic Renewal have vowed to keep the pressure on federal officials to take action. The best hope, they insist, lies in increased public scrutiny and pushing for tougher penalties and enforcement of laws for burning houses of worship.

"That's the most that we can hope for," says Noah Chandler of the CDR. "Unfortunately, hatred will always be with us. But we have to send a strong message to people who practice this type of behavior that this will not be tolerated." §

*Ron Nixon is associate editor of Southern Exposure and director of the Investigative Action Fund of the Institute for Southern Studies. Dennis Bernstein, an editor for the Pacifica News Service and co-producer of Flashpoints at KPFA radio in Berkeley, California, contributed to this story. Research assistance provided by Eric Goldman.*

# BURNING MEMORIES

Finding long-buried records about the Ku Klux Klan in eastern Carolina makes it difficult to evade unwanted ghosts.

By David S. Cecelski

**M**any years ago I dedicated my literary career to writing about the small corner of the North Carolina coast where I grew up and which I still call home. I cherished the deepening familiarity with my remote patch of the American South. I re-peopled with forgotten souls the small towns and rural byways of my youth. I lived surrounded by them, a mortal among the great hosts of the dead. And if I often marveled, to borrow Eudora Welty's words, how "people are mostly layers of violence and tenderness wrapped like bulbs," and could not say, any more than Welty, "what makes them onions or hyacinths," I always found abundant cause for my faith in a fundamental goodness and decency within my countrymen and women.

Then I found the Ku Klux Klan papers. While writing a book about the civil rights movement in North Carolina, I chanced upon an unprecedented array of government documents about the state's Ku Klux Klan in the 1960s, documents from the State Highway Patrol and the State Bureau of Investigation. None had been open to the public until I found

them stacked high in cardboard boxes in a Raleigh warehouse called the State Records Center.

Untouched for 25 years, they included field notes, transcripts, surveillance reports, and investigative files, plus long registers of Klan members' names and backgrounds. Nothing had been censored. If you wanted to know who had tried to kill whom for seeking to vote, or who had burned whose store for wanting

a better education for their children, it was all there, neatly typed, in black and white.

As a historian, I found the documents priceless for understanding both the Southern past and the burning of black churches today. But as a native of coastal North Carolina, the KKK papers troubled me deeply. I recognized every back road and barbeque joint mentioned in them. I was acquainted, if only rarely with individual Klansmen, quite frequently with their children. I realize now that I pass daily by scenes of the Klan's misdeeds—victims taunted, churches burned, schools vandalized, businesses dynamited, assassinations attempted. A once-familiar landscape has for me grown strangely foreign.

## AN OLD-FASHIONED TENT REVIVAL

The Ku Klux Klan lived in our shadows long before the 1960s. Founded in 1868 by former slaveholders, the state's first Klan acted as a terrorist wing of the Democratic Party during Reconstruction. In subsequent years, the ranks of the KKK swelled whenever black Carolinians made significant gains in electoral

**THE KKK papers troubled me deeply. I recognized every back road and barbeque joint mentioned in them.**

politics, civil rights, or economic prosperity. In 1898 the Red Shirts, a group that included many former Klansmen, violently overthrew a coalition of black Republicans and white Populists that had elected the governor and scores of lesser lawmakers. In the 1920s, as many as five million Americans joined the KKK, including untold thousands in North Carolina. In the early 1950s, the Klan rose to quell black labor organizing in our tobacco, timber, fishing, and slaughterhouse industries, as well as to block the surging demands of black veterans whose expectations for freedom at home had risen after fighting in World War II.

Between 1964 and 1967, the Klan again barnstormed the Carolina countryside like an old-fashioned tent revival, holding a rally almost every night in a different town. It is this resurgence of the KKK that the SHP and SBI files chronicle so thoroughly. Merely within our congressional district—North Carolina's First and the Klan's "Province #1" (of 11)—the KKK's state leadership held two dozen recruitment rallies between July and October 1966. All told, tens of thousands attended those events. Most nights, the rallies drew crowds from several hundred to a thousand, but attendance sometimes soared. In 1965, 6,000 spectators crowded a rally in rural Sampson County, and 5,000 attended a Klan wedding near the small tobacco market town of Farmville.

By 1966, the Klan had organized more than 100 "Klaverns" in North Carolina and had nearly 7,000 official members, by far the most in the United States. But membership lists did not come close to reflecting the Klan's popularity. According to KKK records, only a tiny fraction of the people who attended public rallies belonged to the Klan. At a September 1966 rally near the tiny crossroads of Ernul, in my native Craven County, state troopers counted only 11 robed Klansmen, three Klanswomen and 10 Klan "security guards" among a crowd estimated at between 500 and 600 persons. Many people who participated with enthusiasm never joined. Others sat in their cars or loitered on the outskirts, sizing up the proceedings that culminated in the fiery cross.

## COCA-COLAS AND SOUVENIR PINS

A July 26, 1966, rally was typical of the KKK revival. According to an SBI report, that summer day a large crowd massed for an outdoor rally near Chocowinity, a small town about an hour's drive from my home place. The occasion resembled a county fair or church revival. Reverend William Cox, a minister from nearby Blounts Creek, delivered an invocation and a sermon. Robed Klansmen and Klanswomen sang the National Anthem. Visiting dignitaries—Jack Davis, the Grand Dragon from Michigan, and Robert Shelton, Grand Wizard in Alabama—gave rousing speeches. Vendors peddled hot dogs, Coca-Colas, and souvenir pins. Children my age—I was six then—played games on the rally's outskirts. Toward twilight, the organizers held fundraising events. The men auctioned off a television set, a barbecue grill, five quarts of motor oil, and 100 pounds of fertilizer. The ladies' auxiliary raffled

**THE ladies' auxiliary raffled seven cakes and a pair of homemade table lamps. Then, with the coming of night, white-robed figures burned a 15-foot-high cross, and the crowd disappeared into the darkness.**

seven cakes and a pair of homemade table lamps. Then, with the coming of night, white-robed figures burned a 15-foot-high cross, and the crowd disappeared into the darkness.

Klan leaders spoke to the troubled souls in the flickering light of that flaming cross. This was farm country, and the people of the hooded order realized that tens of thousands of middle-class farmholders and tenant farmers were losing their land to agribusiness, mechanization, and government policies that forced farmers to "get big or get out." Kennedy-era Democrats declared that the rising tide would lift all boats, but here a vast flotilla of rural people remained mired on muddy shoals.

Preachers worried as rural people moved away and church congregations dwindled. Parents could no longer expect sons and daughters to stay on the land. Those who remained had to work even harder, longer hours and had to squeeze more from family and hired labor. Frequently they had to add a factory night shift to a full day's farmwork. While America's mainstream boomed, our farm towns grew desolate. Even the better-off rural and small-town people felt profoundly uneasy about the epochal changes sweeping the region.

The legacy of white supremacy left us fatally ill-prepared to deal with this agricultural crisis. All efforts to address political issues, such as agricultural reform, through a bi-racial alliance that might divide white loyalties were cut off. White supremacy had stunted the vitality of our political life, to say nothing of what it did to our souls. With black protestors marching in every town by 1964, it seemed as natural to take out rising anxieties about the economy on black people as it was to pray for rain in a drought. Fear of agriculture's demise and white supremacy's downfall created an atmosphere in which the Ku Klux Klan thrived. Rural life had changed a great deal in North Carolina over the years. White supremacy was one of the few constants.

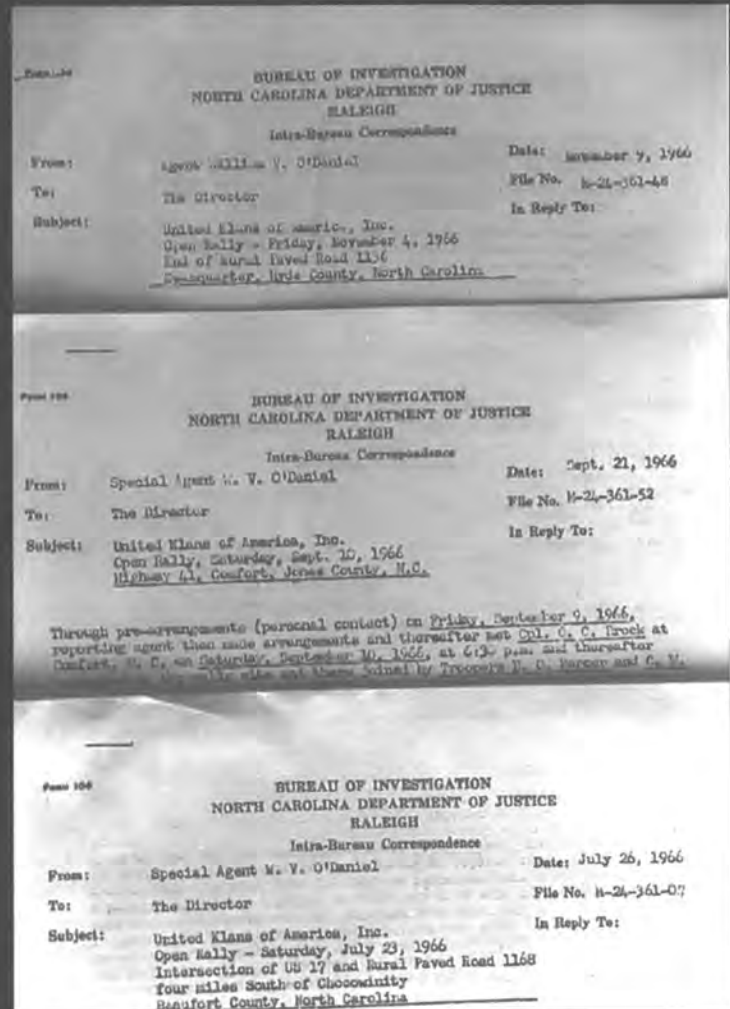
Kevin Phillips, author of Richard Nixon's 1968 "Southern strategy," taught the Republican Party that the art of politics was "knowing who hates who," as he

Newly uncovered North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation documents give details of Ku Klux Klan activities across the state in the 1960s.

put it. Klan organizers did not write books about their own political strategy but they depended on the same dynamic for their success. KKK leaders understood, in particular, how threatened most white Carolinians felt by the prospect of their children attending classes with black children. As local blacks and federal officials heightened efforts to end the separate schooling of black and white children, the Klan attempted to tap into white people's deeply rooted fears of "social equality" and "miscegenation."

KKK leaders tried to make it easy for us to like them. How, after all, could a group that raised funds by auctioning off ponies and homemade table lamps seem sinister? In public, Klan proclamations spewed racial bigotry but within a political rather than a terrorist program. If you did not know how Klansmen spent their nights, you might allow yourself not to see the truth. According to SBI intelligence reports, KKK leaders consciously sought to foster a nonviolent image. On September 22, 1966, Sybil Jones, the Exalted Cyclops of the KKK's Ladies Unit #1, told a local rally that the Klan "is not a hate organization, instead it stands for just and right."

Klan activists emphasized that theirs was a Christian organization. They chastised the Lions, the Moose, Masons, and American Legion for gambling and serving alcohol. Publicly, Klansmen and women disavowed violence and supported political activism against the civil rights movement and the Great Society. They encouraged their listeners to petition local officials, write to congressmen, and attend PTA meetings. They endorsed and campaigned for candidates squarely in the mainstream of the Democratic Party. This, at least, was not mere rhetoric. "There is strong evidence," SBI Director Walter Anderson reported in an October 1966 memorandum, "that the KKK is engaging in an all-out effort to make their influence known in the election." Bolstered by the success of this campaign for respectability, KKK activists longed to escape the social ignominy of the cornfields. They planned to hold more public meetings in courthouses, schools, and auditoriums, including Dorton Arena in the state capital of Raleigh.



# ! OUTDOOR RALLY !

JUNE 14<sup>TH</sup> ❖ 8:00 P. M.

200 BLOCK OF LYNN ROAD, DURHAM, N. C.

UNITED KLANS OF AMERICA  
KNIGHTS OF KLU KLUX KLANS, INC.

Hear— Outstanding Speakers

See— Thrilling Cross Burning Ceremony

Enjoy— Food and Refreshments

== COME EARLY! ==

A flyer unabashedly advertised a Klan rally in 1966.

## THE PILLARS OF THE COMMUNITY

The Klan drew its strength from our rural and small-town middle class. If Klansmen did not widely include "the pillars of the community," to quote a confidential interview with a Martin County Klansman (owner of a 1,200-acre farm), they consisted of "at least good foundation stones." Klan activists who appear in SHP and SBI documents were most often small businessmen, family farmers, and skilled tradesmen. Coastal KKK leaders included the owners of two hotels, several restaurants, a gas station, a pool hall and a seafood company. Farmers who joined the Klan tended to work their own land, unlike the large majority of local white farmers who in that day still sharecropped, tenant farmed, or labored on somebody else's farm. Many had sizable holdings. Klan orators, in fact, harshly berated the poorest whites. They called them "white trash" and other derogatory terms that they usually reserved for blacks, Jews, Communists, and President Lyndon Johnson.

A sign of their public acceptance was that many Klansmen no longer hid behind cloaks. Their violent acts remained shrouded in mystery and a Klansman could still count on anonymity if he wanted it. But frequently an individual's membership in the Klan was an open secret, widely known and even boasted. Klan activists posted signs all over towns announcing recruitment rallies and advertised them in the Greenville Daily Reflector and the Kinston Daily News. Roadside billboards like "Welcome to Smithfield: This is Klan Country" mark an enduring childhood memory for those of us who passed by that town once a year on our way to the State Fair or the beach. At the town limits of a Downeast fishing village, a plain, hand-lettered sign minced fewer words: "No niggers allowed after dark." That sign stood for years. Nor did local Klaverns try to conceal where they held their private meetings. The Belhaven Klavern met almost directly across from city hall. And who in Vanceboro did not know that the Craven Fellowship Club, a concrete-block build-

ing right off Highway 17, was the Ku Klux Klan's headquarters?

The Klan found important supporters among our political leaders. SBI records indicate that at least two county sheriffs and a mayor sympathized openly with the KKK. So did a number of lesser local police, judicial, and municipal leaders. Other politicians recognized in the Klan a constituency that they could not afford to antagonize. Our 1st District Congressman, Walter B. Jones, for instance, was a racial moderate who often supported civil rights legislation, but many in New Bern still recall his public appearances at Klan gatherings. Other political figures had murkier motives for their involvement with the Klan. Sheriff Marion W. Millis of New Hanover County and six of his deputies joined a local Klavern—he later explained to Congressional investigators—"to keep an eye on the Klan." He later acknowledged that "some of [his deputies] got a bit enthused." His second-in-command, in fact, got himself elected state KKK vice-president.

Other local political leaders had little sympathy for the Klan, but they remained silent and rarely pursued Klan lawbreakers aggressively. Few district attorneys prosecuted Klan terrorists. Several county sheriffs deserve credit for their quiet efforts to keep Klansmen within bounds, and a handful earned reputations as ardent enemies of the KKK. According to SBI records, Klan leaders held Greenville police chief

**SBI records indicate that at least two county sheriffs and a mayor sympathized openly with the KKK.**

Henry Lawson in special contempt; he not only spoke in black churches but allegedly challenged a Klansman to a public duel. We may never know what atrocities they nipped in the bud. But few cracked down hard on the Klan, and it is easy to understand why. They realized that they were not dealing with inconsequential folks. In an April 12, 1966, memorandum, an SHP corporal frankly referred to Klansmen as "generally good citizens [who] present no problems for future violence."

To complicate matters, some law officers that despised the KKK had friends and family in it. This closeness often helped in intelligence gathering. Prior to a June 4, 1966, rally in the bustling tobacco market of Wilson, for instance, an SBI agent reported that local detectives "conferred with . . . Klan members they considered friends" in order to assess the potential for violence. Other times local police used their influence to steer KKKers away from civil rights marches. Such relationships, on the other hand, may also have contributed to a reluctance to suppress the Klan.

State political leaders acted no better. By 1964 or 1965, undercover agents provided good informants on the state Klan at its highest levels. The SBI monitored the state-level KKK closely, and it would not be surprising if the FBI, possibly with the cooperation of the SBI, sowed dissension within Klan ranks. Certainly it happened in other places. But, solicitous of the Democratic Party's right wing, many of whom, like Jesse Helms, would soon become Republicans anyway, state leaders neither provided moral leadership nor pursued all of the available legal options for curtailing Klan terrorism. In speeches, they grouped the Klan with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and other civil rights groups, including those based in black Christian churches, as "extremists." They allowed the Klan its annual booth at the State Fair. And neither Governor Dan K. Moore nor the General Assembly held special hearings into Klan violence or led campaigns to discourage public sympathy for the KKK.

In the summer of 1966, however, a maverick Democrat named Malcolm



Seawell, chairman of the governor's special Law and Order Committee to investigate "extremist groups," accused the SBI of withholding surveillance records. Seawell had first made his reputation prosecuting Robeson County Klansmen in the early 1950s. He believed that the SBI documents might give the state the necessary evidence to revoke the Klan's legal certification, an important symbolic act, and possibly to prosecute the Klan for violating concealed weapons laws. Gov. Moore and SBI officials repeatedly denied Seawell's allegations. Seawell and the Committee's special counsel resigned in protest. The SBI later acknowledged that it had indeed withheld key documents from the Committee.

### A SAVAGE HEART

Evil often wears respectable garb, and the soul of the Ku Klux Klan revealed itself most plainly away from the public rallies and their hordes of curious spectators. This can certainly be seen in the county where I lived. By 1965, the Ku Klux Klan had organized at least three Klaverns in Craven County. They held open air rallies on the outskirts of New Bern, our county seat, as well as the small town of Vanceboro and the rural communities of Jasper, Ernul, Dover, and Cove City. According to SBI and SHP records, the crowds ranged from 350 to 650 persons. The Klan had its headquarters first in an old building near Vanceboro, then built a new facility on the town's outskirts. Local leaders included a restaurant owner, two night club operators, and several family farmers. Klan sympathizers included a small-town constable and a police chief.

The Craven County KKK was not as violent as some Klan groups in the South—but it had a savage heart. In New Bern in February 1965, KKK terrorists bombed St. Peter's African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the historic mother church of the southern A.M.E. Zion, and two automobiles. The blast nearly assassinated the Rev. Leon Nixon, a local leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and attorney Julius Chambers, now chancellor of North Carolina Central University in Durham. Another explo-



**BETWEEN 1964 AND 1967, THE KLAN BARNSTORMED THE CAROLINA COUNTRY-SIDE, HOLDING A RALLY ALMOST EVERY NIGHT.**

sion that day ripped apart Oscar's Mortuary, a black-owned business in the Pembroke area. The Klan later bombed the Cool Springs Free Will Baptist Church, apparently to silence a white minister who had criticized the KKK. A member of that same Klavern shot a state

trooper. Another stoned a school bus. Others paid nighttime visits to parents, grandparents, and teachers sympathetic to school desegregation, showing a marked preference for harassing the elderly and infirm. Craven County Klansmen burned a cross and torched an outbuilding on Vanceboro Mayor Royce Jordan's front yard and repeatedly attempted to assault him. And, in a trademark case of Klan viciousness directed at the weak, in January 1966 Klansmen harassed and threatened a mentally retarded white youth for having black friends. Local Klansmen traveled widely in our section of the coast, participating in attacks on civil rights marchers in Plymouth and Williamston and threatening to drag black teachers out of a formerly all-white school in Onslow County.

This litany of crimes in the public record includes only a fraction of Klan outrages in Craven County. Several oral history projects, including one that I direct at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, have recently interviewed large numbers of local black citizens who lived through the KKK revival. Undocumented Klan atrocities emerge in nearly

**CAN hands that I have watched grow weathered with the labors of steadfast grace and unrelenting good have also lit the fiery cross?**

every interview. Newspapers almost never mentioned these racial attacks nor did law enforcement agencies investigate them. They represented the real Klan that tens of thousands of my fellow North Carolinians crowded to see and hear.

Then we woke up like out of a nightmare. Attendance at KKK rallies plummeted in 1967. Many people walked away from the fiery cross never to return. State Klan leaders soon found it difficult to find local people willing to lease them land for a rally. Wreckers and oil companies grew reluctant to erect or light the crosses. Well-founded rumors of corruption, disunion, and cruelty soured the Klan's quest for respectability. Many local whites learned that the world did not end with school desegregation and plunged forward to make the best of the new day. Other whites found they no longer needed the KKK. They channeled their racial anxieties into the south-wide rebirth of the Republican Party, George Wallace's American Independent Party, or the segregationist campaigns of local and state politicians. And they could allay their worst fears about race mixing by sending their children to the all-white private schools springing up in every county. At the same time, a heartening number of ministers, editors, and county sheriffs who had been silent began to speak out against the Klan.

Another compelling reason behind the KKK's declining popularity was that black Carolinians no longer allowed its sins to remain in the shadows. By 1967 the civil rights movement had emboldened black residents to stand up for themselves. Black communities like Rose Hill in Duplin County understood that the business class controlled the Klan. They went for the jugular: the black citizens of Rose Hill boycotted downtown businesses until the Klan halted open air meetings.

The days when Klan night riders could terrorize a black community without a fight had also drawn to a close. Blacks understood only too well that they could not count on white sheriffs and judges to protect them, so they increasingly took matters into their own hands. Now Klan terrorists encountered

riflemen guarding civil rights leaders and the roads out of black neighborhoods. When Klansmen shot at four youngsters at the rural crossroads of Middletown in Hyde County, they quickly found themselves surrounded by 125 blacks, many of them Vietnam veterans armed with hunting rifles and shotguns. The ensuing shoot-out drove the local Klan back underground. Similar clashes occurred throughout North Carolina.

### THE FRAILTY OF OUR SOULS

A historian never knows what will emerge from the shadows, and God help them who are afraid of the dark. The unblatant prose of police ledgers and government surveillance reports make it difficult to evade unwanted ghosts, and I must confess that I am now haunted by what I have discovered about this place that I care for so deeply.

As I drive along our two main roads, Highway 17 and 70, every mile I see landmarks unnoticed by other motorists. I pass a local farmer and I cannot forget that he allowed Klansmen to run an elec-

**If you wanted to know who had tried to kill whom for seeking to vote, or who had burned whose store for wanting a better education for their children, it was all there, neatly typed, in black and white.**

tric line to their loudspeakers. I drive by an elderly woman's home and wonder why such a kind lady allowed the KKK to lease her pasture for a rally. I pass a Shell filling station and remember how the manager used to supply kerosene for the Klan's crosses and torches. I visit my favorite barbecue restaurant and recall how the proprietor stuck a shotgun in the belly of a civil rights protestor and nearly killed her. Everywhere I go I recognize names of people that the SBI or SHP listed as attending Klan rallies—on rural mailboxes, billboards, downtown stores, law offices. I drive along quiet country roads that for me now echo with bomb blasts, shots fired, and torches crackling in the night. And when I stroll the beautiful, colonial-era historic district in New Bern, a place I used to love to visit, I can only think now of the town's silence before the Ku Klux Klan revival in its midst.

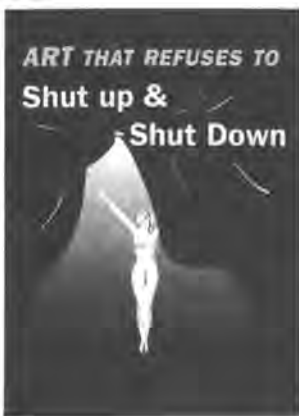
There is another, bone-deep way that uncovering the KKK documents has affected me. When I am back in Craven County I scrutinize more closely the faces I pass on the street, the men and women I see at the grocery store, Wal-Mart, and my doctor's waiting room. Knowing what I know, I cannot help but wonder what other hidden sins still await discovery on the dusty shelves of some distant archive. And—for what is the difference?—I cannot help but wonder too what unrecorded sins remain locked away within their hearts. Now I find myself searching my neighbors' eyes for previously unsuspected iniquities. I feel surrounded by unspoken failings. Can hands that I have watched grow weathered with the labors of steadfast grace and unrelenting good have also lit the fiery cross? The thought makes me shudder at the frailty of our souls. And, at that instant, I have never felt more kinship with them.

SE

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ART THAT REFUSES TO

Shut up &  
Shut Down



# SHUT UP & SHUT DOWN

Censored and defunded, artists in the South still  
hold their heads up.

**Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.**

— *The First Amendment, U.S. Constitution*

**F**orget art for art's sake. The 1980s and the wars over public funding of arts have been fought and mostly lost. The NEA still exists, but in reduced circumstances. Private foundations fund programs, but they tend to look for art that is more project than product, art that builds communities, cooperation or self-esteem. State and federal agencies also support teaching or participation with what little they have. As one actor said, "You have to do something useful with the community — workshops, oral histories, something. You can't just get some actors together and put on a play anymore." You especially can't do something vulgar, anti-religious, or sexual. After bruising controversies, art — especially in public spaces, and most especially with public money — seems to be growing more timid, less daring and edgy.

Many would agree that public funding shouldn't go to in-your-face offensive art anyway. They may welcome the trend toward funding useful art. But even if art does help to transform a community, it's not likely to get much support — the funds just aren't out there. The budget of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has been going steadily downhill — from \$176 million in 1992 to \$99.5 million both this year and last year.

The NEA cuts "have slowed down growth but haven't ended production," says Lisa Mount, the managing director of Seven Stages, a multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary theater company in Atlanta. But, she says, the larger, urban companies are much better off than rural, community theaters because the bigger ven-

ues have other resources. "Seven Stages can absorb these blows — they're not punishing — but for smaller, more isolated communities, they definitely are," she says.

The NEA, which reorganized to deal with massive cuts, eliminated the Expansion Arts Program "where almost all organizations of color got most of their funding," says Linda Burnham of Art in the Public Interest, a community arts advocacy organization that publishes *High Performance* magazine.

Individuals are affected the most, especially those involved in jazz and literature, says Steve Durland, also of Art in the Public Interest. The large institutions will continue to operate at the expense of the smaller organizations. And (some legislators may be relieved to hear), those that are community-based and non-controversial will be able to cope with the cuts better than "out-of-control activists," he says.

But starving the arts is bad economic and social policy.

Far from being a drain on public resources, the arts play a crucial role in the health of the economy. "Even if the positive social values of the arts are recognized, they are often shortsightedly dismissed as 'unaffordable,'" says a 1994 report, "Arts in the Local Economy," a study by the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies (NALAA). "When our communities invest in the arts, they are not opting for cultural benefits at the expense of economic benefits . . . Quite simply, the arts are an industry that generates jobs."

Their report showed that nonprofit

**"Painters, dancers, actors are tough as weeds and can grow in cracks in the concrete. There was great art, drama, writing and scholarship in America before 1965, when the endowments were founded. Dedicated people create ingenious strategies of survival for themselves. But why should they have to?"**

— Robert Hughes, *Time*, August 7, 1995

**Art is moral passion married to entertainment. Moral passion without entertainment is propaganda, and entertainment without moral passion is television.**

— Rita Mae Brown

arts accounted for more than 2,100 jobs in Dade County (Miami), Florida, in 1992, more than 5,700 jobs in Houston, and some 650 jobs in New Orleans. These nonprofit arts organizations — local theaters, opera companies, community orchestras or major symphonies, film festivals, museums — generate millions of dollars in revenues.

Overall the nonprofit arts in the United States support more than 1.3 million jobs, which return \$3.4 billion in income tax to the federal government each year. The National Endowment for the Arts provides just a small part of the revenues — most comes from state and local governments, foundations and private donors, and people who attend the concerts and plays, read the literature, and see the exhibitions.

The total arts industry produces an annual output of \$314.5 billion, contributing 6 percent of the gross national product. About 1 percent of U.S. labor goes to the nonprofit arts — almost as many workers as are involved in building construction.

Money for jobs isn't the only economic benefit of the arts. Artistic and cultural offerings draw tourists, boosting local economies. An annual storytelling festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee, attracts a nationwide audience, pumping \$5 million into a small, Appalachian community. Direct spending on the arts, both by artists buying supplies and renting facilities and by audiences who buy their tickets and often spend more money on parking, food, drink, and shopping, creates wider, indirect economic growth. These indirect revenues add up. A 1993 study by the Colorado Business Community for the Arts calculated the non-ticket spending of people attending cultural events on items like food, accommodations, and parking — in Houston, audience members spend an average of \$14 besides their ticket. In Atlanta, they spend more than \$15.

"Our leaders need visible proof of the economic benefits of the arts, so that arts funding can be strengthened and made less susceptible to public and political whim," said the National Association of Local Arts Agencies (which recently

merged with other arts advocacy organizations to become Americans for the Arts).

There is also the cultural benefit, the most obvious benefit of art, the stimulation, the throwing of creative sparks, the inspiration, the beauty. The problem in publicly funded art is judging what's worthy and what's not, what is beautiful and what is offensive. One of our staff members said that something like "Piss Christ," described in the article on the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, should never be publicly funded. I disagreed. Restricting the flash points in art creates a chilling effect. When schoolchildren painted the little white posts in front of the Mississippi Cultural Crossroads building with bright colors as part of a mural project, the powers-that-be in Port Gibson, Mississippi, were offended enough that they insisted that the little posts be repainted white.

The chill on finances and freedom of expression hasn't stopped artists in the South. I conceived this section to talk about how bruising the censorship and defunding of arts has been in the region — how the arts have been shut down and shut up. But what I found as I talked with artists all over the South is that they keep on doing their work no matter what. The section became "Arts that refuse to shut up and shut down," and features a portfolio of artists who just won't give up.



I would like to dedicate this section to my mother, Edna Arnow, who gave me an appreciation of the importance of art in everyday life. After working as a studio potter for 45 years, she retired, and shortly thereafter got a new studio because she found she couldn't live without making pots — another artist who just won't give up.

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— Pat Arnow with Gretchen Boger and Caroline Brown.

*Gretchen Boger is from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and a student at Yale University. Caroline Brown attends Duke University and is from Greensboro, North Carolina.*



# PORTFOLIO

Some who wrote the local newspaper said that Larry Jens Anderson's exhibit at the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College in Gautier was an "abomination." Others commended the school for bringing in the show about homosexuality and AIDS. School officials closed the exhibition early.

The shutting down of Anderson's ex-

hibition was one of more than a hundred cases of censorship across the nation last year. The children's film, *The Lion King* and the popular Broadway play about people with AIDS, *Angels in America*, faced challenges. Television shows such as *Seinfeld* and *Chicago Hope* came under attack. Radio stations all over the country are giving into pressures to stop playing "gangsta rap" music.

Many of the high-profile campaigns are led by organized groups. "Don Wildmon [of American Family Association in Mississippi] accounts for a big share of the activity," reported Matthew Freeman, director of research for People for the American Way, a Washington, D.C.-based organization devoted to defending freedom of expression. But challenges to commercial television, movies, music and advertisements accounted for just one-quarter of the censorship incidents. The rest were local and regional arts: plays, paintings, murals, and photo exhibits.

The sentiments of those objecting in the smaller venues are generally the same as Wildmon and his national

group. "Eighty percent of the objections come from the political right," according to Freeman. "In past years we saw a lot of incidents described as political correctness variety," said Freeman. These were complaints that a work constituted harassment, for instance. But this year, Freeman said, that kind of challenge makes up only about 5 percent of all objections to art.

People for the American Way documented 137 challenges to artistic expression in 41 states and Washington, D.C. Those objecting to art, television shows, plays or other media "claimed it was pornographic or obscene, objected to depictions of faith, or on grounds it was promoting homosexuality," said Freeman. Homosexuality was the biggest problem for viewers, he said, followed by objections to sexually explicit materials.

"Challengers continue to be remarkably successful at removing or restricting the expression to which they object," reported PFAW in their annual listing of incidents, *Artistic Freedom Under Attack*. In nearly three-quarters of the cases, work was removed or restricted.

The South, with approximately a quarter of the nation's population, accounts for nearly a third of the cases of censorship in the nation, according to Freeman.

There is more than one way to talk the arts into shutting up. Lack of funding has had a chilling effect on art and artists, especially in rural areas.

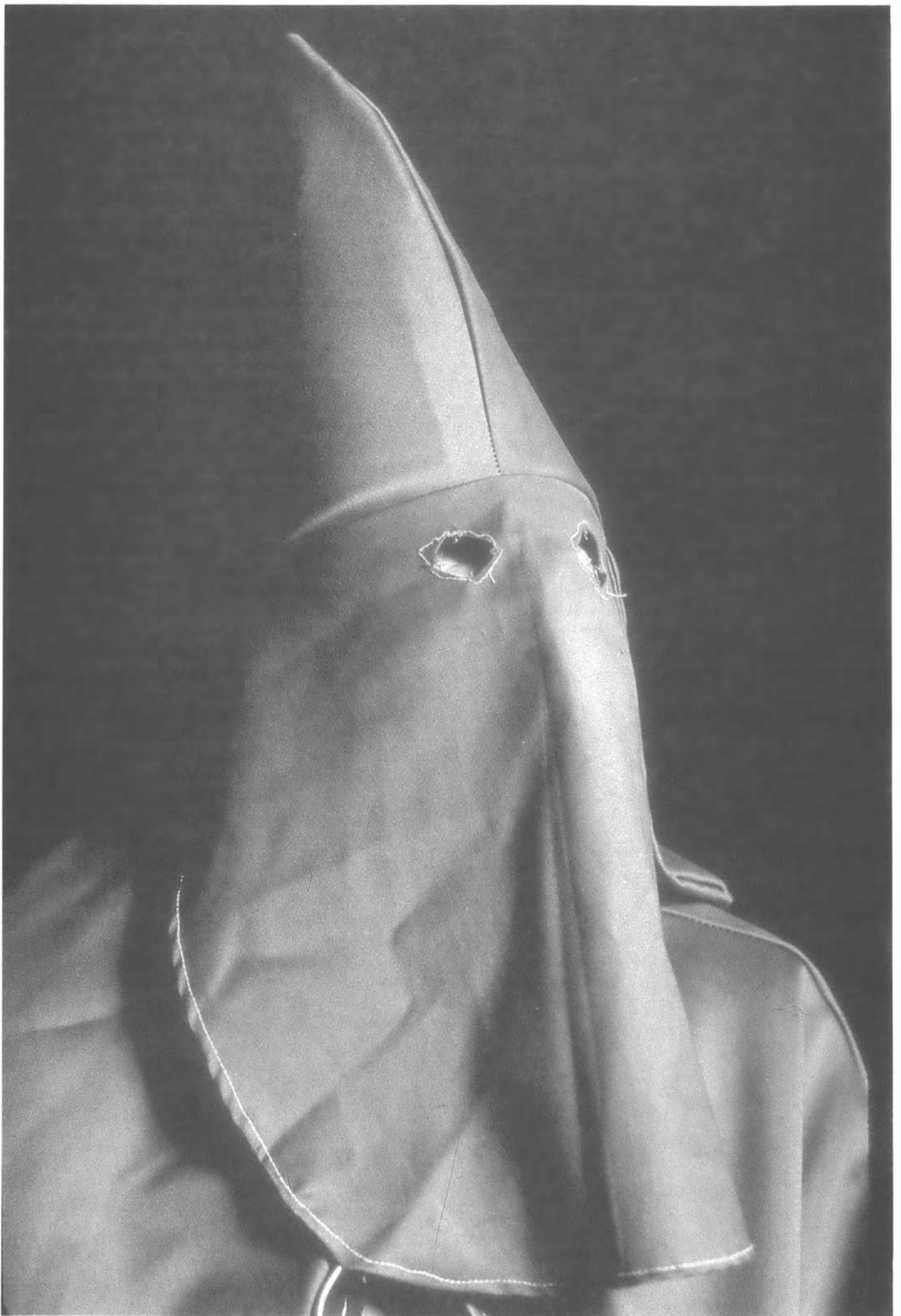
In the following portfolio, we focused on examples of publicly funded art or art shown in public places in the South.

— Portfolio compiled by Pat Arnow with research assistance by Leslie Waugh.

Leslie Waugh is a graduate student in journalism at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and was a summer Southern Exposure intern.



Judy Horacek from *Life on the Edge*, Spinifex Press, Australia, 1992



# IRONIES, CONTROVERSIES, AND COMMUNITY

## Southeastern Center for Contemporary Arts.

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — Controversy over a photograph called "Piss Christ" had a chilling effect on the work of the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art. But the flap also inspired the 40-year-old nonprofit visual arts organization to learn to work with the community and become more effective, according to its director.

"Piss Christ," a photograph by artist Andres Serrano, featured a crucifix in a container of urine-like liquid. Serrano had created the work as part of a fellowship he received through a major 10-year-old SECCA program called Award for the Visual Arts. The program involved a show that traveled to various museums without incident in 1988.

That was before North Carolina's Senator Jesse Helms noticed the piece. "He had gotten wind through the American Family Network," said Virginia Rutter, SECCA's public relations and marketing coordinator. Helms' office asked for a catalog from the show, which Rutter provided.

"It dislodged the first rock in a landslide of congressional criticism of the National Endowment for the Arts, which supported . . . SECCA's annual examination of new art in America," wrote Steven Litt in the *Raleigh News & Observer*. In the summer of 1989, "Piss Christ," along with Robert Mapplethorpe's photos of nudes, some in sadistic and homo-erotic poses, became the focus of the crusade to eliminate the National Endowment for the Arts.

Helms' office "asked us to help bury the NEA," said Rutter. "We said no." Funding levels dropped, but the NEA survived.

The current director of SECCA, Susan

Lubowsky Talbott, was, at the time of the controversy, director of the visual arts program at the NEA, which funded the Serrano project.

SECCA had sponsored the art program with funding from the NEA, the Rockefeller Foundation, and corporate sponsors. After the controversy, Talbott said she found it ironic that "the only funder willing to go on with the program was the NEA." But SECCA could not find matching funds needed to secure the NEA grant. Rockefeller, and the foundation had already made it clear before the controversy began that they weren't planning to fund the program again, according to Talbott.

No other sponsor wanted to fund the program. "I could only guess that it had something to do with the Serrano controversy. We couldn't make the match. I could not find the corporate support for it when I came on board in 1992." The entire Award for the Visual Arts program had to be abandoned.

"That's long behind SECCA," Talbott said recently. "SECCA has been going about our business."

Programs now involve community-based grassroots work. SECCA has succeeded, according to its director, in making a transition from "an institution under a great deal of attack because of Serrano to an institution that has been getting a great deal of support. Our whole Artists in the Community [program] has a lot of success stories."

The programs and exhibits have not involved inflammatory images of nudity or religion, but they have had potential for problems, especially when they deal with race and gender issues, said Talbott. Many of the works "do question the basic

**(OPPOSITE PAGE) ANDRES SERRANO, *KLANSMAN (IMPERIAL WIZARD II)*, FROM THE GROUP SHOW, "CIVIL RIGHTS NOW," A 1995 SOUTHEASTERN CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART EXHIBIT, WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA. IT WAS SERRANO'S PHOTOGRAPH, "PISS CHRIST," THAT "DISLODGED THE FIRST ROCK IN A LANDSLIDE OF CONGRESSIONAL CRITICISM OF THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT OF THE ARTS" IN 1989, ACCORDING TO THE RALEIGH NEWS & OBSERVER, AND INSPIRED SECCA TO CHANGE THE WAY IT DOES ITS WORK.**

*Andres Serrano, 1990, cibachrome, silicone, plexiglass, wood frame 40" x 60," edition of 4. Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.*



NEW ORLEANS NATIVE AND BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, RESIDENT WILLIE BIRCH WAS ONE OF THE ARTISTS IN THE "ARTIST AND THE COMMUNITY" PROGRAM AT THE SOUTHEASTERN CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART IN WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA. BIRCH WORKED WITH THE COUNTY SCHOOLS AND SHOWED HIS WORK AT THE SECCA GALLERY. THIS PAPIER-MÂCHÉ AND MIXED MEDIA SCULPTURE, 46 X 18 X 18 INCHES, *REMEMBERING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT*, 1995, WAS PART OF BIRCH'S SECCA EXHIBITION.

core beliefs of a lot of people in this community. Some of the most activist artists have done exhibits here," she said.

"We did an exhibit last year, 'Civil Rights Now,' and the curator felt very strongly that civil rights in the '90s involved not only racial issues but gender issues and gay and lesbian rights, and one part of the show had the potential to be very controversial because it was extremely sexual in nature."

Before the show opened, SECCA arranged a special showing for community leaders including blacks and whites, liberals and ultra-conservatives. "We asked them to see the show before we showed it to the public to give us advice on how to program the exhibit. About 25 came. Our curator and I gave them a tour."

The strategy worked better than the staff expected. The show included large photos of Ku Klux Klan members by, ironically, Andres Serrano. A black alderwoman stood in front of one of these photos and talked about having a cross burned on her lawn as a girl. "Her description brought tears to every person there," Talbott said. People in this diverse group talked to each other.

There was discomfort with the exhibit, too. Members of the black community were upset that gay rights were being mixed in with black civil rights. After listening to the opinions of the visitors, "We ended up rewriting some of our label copy, rewrote it in a more sensitive way," said Talbott.

Seeing the work, airing opinions, and

being heard made the difference. "Even a lesbian videotape was accepted by everyone there," said Talbott.

The show came off without opposition or controversy. Taking the time to build a base of support in the community, "was a very different approach than the Serrano controversy, where no one wanted to hear the opposition." Of course, Talbott added, "It was such a political football. It is not realistic to say that the kind of tactics we used with 'Civil Rights Now' would have worked on a national level, but I think the art world made a grave mistake — and myself as well — in taking a defensive, combative position that didn't allow the opposition any integrity."

The art world "took what I consider now to be a very elitist position that 'you can't understand art.' All the arguments were made about the aesthetic qualities of the work, and the whole dialogue was very much art world language, artspeak. There was an us and them mentality."

She said Jesse Helms and New York Republican Senator Alfonse D'Amato propagated the argument, but that the art world went on the defensive. Talbott was quick to say that she still supported NEA and freedom of expression, "but the argument can be made in a less elitist and less combative way and in a way that is based more on dialogue and mutual understanding than on animosity and the position of 'we're smart, you're stupid.'"

Today, SECCA is comfortable in its revised role as a member of the community. Financially, they've never been better off. The center receives support from NEA and state and local foundations and agencies. This support has more than made up for other cutbacks and losses. "I daresay we're not typical," said Talbott. The Artist in the Community program is "the kind of thing that funders want to do now, but not every institution has that as their mission. We happen to be fitting right into the trend [that foundations like], so we're lucky, but it's the work we'd be doing anyway." **S**

**E**



# THE OFFENSIVE HUMAN BODY

Maxine Henderson

*Courtesy of the artist*



WHEN A PAINTING OF A NUDE BY MAXINE HENDERSON WAS REMOVED FROM HER EXHIBITION, THE ARTIST DECIDED TO FIGHT THE CENSORSHIP.

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. — “It was really a semi-nude — she was draped at the bottom, and her arm was over her breast,” says Maxine Henderson, whose painting landed her in the midst of a First Amendment battle.

The nude, which the artist made with a palette knife and leftover paints at the end of a painting day, was one of 40 paintings in a one-woman show October 1995 in the rotunda of City Hall in this middle Tennessee town. Other images created by the retired businesswoman turned full-time painter included local churches, the woman’s club, and the artist’s grandchildren.

When the assistant superintendent of city schools passed the exhibit on her way to a meeting and saw the nude, she objected. “I personally find ‘art’ in any form whether it be a painting, a Greek statue or a picture out of *Playboy* which displays genitals, buttocks, and /or nipples of the human body to be pornographic and, in this instance, very offensive and degrading to me as a woman,” she said in a sexual harassment complaint she submitted to the city the next day.

The city removed the painting and changed policies to give the city manager final say in art exhibits.

Henderson felt she had to fight.

“They rewrote city art policy after this incident. My attorney calls it prior restraint. The art committee failed to stand up. I was just outraged,” said Henderson.

She has filed a federal lawsuit claiming her First Amendment rights were violated. “I felt that I had to as a citizen,” she said. She thought the complaint “trivialized the real issue of sexual harassment. So many people need this protection that it’s obscene she took this route.”

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# DEMONIC SYMBOLS

## Mona Waterhouse

MOBILE, Ala. — "I'm from Sweden originally. I have lived all over America, and it never ceases to amaze me the way people think," said artist Mona Waterhouse after the University of Mobile removed her work from a regional show last year for use of "demonic symbols."

The university displayed "incredible ignorance," she said recently as she explained what happened to her work. "In my paintings the symbols I used are based on rune stone symbols, the ancient way of writing before Christianity. That's probably why I got in trouble."

A jury selected Waterhouse's piece, "Letters Home III" for an annual exhibition of Southern artists, "Art with a

*Courtesy of the artist*

Southern Drawl," at the private religious school.

The painter/sculptor/teacher used rune stone symbols, which are found in art and decoration all over Sweden, as symbols for her letters home once-a-week for the 35 years she has lived away from her native land.

"They don't mean anything," she said, but they "represent everything that has been written, in a sense."

A student who saw the show just before it was to open "totally freaked out, got a book about witchcraft — where did she get that, I wonder? — and told the director of the show that the work was demonic," said the artist.

The director of the show, Charles M. Clark, who was also chair of the department of fine arts, "summoned some individuals affiliated with the University who could either confirm or deny the student's interpretation and, unfortunately, they all concurred that the piece contained a number of demonic symbols," according to a letter informing Waterhouse that her picture had been withdrawn from the exhibition. Clark and Audrey C. Eubanks, Vice President for Academic Affairs, both signed the letter.

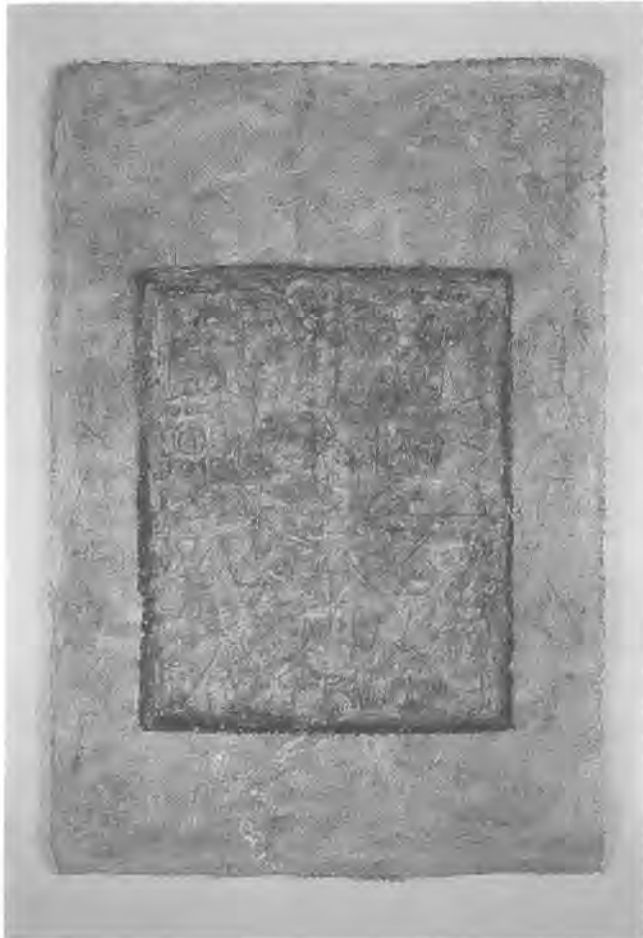
"We do not know whether or not you were aware, at the time you submitted the piece, that the University of Mobile was created under the auspices of and is closely affiliated with the Alabama Baptist State Convention. In view of this affiliation, and the University's Christian philosophy, we think you can understand that a piece containing such symbols is not appropriate for exhibition at any University facility or at any events sponsored by the University," the letter explained.

They offered to let the painter submit another piece "with a content which would be more in keeping with the Christian philosophy of the University." The artist refused.

She is still angry that the administration immediately took down the picture in reaction "to one student's hysteria. For me it reflects much larger issues." Acting out of fear and ignorance, "that's where all the evil comes from, in my book."

SE

**A CHRISTIAN COLLEGE DECIDED TO REMOVE MONA WATERHOUSE'S PAINTING WITH SUPPOSED DEMONIC SYMBOLS FROM A JURIED EXHIBITION.**



# I HAVE TO WATCH WHAT I SHOW

Isabel Zamora

*Courtesy of the artist*



ISABEL ZAMORA, WHO TEACHES FIFTH GRADE AND CREATES WORK FOR THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE, FOUND SUPPORT IN HER CENSORSHIP EXPERIENCE FROM HER PARISH PRIEST.

FORT WORTH, Texas — Isabel Zamora's show at the Health Science Center at the University of North Texas featured two nudes, but the artist wasn't much worried about offending anyone. After all, the display of her art for Hispanic Heritage Month was at a medical school, where "they see dead bodies," so why would some nudes painted in a life-drawing class bother anyone?

A week after the show opened, exhibit organizer Sylvia Flores noticed that one of the pictures, a male nude, was missing. Thinking the work had been stolen, she called the artist who "began to panic." Two days later, the drawing turned up in the office of equal employment officer Louis Seales. He had removed the drawing after he received a complaint from "an anonymous university staff member," who claimed that the drawing "was obscene, sexually harassing, and potentially offensive to women and children visiting the center," according to *Artistic Freedom Under Attack 1996* by People for the American Way.

"That struck me as weird," said Zamora, who recently graduated from the art program at Texas Wesleyan. "The drawing of the female nude was O.K. It was the male nude she found offensive."

The show had about two weeks left to run, but Zamora took down the other nude as well, worried that it would be damaged.

She said she never received a real explanation or apology. The artist, who teaches fifth grade and creates religious works for area Catholic churches, speculated that her minority status might have acted as a catalyst for the people who objected to and removed her work. The sexism certainly struck her: "If we see men nude, it's offensive, but you can go ahead and show a woman."

AN OFFICIAL REMOVED THIS NUDE  
FROM AN EXHIBIT AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS  
HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER.



ISABEL ZAMORA'S  
VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE  
FOR CATHOLIC DIOCESE

Zamora noted the chilling effect on her work. "I feel that I have to watch what I show. I had that fear. I didn't have the freedom to express myself." The university has not asked her to exhibit work this year for Hispanic Heritage month as they had done in past years. She said she would not display her work there in any case because they had treated her so rudely.

Her religious work has been rewarding. The bishop blessed her and the painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe that she did for the Catholic diocese, and she continues to paint for the church.

Her priest was supportive when medical school officials removed her nude pictures from the exhibition last year. "The priest said, 'God brought us into this world nude. Why shouldn't we [see] nudes? People should appreciate the artist who draws what God created.'" He warned her that people can be close-minded, and to be careful where she shows her work. "He said, 'You have to remember we're in Texas.'" **S**

**E**

# NO SHOWS AT HOME

## The Road Company

JOHNSON CITY, Tenn. — Because funding has been so tight, the new show that The Road Company has been developing isn't so new. Five performer/writers have been working on creating *Zero Moment* for more than three years. This year they hope to finish the script. Next year, they can think about performing their show about the lives of a band of sideshow performers.

A theater troupe based in a small Appalachian city creating original works is always going to have a tough time finding funding, but this lean nonprofit is learning to make do with even less than usual. The National Endowment for the Arts Expansion Arts Program ended in 1996, taking money the 20-year-old touring group used to put on plays at their home base. This year, The Road Company will present no shows at home and bring in no guest performers.

The performers did receive a \$6,000 grant recently from another NEA pro-

gram to finish *Zero Moment*. That limited funding will enable the group to write a script, not to develop the play the way they usually do — on their feet as an ensemble.

That funding along with teaching in artists-in-the-schools programs, and community arts center funding from a private donor to work with neighborhood children, will make up the \$40,000 budget this year. In the past, when they had big projects — such as taking a show to Russia — their budget has been as high as \$250,000.

The small core ensemble of two actors and a staff person, won't let a lack of funding stop them from the work they do. They won't be buying new cars, either. Or even new jeans. But they never have. They've always been content to work in this East Tennessee community creating and performing plays of their own design.

## from *Zero Moment*

BY THE ROAD COMPANY ENSEMBLE — CHRISTINE MURDOCK, EUGENE WOLF, ED SNODDERLY, LAURENE SCALF, AND BOB LEONARD

### Dog Boy Speaks in Tongues

They law, if that is not the awfulest thing I have ever seen. That boy is the vilest thing on the face of this earth. That boy invented evil. He's as evil as cockroaches.

I don't know what the big to-do is. Everybody thinks he's so good-looking. Well, if he's good-looking, I'm Joey Heatherton. Pshht. Everybody eats him up like buttermilk. I don't know. There's

something funny about him. I don't like him. I don't. He's creepy. And that girl. That old tramp that runs around here in them old dresses. They are brother and sister. Now, and I know it. They've got different last names, but they are brother and sister. They might have different daddies, or something.

Now she is pretty. She is, but she acts trashy. She's went with every old thing in this town. You know a person's actions will make a person look ugly to you. I don't go down there, but they say she just kisses on everything at the Watering Hole. And her colors don't look good on her. She ought to have that done, where

they tell you what colors to wear. Of course, you know, she don't wear anything too long. If you get where I'm going with that. . . .

#### JOE

I see a little girl on the tightrope. It is very early morning. No one else is around. The tent flaps in the early morn-

ing breeze. The air is close but hints of the warm to come. The little girl wears a pink dress. At the foot of the ladder, a little pair of white socks lie atop black patent leather Mary Janes. She moves slowly, thin arms out to her side for balance. She steps, teeters, waits until her footing is again secure. I hold my breath while she brings her right foot slowly around to the front of her left. Her tiny soles are pink, the toes indiscernible from this distance.

I could climb the ladder and grasp the tightrope, watch her little eyes bug with fear, watch her little mouth form a round pink scream as she falls. I could defile her. I have never been with a child. I've never thought of it till this moment. Her skin must be incredibly smooth. The thought is disgusting, thrilling. I look around the tent. I listen intently, dreading, hoping, to hear someone coming. No one.

As she moves across the wire, I move toward the ladder. We move in tandem, my slow step echoing hers. Neither of us breathes. I silently scale the ladder. As I reach the top, she turns her head. She is frozen there on the wire, one foot in front of the other, knees slightly bent, her arms stretched out like wings, her head turned to me. Her eyes are gray; their gaze is grave. I can't look away from her eyes. I reach out to take the wire in my hand. Her mouth turns up at the corners in a tiny smile. She steps off the wire and flies away, away through the air, through the doorway, out of the tent.

I begin to breathe again. I realize where I am, standing near the top of the ladder, holding the wire in my hand. I let go of the wire and descend the ladder. When I get to the bottom, Dog Boy is standing there staring at me. He holds the little shoes and socks in his hands.

I run all the way home, looking behind me often to see if Dog Boy is following me. He isn't, but I can't slow down until I get to the cave. I throw myself on the stone and lie there panting. I keep seeing her step off the wire. And that tiny sweet smile just before she moved. It was a smile of pity, and remembering it fills my heart with hatred.

SE

Photo by Lynn Jeffries



LAURENE SCALF AS MADAME ZOLTA OBSERVES CHRISTINE MURDOCK AS INNOCENCE FLAME IN A 1995 SHOWCASE OF PART OF THE ROAD COMPANY'S UNFINISHED PLAY, *ZERO MOMENT*, IN JOHNSON CITY, TENNESSEE.



# WHITE ONLY

A community showed its true character when

# ON MAIN

exuberant artists didn't paint within

# STREET

the lines.

**By Emilye Crosby**

*Photos by Patty Crosby*

**PORT GIBSON, Miss.** — The liveliest spot on Fair Street and the most recent object of controversy in a continuing racial conflict over control of public space in Port, Gibson, Mississippi, is a full-length mural which decorates the side of a previously abandoned building. In a town working to rebuild the downtown area and promote local culture to attract tourists, the mural project, which replaced the cracked, dirty, and unappealing wall, seemed like an ideal project for widespread community support. Instead it has been the latest subject of scrutiny and controversy in this rural, majority African-American community in South-west Mississippi.

The storefront of Mississippi Cultural Crossroads (MCC) faces Main Street, which is the traditional white center of commerce and power. The mural side of the building runs along Fair Street, which was once known as "Nigger Street." As its location suggests, MCC, in some senses, serves as a literal connector between white and black Port Gibson. It is an integrated cultural arts organization with a commitment to African-American history, culture, and aesthetic as an essential part of an integrated and complete community. Through its racially inclusive programs and presentations, MCC has become a sort of touchstone for revealing many unspoken assumptions which still divide blacks and whites, and





A Port Gibson youth decorates his home — or destroys public property — depending on whose opinion you seek.

for subtly challenging the sometimes hidden remnants of white dominance.

The mural was created in large part by children and adults in the community, both black and white. It is bright and colorful and includes children's self-portraits and large jaunty letters spelling out Mississippi Cultural Crossroads. It portrays 18 years of various MCC programs (Peanut Butter and Jelly Theater group and Summer Art Program), black and white individuals, and downtown landmarks traditionally associated with blacks (Our Mart, a black-initiated cooperative grocery store), whites (Presbyterian Church with a finger pointing to the sky), and with both communities (Trace Theater, owned and frequented over the years by whites and blacks). It is through its very racial inclusiveness that the mural diverges from the conventional white idea of the community's important history and culture.

The society and architecture of ante-

bellum days and General U.S. Grant's oft-quoted comment that Port Gibson was "too beautiful to burn" tend to dominate the community's image to tourists and to some extent its self-image. In an effort to attract tourists, Port Gibson is deliberately working to promote its history. The integrated Main Street Organization, dedicated to rejuvenating the once-thriving downtown area, and the integrated City Preservation Commission, charged with maintaining and preserving the integrity of the community's history and culture, are the civic organizations charged with leading this effort. Both organizations are signs of a growing commitment by black and white civic leaders to create a harmonious integrated community where public policy considers and benefits both races.

At times, however, the Preservation Commission's charge to "strengthen civic pride and cultural stability" and "preserve, enhance, and perpetuate those

aspects of the city . . . having historical, cultural, [and] architectural . . . merit" raises difficult questions which test the tenuous peace. Mostly unspoken, these questions can reveal the differences between whites and blacks that otherwise tend to remain submerged in the cautious terrain of 1990s politics and polite, careful conversations about an integrated town and interracial harmony.

This is evident in the community's response to the mural and related work. After a lengthy meeting with the Preservation Commission, the constitution of a mural subcommittee, and negotiations about the mural's content, MCC's request for a required "certificate of appropriateness," or permission to alter a historic building, was granted, and painting began in late May 1996.

### **PAINTING THE BOLLARDS**

The three week project involved two weeks of art instruction and painting for



# BEFORE AND AFTER...



Artists, young and old, black and white, painted the side of the Mississippi Cultural Center in Port Gibson.

local schoolchildren. By the end of the first week the children had painted everything they could reach, so mural artist Dennis Sullivan decided to have the children paint the sidewalk squares in front of the mural. The children maneuvered around the cracked and broken cement and covered years of dirt and neglect with cheerful and vibrant images of their homes and families and favorite musical instruments. These images brightened the sidewalk and commemorated the history of Fair Street where African Americans had gathered (through the 1960s) to visit and listen to top rhythm and blues acts playing in local juke joints.

In a final burst of enthusiasm, Sullivan

and others also painted small posts (called bollards) that separated the street from the sidewalk in front of MCC on Main street. Originally white, the painting crew left them a variety of bright colors.

Reactions to the project came quickly and varied widely. The white city clerk articulated her dismay by saying, "Look

what they've done to our sidewalks!" She asked the chief of police to research local laws to see if Mississippi Cultural Crossroads should be charged with destroying public property. A white banker and member of MCC's board was pleased with the mural and thought the sidewalk was O.K., too. But, he reported objections to the colored bollards with

**THE** white city clerk thought that Mississippi Cultural Crossroads should be charged with destroying public property.

the simple explanation: "White only on Main Street."

A retired black schoolteacher liked the bollards' new range of colors and got right to the heart of the matter by volunteering to repaint them, not their new array of colors, but black, if they were restored to their earlier uniform white. A young African American who participated in the painting brought more than 50 of his relatives, in town for a family reunion, to view the mural and admire the parts he had helped paint. His mother, a member of the Preservation Commission, was pleased with the mural as a visual addition to downtown, but also for the way it connected her son to the community.

These comments and reactions were fairly typical and, as I listened to them, I was struck not simply by the divergent reactions, but the sense of ownership, entitlement, and assumptions of control that many white comments conveyed. In this regard, the mural, though perhaps more subtle, raises important issues of authority and control reminiscent of the community's civil rights movement.

### WHITES AND SPENDERS ONLY

Before the civil rights movement, Main Street, the commercial center of Port Gibson, was almost like a private drive for the white community whose merchants and farmers dominated the community's economic and political power structure.

Like temporary guests, blacks were welcomed to spend their money, but Main Street was the "white folks street." A minister and civil rights leader recalls



**MURAL PAINTERS DREW PEOPLE THEY KNEW AND FANCIFUL PORTRAITS, TOO.**

that, "[when] we would walk down the street [and] a white person would come along, they would occupy the whole street. And, you had to get off to the side, wait, and let them pass." An African-American woman remembers, "We would go uptown and purchase items from the 10-cent store and stuff, but everybody black would hang on 'Nigger Street,' which is Fair Street now."

The local civil rights movement directly challenged white supremacy and the accompanying white sense of entitlement and private ownership of nominally public spaces. In Claiborne County, the obvious shifts in power triggered by the civil rights movement came through the political process and a black boycott of white merchants.

However, some of the most dramatic, visible confrontations over power came on Main Street as African Americans challenged white usurpation of such public spaces. For example, Jimmy Allen, a white merchant and member of the board of aldermen, parked vehicles from his car dealership on the sidewalk forcing pedestrians to walk around. Civil rights leader Charles Evers challenged this practice telling a crowd of marchers, "This street doesn't belong to Allen. It belongs to the City of Port Gibson. That is all of us."

White assumptions of jurisdiction over the streets is clear in another interaction involving a movement leader, Calvin Williams. Williams and an informal group of African Americans were walking down Main Street when they encountered the white chief of police and a group of white men who were standing together on a street corner. Although Williams and those accompanying him were simply walking down the street, Williams was arrested and charged with "disturbing the peace" and "blocking the public sidewalk and entrances to stores." The white men who testified against

him, described how Williams and his companions were walking in a group down the street and at one point stopped on a corner. They never reported Williams actually physically blocking the sidewalk or any store entrance, and more importantly, saw no irony in the fact that they too were standing in a group on a sidewalk corner. Race and power were the only real differences between the two groups of men on Main Street that day. But explicit white control of public streets was ending. That summer the Deacons for Defense and Justice, a group of armed black men, patrolled the streets of Port Gibson with guns and walkie talkies to ensure the protection of movement leaders, churches, and black citizens. Strong, armed, black men dressed

in distinctive black hats, patrolling and standing on Main Street, created a powerful challenge to long-standing white dominance of the streets.

During the movement, individuals like Charles Evers, Calvin Williams, and the Deacons asserted their right to stand, march, or congregate on Main Street, while newly registered black voters replaced white officeholders, occupying the antebellum courthouse with black officeholders. Yet, to some extent, blacks simply moved into a white world symbolized by the courthouse and Main Street. While many stores went out of business and for years Main Street had the appearance of a ghost town, it still retained the feel and character of its white occupants and the remnants of the prized (by whites) antebellum culture.

Even today, whites still assume, maybe unconsciously, that their world view, their aesthetic, is the right one or even the only one. This summer, 30 years after the movement began, Mississippi Cultural Crossroads challenged that aesthetic and has laid claim to downtown Port Gibson at another level. By affirming African-American culture and vision, the mural project, including sidewalk and painted posts, is another step in establishing downtown public space for all Port Gibson residents. Not as confrontational as defiant speeches, changing behavior, and civil rights marches, art provides a more implicit challenge because it puts forth a vision which is not universal and which diverges from the unspoken or undefined. At stake this time are competing priorities and visions of Port Gibson and whether the entire community will share in a sense of belonging and commitment.

The bollards are now their original white, the mural is being continuously evaluated, and there is discussion and speculation about the fate of the painted



sidewalk. This experience illustrates that historic preservation is not neutral or colorblind. It can too easily be used as a vehicle for returning to an imagined ideal of a bygone time.

Many whites believe historic preservation should recreate the image of pre-civil rights movement Main Street and antebellum mansions of a seemingly idyllic past. For African Americans these images recall the same era but to a different effect. The good old days of white memory are, for African Americans, colored by painful recollections of poverty, oppression, and capricious white power. This white-dominated vision doesn't completely exclude African Americans, but encompasses them in a larger Jim Crow world where African-American cemeteries and shotgun houses are acceptable images of the past because they

don't challenge white historic vision. But MCC and the community mural refuse to accept this world view which would once again include blacks simply on white terms.

The white city clerk's immediate reaction to the painted sidewalk ("Look what they've done to our sidewalk!") was quite perceptive. She recognized that by painting the sidewalk, the school children and younger generation were putting their mark on a piece of Port Gibson and making it theirs.

Perhaps, too, in the same brush strokes, they were laying the groundwork for a truly integrated Port Gibson, one that their elders—tied to the past, years of racial struggle, and conventional visions of history—cannot visualize or imagine. While white adults, even unconsciously, recognize an assertion of African-American power in the mural, the white children

who participated have a different experience and understanding. They now share something with their black co-authors. And, perhaps, in another 30 years, the white and black participants in this project will meet at the mural to show off to friends and family their shared history and tradition. If that happens, their parents' stated ideal of a harmonious integrated community might come to pass, not through ignoring the community's varied racial perspectives, culture, and history, but through embracing them.

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Shut up &  
Shut Down



# OUT

Telling real stories in front of people breaks

# LOUD

the tradition of silence.



Illustrations by David Terry

## By Jo Carson

**I**n an issue devoted to stories of censorship and other acts of cowardice and things hidden, I want to add a story about courage in the face of art.

I've been making part of my living as a sort of playwright-for-hire, creating performance pieces out of oral histories for communities. The pieces begin as humanities projects or economic development projects or projects undertaken because somebody needs people to talk cooperatively with one another, and this looks like a good way to get them started.

What I create are not plays in the traditional sense. They are more like patchwork quilts of stories which community people, not professional actors, play back for the community in public performances. Room is made for whoever wants to participate. That is often stage-struck children. Sometimes people have to be begged to participate, usually adults who already have plenty to do.

The process begins with whoever can be roped into using a tape recorder and

going to their relatives and neighbors to collect oral histories. This may be the most important part because people have to listen to each other.

As a writer of performance pieces, I am not looking for the same things historians want when they gather oral histories. I need stories of things that have happened to people, and I want the best raconteurs on tape, not necessarily the folks with the most accurate memories. Sometimes they are the same people but not always, and in truth, not often.

My nightmare in this process is when oral history takers are given a list of questions to follow. The last project of that nature had about 1000 pages of oral histories from 75 or so people with two stories — count them, two — in the whole collection. All the rest was answers to questions designed to gather opinions, not stories. It is very hard to write a play out of opinion.

The collected oral histories are transcribed, and the transcriptions come to me. I choose stories I can make some kind of whole with. I don't always follow a single story line through the play, though I have done that. I might follow a theme — the work of a place, for example. An emotional path can be the organizational backbone, or a character I keep coming back to. The structure varies every time I do a new piece. I also play loose and free as a writer with the stuff in the oral histories. I'm not inclined to ruin a good story by sticking to facts; truth is, most people seem to like it when I add some salt to the meat.

My main job as a writer is giving these past tense narrative stories some dramatic value so they become interesting on-stage. I use every trick I know or can think up, then I carry the script back to the community, and we produce it. I am currently working on my 10th show with two more to come in the next six months. I'm doing women's stories in East Tennessee (the Hidden Heroines project) and single room occupancy hotel stories for Scrap Metal project in Chicago.



And so we come to Colquitt and to courage.

The most successful of these endeavors is an economic development project called Swamp Gravy in the town of Colquitt, Georgia.

Swamp Gravy is named after a dish made with whatever is on hand—tomatoes, peppers, onions, rice—to accompany fried fish. Colquitt is a small town (about 3,000) in the piney woods of southwest Georgia. The economy is agricultural—cotton, soybeans, and peanuts, and if you're not farming, you are doing something related. There is not much else to do. You can buy all the brides' magazines a human could want, and the current *House Beautiful* and *Southern Living* at the grocery store in Colquitt, but it is 20 miles to a Kmart and a Newsweek or an Atlantic. A good bit further—120 miles—to a *Mother Jones* or a *Southern Exposure*. There is a video rental store, but the closest movie house is also a drive away. Swamp Gravy is literally the only show in town. It runs 30 to 40 nights a year downtown in a renovated old cotton warehouse that seats about 200 but has room for another hundred standing. Swamp Gravy often plays to 300 people per night.

These folks are currently collecting oral histories for their sixth show. We keep changing the show in Colquitt because most of the Swamp Gravy audience comes once or twice a year to see it, and we try to give them something that is (in part) new once a year.

Swamp Gravy was part of the Cultural Olympiad (a rather exclusive list of rec-

**YOU** do not know how hard it can be to tell real stories, out loud in front of real people in places where the tradition of silence in such matters is so very, very strong.

commended cultural events in the South to see while in the country for the Olympics) and about the time this issue of *Southern Exposure* gets to your mailbox, Swamp Gravy will play an invitational evening at the Kennedy Center in Washington. They've made national media several times, and Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter came to see the play last summer. Sometimes all this seems almost like magic, but it has been hard, politically savvy work by the folks in Colquitt.

I am the hired playwright, and worse, I am imported, i.e., I am not from Colquitt. This is not fashionable in the politics of art these days. Communities are supposed to grow their own. Using an imported artist is a little like using non-dairy creamer or instant coffee: it will do, but only if you don't have the real thing, and everyone will wonder about your upbringing. Not being from Colquitt made me suspect there, too. A person actually asked me why on earth would I want to come to Colquitt if I wasn't trying to rip them off. My first trip there, I wondered the same thing. Our relations have improved. Five plays and five years later, I've earned a measure of trust, and nobody local is clamoring to take over the playwright's job. So, suspect though I still am, it is for being an artist at all, and not for being from somewhere else. I live with this suspect artist stuff in my neighborhood at home.



We had done two or three shows, I forget which, when the story I want to tell comes up. The early oral histories were bland—people had no notion of what we were trying to do with their stories and no faith that we would do them any sort of justice. As the community liked what we did, collecting stories got a little easier, and then, almost like a dare, there came a hard story from a woman who had shot and killed her abusive husband after 14 years of being married to him. I felt we had to honor it somehow. It represented a new level of trust from that community. We'd done something right, or that story would not have been told for our ears, so I wrote it up.

The first responses were predictable: "We can't do that story. It's too awful." "We can't say anything bad about Colquitt. People won't like it. They won't come back." "We cannot tell a story like this in public." What you can and should read is, "I'm scared of whatever level of opprobrium this brings down on my head."

It was not an ungrounded fear. It would have been left there, the piece omitted from the play, but for a cast member who stood up in rehearsal and said, "This sort of thing does happen here. This story came in the oral histories. We should at least try it." So try it they did. Sure enough, they got some letters of protest from the churches in town about including this material in a "family show," and a few of their audience protested and swore they wouldn't come back, but what I think of as the brown dress story is now one of the strongest and most requested stories in the Swamp Gravy collection. They used it last year to raise money (\$23,000) for a women's center in Albany, Georgia.

If you are thinking, "But this is such old hat, wife abuse, the women-in-jeopardy made-for-TV movies," if you are thinking something like that, you do not know how hard it can be to tell real stories, out loud in front of real people in places where the tradition of silence in such matters is so very, very strong.

We did not want this story to point to

any particular ethnic or racial community so the director of Swamp Gravy, Dr. Richard Geer, gave it to a black woman and a white woman to tell at the same time. It was a good idea. So, this is one story, but it has two tellers.

## THE BROWN DRESS

(An officer is taking notes, a deposition.)

**BOTH:** He bought me a brown dress

**WOMAN ONE:** It was a house dress kind of thing,

**WOMAN TWO:** cheap and flimsy and too big for me, and it was my Easter dress.

**WOMAN ONE:** He dressed like a peacock,

**WOMAN TWO:** hundred dollar suits, and good shirts and shoes. He wore

**WOMAN ONE:** three shirts a day, and he wanted them blue-white,

**WOMAN TWO:** starched and ironed,

**WOMAN ONE:** and I spent my Saturdays on them,

**WOMAN TWO:** twenty-one a week. Not to mention mine and the children's clothes. I was washing shirts

**WOMAN ONE:** when he come in with this dress.

**WOMAN TWO:** I wouldn't have worn it to teach school.

**WOMAN ONE:** I didn't.

**WOMAN TWO:** It is still hanging in my closet.

**WOMAN ONE:** I wore it once.

**BOTH:** Easter Sunday.

**WOMAN TWO:** But I didn't say a word about it. I was supposed to be

**WOMAN ONE:** thankful for it.

**WOMAN TWO:** He told me I

**WOMAN ONE:** better act thankful for it

**BOTH:** even if I wasn't.

**WOMAN ONE:** (Slowly) Looking at it made me cry, not just the dress, but the threat of it. And his sisters

**WOMAN TWO:** out prowling the road for footprints

**WOMAN ONE:** to see if I'd walked anywhere when he wasn't there. Every

day,

**WOMAN TWO:** they'd get out on the road and look and see if my footprints were there.

**WOMAN ONE:** Sometimes they were. We had a car,

**WOMAN TWO:** but if me and the children weren't ready when he thought

we ought to be,

**WOMAN ONE:** he'd drive away and leave us

**BOTH:** and there was hell to pay

**WOMAN TWO:** if we weren't there on time.

**BOTH:** He and I worked in the same place,

**WOMAN ONE:** and the children went to school there.

**BOTH:** We went to the same church,

**WOMAN TWO:** but I can't tell you how often we walked and he didn't.

**WOMAN ONE:** And them sisters, they'd say,

**WOMAN TWO:** "She's been out

**WOMAN ONE:** "she's been out

**WOMAN TWO:** "she's been out.

**BOTH:** walking, brother."

**WOMAN ONE:** And then, he'd want to know where I'd been.

**WOMAN TWO:** To church. On Easter Sunday

**BOTH:** in a trashy brown dress.

**WOMAN ONE:** So it wasn't just the

dress.

**OFFICER:** Get to the night in question, please.

**WOMAN ONE:** There are 14 years of nights in question,

**WOMAN TWO:** almost all in which he did something to me or the children,

**WOMAN ONE:** and one

**WOMAN TWO:** in which I did something

**WOMAN ONE:** to him. Now, I know what you're wanting me to say, and I'm getting to it, but I'm not going to say it without saying some of this other stuff first, and what I really want to know is why you've not been here before now.

**WOMAN TWO:** Cause I'm black, and what happens in this neighborhood is not something you worry much about?

'Cause this time it is a man been hit

**WOMAN ONE:** and not a woman?

**OFFICER:** I got a call, ma'am.

**WOMAN ONE:** I know you did. I'm the one that called you. I don't care if you don't write down about the brown dress, but write this down.

**BOTH:** He beat us, all of us.

**WOMAN ONE:** His sisters saw that, too, but they didn't worry about that.

**WOMAN TWO:** They were here,

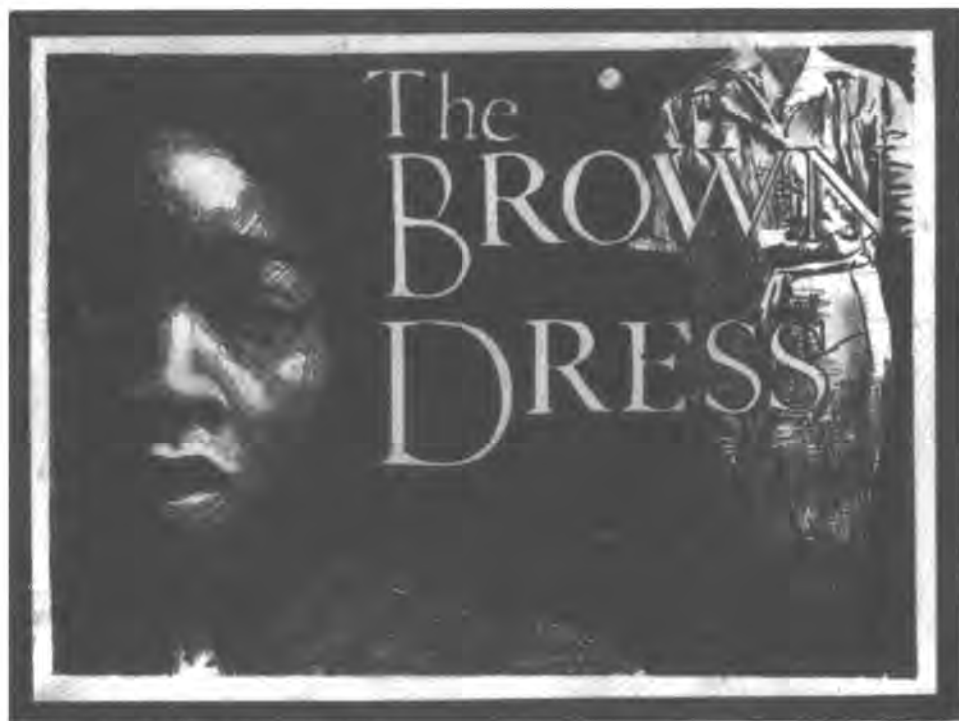
**BOTH:** both of them,

**WOMAN ONE:** the nights all three of my children were born, and they'd look at those babies when they came out of my body and try to decide whether or not they looked like him.

**WOMAN TWO:** They were his,

**BOTH:** all of them. (Pause) He beat me the night the third one was born because they didn't think she looked like him.

And he beat her. Not that night, but as she grew. She's nine years old, and she



has scars all over her back where her clothes cover them and you can't see them.

**WOMAN ONE:** He was careful about that. I've got scars

**WOMAN TWO:** on my back, too.

**BOTH:** We all do. And then he takes a deacon's job in church. And he's principal at the school.

**WOMAN ONE:** A fine man,

**WOMAN TWO:** a real role model for his community. He beat

**WOMAN ONE:** everything that could be hurt by beating

**WOMAN TWO:** except those sisters of his.

**WOMAN ONE:** Now, did you write that down?

**OFFICER:** Victim allegedly beat wife and children.

(**Woman One** jerks the tail of her blouse from her skirt and holds it up to show the man her back.)

**OFFICER:** Jesus, woman, looks like you've been worked over with a bullwhip.

**WOMAN ONE:** I have been. Victim BEAT his wife and children. Mark out allegedly.

**OFFICER:** It's just legal language.

(**Woman One** dresses)

**WOMAN TWO:** Mark it out.

**OFFICER:** It's out. (He writes something else.)

**WOMAN TWO:** He kept a gun in his coat pocket.

**WOMAN ONE:** Loaded.

**WOMAN TWO:** A .38.

**WOMAN ONE:** And a shotgun in the house.

**WOMAN TWO:** Also loaded. And he came in, he took his coat off —

**WOMAN ONE:** it was hot —

**WOMAN TWO:** and for no reason I know — he hauled the youngest into our room. I could hear her screaming.

**WOMAN ONE:** And I don't know why it was this day and not some time before, but I said to myself, "enough is enough"

**WOMAN TWO:** Enough is enough. I didn't see his coat, I figured he

still had the .38 in his pocket,

**WOMAN ONE:** I figured.

**WOMAN TWO:** and I thought I might die, but I've thought that before, and I didn't. I walked into our room,

**WOMAN ONE:** I figured

**WOMAN TWO:** and pointed the shotgun at him and told him to

**WOMAN ONE:** quit!

**WOMAN TWO:** or I'd shoot him,

**WOMAN ONE:** and he came after me.

**WOMAN TWO:** He felt his pockets for the gun.

**WOMAN ONE:** for the gun

**WOMAN TWO:** and I ran into the yard. I was yelling for help when he came out the door . . .

**WOMAN ONE:** (Softly, intensely, fast) I don't care if you don't write down about the brown dress, but write this down. He beat us, all of us. His sisters saw that, too, but they didn't worry about that.

They were here, both of them, the nights all three of my children were born, and they'd look at those babies when they came out of my body and try to decide whether or not they looked like him.

They were his, all of them. He beat me the night the third one was born because they didn't think she looked like him, And he beat her. Not that night, but as she grew. She's nine years old, and she has scars all over her back, scars all over her back.

**WOMAN TWO:** (Precisely and slowly) And he had his coat in his hand and he was reaching for the gun in the pocket of it, and I pointed the shotgun at him and pulled the trigger.

**BOTH:** and he fell on the porch and died.

**WOMAN TWO:** I killed him.

**WOMAN ONE:** There are the words you're looking for. Write them down.

**WOMAN TWO:** Read me what you've written.

**WOMAN ONE:** I am an English teacher.

**OFFICER:** Brown dress.

**WOMAN TWO:** Cross out brown dress.

**WOMAN ONE:** It is not a complete sentence.

**OFFICER:** Suspect states victim beat her and the children. Suspect states another beating of youngest child was in process. Suspect states she had reason to believe victim was armed. Suspect states she tried to halt beating. Suspect states she shot victim in self defense.

**WOMAN TWO:** And that's it?

**WOMAN ONE:** That's all you wrote of what I told you?

**OFFICER:** That's what I need.

**BOTH:** (they turn to each other) But it is not the story.

(**Officer** exits)

**WOMAN TWO:** I am not proud of this story,

**BOTH:** not proud

**WOMAN ONE:** of what I did,

**WOMAN TWO:** I did,

**WOMAN ONE:** but I would do it again tomorrow if I had to,

**WOMAN TWO:** and my regret,

**WOMAN ONE:** if I have one,

**BOTH:** is that I did not do it sooner.

▲▲▲

The second piece is similar in how hard it is, but the story shows another fold in community and community involvement: After we did "Brown Dress," two stories of childhood sexual abuse came in with the new oral histories. They both came in anonymously. They probably came because we had done right by the brown dress story, and I chose one that I could make fit in the new play. That play was called *The Gospel Truth* — Swampers wanted to do a show about faith, trials of faith, and coming to faith. I was using snatches of a 10 Commandments' sermon by a locally famous preacher, and coming out of each of the commandments with a story that either kept or broke that commandment. This was the story that broke "Thou Shalt Not Covet."

I carried the piece in to rehearsal, and I warned people it was hard. There was a long minute of silence after we read it the first time — the sort of silence that is so hard on playwrights' stomachs — and finally, a cast member said "Jo, you can't say 'sex' and you can't say 'breast.'"

"I beg your pardon?"

"You cannot say those words on-stage here. This is a piece we probably have to do like we had to do the brown dress story, but you can't say 'breast' and you can't say 'sex.'"

"Well," I asked, "can I just cut those words?" And that's literally what we did. It makes the piece even harder in performance, but the courage is in the telling of the story and not in the words used. This piece has a deacon in it, too. I am not trying to pick on deacons, though they do seem to show up a lot. The deacons were unchanged details from the oral histories. I wrote this as if it were an encounter/conversation between a woman and her younger self that takes place at a funeral. Again, in performance, we did not want this to point to anyone in particular, so Director Richard Geer divided it between a number of women, older and younger. It can be played by as few as

two or as many as 12. It works best with four, five, or six. It does need the older/younger division in places.

## COVET

—I was five. What can you covet when you are five? Your older sister's new shoes?  
—But you had new shoes, too, new used shoes, shoes she had outgrown, but new to you. And you had no need of fancy shoes, so stop worrying it.  
—I had work to do.  
—Everybody had work to do.  
—I had to carry water to the animals.  
—Are you going to pass his house again?  
—I carried a bucket at a time, because I was not big enough to carry two buckets,  
—and I had to pass by his house to do it.  
—And what did he covet?  
—I don't care.  
—You do so care, you care very much.  
—I'm glad he is dead.  
—I know.  
—I hate funerals.  
—I know.  
—I am always back at his funeral, and I am 10 years old, and the minute I am let out of this church, out from behind my mother's skirt, my mother who doesn't know anything, I will run like a banshee and scream and play with the others. There is no greater joy for any of us than this death, and this day is our ...  
—Redemption? Do you dare say redemption?  
—No, I wish it was, but it isn't.  
—It is just a release,  
—No more.  
—Is it a sin to be so glad he is dead?  
—I can't help it if it is.  
—You have to stand here anyway.  
—You all have to stand here. He was a deacon.  
—Everybody in the church comes to his funeral.  
—So I look at  
—Sara,  
—Alice,  
—Jane  
—and Morgan, a girl named Morgan.  
—Do they look back?  
—No. But they know I'm looking at them,  
—And they know I am one of them.  
—Each of us knows the other is one of us.  
—How would they know?

—They suspect like I suspect, they know like I know.  
—We each saw the other coming out of his house.  
—It was a shack, it wasn't a house. You could smell it, the unwashed clothes, unchanged bedding, and too many times he just went in the yard when he was too lazy to get to the outhouse.  
—"A good man has fallen on hard times."  
—Daddy said that.  
—Daddy didn't know any better.  
—I think sometimes about people who punish themselves somehow really bad because they are sinners.  
—Are you one of them?  
—I think I am.  
—Was he?  
—He had money. I mean, he had quarters when he wanted them.  
  
— But he lived in such squalor, Why else, except to punish himself, would he live with such filth?  
—What did he covet?  
—He would watch me when I passed his house.  
—He said.  
—"Come here, little girl."  
—No. Don't say that ever again.  
—"Come over here, little girl. I've got a present for you."  
—A present.  
—I would very much like to have a present.  
—So you wanted a present. Your first present was a doll with an eye poked out.  
—But that was OK.—I could find a pretty rock to go in the eye hole.  
—Except I remember where he said he wanted to touch me before he gave it to me.  
—Your (gestures to her breast)?  
—I had a child's body. I was five years old.  
—And I prided myself on how fast I could run.  
—I had a tooth missing and white chicken fuzz for hair, but he told me I was pretty.  
—He wanted to touch a child.  
—My second present was a quarter.  
—A quarter was an awfully lot of money.  
—I had never had a quarter of my own before.  
—I coveted the quarter.  
—And his hand was not pleasant, but it was a sort of caress, it didn't hurt...  
—He hurt Sara. She had to pass his

house, too.  
—I saw her coming out and she was crying. (as the man) Come here. I'm lonely.  
—He gave her quarters, too,  
—she wanted the quarters just like I did.  
—A quarter was so much money then.  
—What did he covet?  
—Why do you keep asking that?  
—I don't care.  
—He was a pervert. He hurt Jane, too. I don't know about Alice and Morgan.  
—You think you are free because he is dead?  
—I want this funeral to be over.  
  
—I want to run like a banshee in the yard with  
—Sara  
—and Alice  
—and Jane  
—and Morgan,  
—and look at one another in the eyes and know he is not in that house anymore.  
—(as the man) Come here. You are so pretty, little girl. So pretty, you have white hair.  
—What's wrong with wanting a quarter?  
—My mother never told me a word about . . . anything until after I got my period, —and when it came, I thought I was wounded, maybe dying, and all she said was it was natural but that  
—you mustn't let any boys touch you.  
—but the dispenser of quarters wasn't a boy.  
—And by the time he started doing the things that hurt my body,  
—I was guilty, too, guilty of the pleasure of quarters if not of the acts themselves,  
—and I didn't know how to say no anymore.  
—(as the man) "Here, girlie, you're big enough now to climb up here and sit on my lap."  
—Please. Stop it.  
—It will be 40 years before you can tell this story even to yourself.  
  
—I want to run like a banshee.  
—Forty years before you can stand at anyone's funeral,  
—even someone you love,  
—without reliving his.  
—I want to look Sara and Alice and Jane and Morgan in the eyes and know he isn't there,  
—Forty years before you begin to wonder what happened to  
—Sara  
—and Alice





—and Jane  
 —and Morgan  
 —and wonder if they ever spoke to any-  
 one, and if they are afraid  
 of funerals.  
 —I want to look them in the eyes, and  
 know we do not have to  
 fear passing by that house ever again.  
 —Forty years before you can say to your-  
 self why you were so fearful, so careful,  
 for your own children.  
 —I want to run.  
 —I want to go outside and run.  
 —I am so fast when I run, it is very hard  
 to see me.  
 —Forty years in the wilderness.



The courage here? Aside from the com-  
 munity doing this story, the woman  
 whose story it is performed in it. What

she says of the experience is that she had  
 been afraid of her abuser for 40 years,  
 dead or not, even in her dreams she was  
 afraid, all she had to do was think of him  
 and the fear poured over her again and  
 made her knees weak and her stomach  
 nauseous. Telling the story has taken the  
 power out of him. I tell her it is hers now,  
 that power, or it could be. I say it as a  
 joke, sort of, and she laughs. She does not  
 seem comfortable with the idea of having  
 power at all, but she has changed for tell-  
 ing that story. You can see it in how eas-  
 ily she meets your eyes now with her  
 own, and she is taking back some power  
 from somewhere whether she wants it, or  
 intends it, or not.

Oh, hallelujah. I knew there was heart  
 in this work.

People, communities, whatever living  
 entity it is that wants courage, are  
 changed by finding even a small measure  
 of it, like the capacity to tell real stories  
 out loud. It is what makes arts so won-  
 drous and so very dangerous all in the  
 same breath.



*Jo Carson is fiction editor of this magazine and a  
 fiction writer with a collection of short stories from  
 Gnomon press, The Last of the Waltz Across  
 Texas and Other Stories, but she is a playwright,  
 too. In 1997, you can see productions of her work in  
 Atlanta and Minneapolis (Whispering to  
 Horses); Long Island City, New York, and  
 Abingdon, Virginia (The Bear Facts). Or Swamp  
 Gravy in Colquitt, Georgia, at 912-758-5450.*

All illustrations by David Terry



# NOT How can art WHISTLING make a difference? DIXIE

**"We see despair in the political activist who doggedly goes on and on, turning in the ashes of the same burnt out rhetoric, the same gestures, all imagination spent. Despair, when not the response to absolute physical and moral defeat, is, like war, the failure of the imagination."**

— Adrienne Rich,

What is Found There: Notebooks on  
Poetry and Politics, 1993

*Singing, stories, poems, pictures, plays—  
can any of them lead to social change?  
Meridith Helton asked Southern Exposure  
section editors Nayo Watkins ("Voices") and  
John O'Neal ("Junebug"), both social activ-  
ist/artists, to comment.*

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## NAYO WATKINS

"The role of art in social change . . . it can be a vehicle to allow people to experience something that takes them to another level or that gives them a reflection of themselves or their world in a way that they see new depth and new meanings.

"Much of what I know being called art for social change is really about personal transformation as opposed to community action. Now, personal transformation has to come about before the action. Or it comes about in the context of community action. But I think most of what is passing for art for social change is . . . someone dances with an elderly person and suddenly has a new understanding of ageism. Someone is in a play or sees a play about AIDS and has a new awaken-

ing. Well I don't call that social change, frankly. I think the social change comes in terms of, 'So what?' 'What then?'

"I'm often at a loss to find examples on how it actually brings about social change. One of the things that comes to my mind is from the 1960s and the role that song played in the dispelling of fear. I have heard the story of McComb, Mississippi, where [there was] a little tiny jailhouse that was really only supposed to hold a few people. They had [civil rights] people stacked in there, and people started singing, and their singing was so forceful, so hopeful, so uncompromised, so fearless, that the jailer was the one who was afraid.

"The empowerment that happens when you know you are challenging a force and overcoming a negative force, that's an empowerment that I think is real important.

"So often the artist, even the artist who is well meaning, doesn't get a chance to do some substantial work. And even when they do the emphasis gets put on the end product, whereas what I think is important is this whole process."

# JOHN O'NEAL

"Well, without art and culture, the struggle for change gets to be pretty dull, dry, and unforgiving. You know, it may be necessary, but it sure ain't no fun. And people burn out. The thing that comes to mind is what ol' Mao used to say: 'The content of art is politics, and the form of politics is art.' They are essential to each other. We don't make art with nothing to say.

"[But] the arts [have] rarely emerged as the central focus for people [in the civil rights movement]. The Freedom Singers, which Bernice [Johnson Reagon] was a part of and the Free Southern Theater, which I was a part of are the only instruments that emerged from the movement where art was the main thing that we did.

"The people who made up the [civil rights] movement were no more appreciative of the role and the function of the arts than average.

"I'd be hard-pressed to make the connection between Andy Young, Marion Barry, and myself. I can't quite figure it out. We're doing different things. And yet, we were all strong in that movement. I mean, the politics are no more accountable to the community than the artists are. The only thing that keeps us accountable in any way that's realistic is the conscience of the person involved. As important as conscience is, it's not a viable political mechanism.

"We have a problem in the culture, American culture. It's a pragmatic culture, and people are inclined towards . . . the means that are justified by ends. They will look at the answer in the back of the book rather than solve the problem. That characteristic was no less evident in the people in the civil rights movement than in others. Only when the answer in the back of the book didn't work, [did we turn to art]. It wasn't a change in theory. We were just forced by circumstance to be a little more creative.

"What is absent is a broad conscious-

ness among us about what we're doing and how what we do is related to each other. And I think the movement is going to have to come into focus to make those kinds of connections. And certainly art will be able to play a role in there.

"I think the arts can be a force, but a public instrument is no better than the base upon which it stands. Our movement is pretty small right now. The need for it is great, but the extent to which we are capable of mobilizing people and resources is pretty small, and this despite the fact that some extraordinary things are going on in local communities and some neighborhoods.

"I think that our job, as cultural workers, is to try to study those things [history] and learn from them ourselves and present them in ways that people can have access to the information.

"Working with real people, and talking to the realities of their efforts to make their lives, to make the audience and the community that creates the audience the center of the work. And to aim at a community that is not defined by its exception to the rest of us but is at the heart of our effort to make the whole world a better place to be. . . [We should ask instead] What is the broad historical problem here that captures and makes it difficult for all of us to live? And how do we make a more just, more humane society that will nurture us all. If we don't get to that question, then we're just, as they say, whistling Dixie."

— Meridith Helton

*Meridith Helton goes to Sarah Lawrence and lives in Chattanooga, Tennessee. She was a Southern Exposure summer intern.*

**"Art, I am convinced (as indeed have been many scientists like Pascal and Einstein), is at least as necessary as the sciences in grasping reality if we are ever to effect the change we seek in our long struggle to be human."**

— Jean Caiani,  
*Resist, July/August 1996*



# RESOURCES

## Arts Advocacy Groups

**Americans for the Arts**  
927 15th Street, NW  
12th Floor  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-371-2830  
Fax 202-371-0424  
nalaa@artswire.org

The National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies, the nation's largest alliance of community arts organizations, merged in fall 1996 with American Council for the Arts, a national arts service organization, and the National Coalition of United Arts Funds, an arts fundraising coalition, to provide more resources for all of the arts at all levels. They publish *Arts in the Local Economy*, an economic impact study, *Working Relationships: The Arts, Education, and Community Development*, and *Arts Build Communities: a Training Handbook on Arts Programming and Public Housing*.

**Art in the Public Interest**  
P.O. Box 68  
Saxapahaw, NC 27340  
910-376-8404  
Fax 910-376-3228  
highperf@artswire.org  
<http://www.artswire.org/highperf/>

This community arts advocacy organization focuses on finding and spreading information on artists who work on culturally oriented projects. An information-based group, they publish the quarterly *High Performance* magazine.

**Artists for a Hate Free America**  
P.O. Box 12667  
Portland, OR 97212  
503-335-5982  
Fax 503-335-5953

Formed after the successful involvement of the entertainment industry in the defeat of Oregon's anti-gay ballot

measure 9, this nonprofit group counters bigotry, homophobia, racism, violence, and censorship.

**Association of American Cultures**  
1703 W. Kings Highway  
San Antonio, TX 78201  
210-736-9272  
Fax 210-736-6921  
taac@artswire.org  
<http://www.artswire.org/Artswire/taac/dialog.html>

This national arts organization supports artists and arts organizations of color that are striving to maintain their ethnic cultural identities through the arts.

**Thomas Jefferson Center**  
400 Peter Jefferson Place  
Charlottesville VA 22911  
804-295-4784

A nonprofit, nonpartisan institute, the center is engaged in education, academic research and intervention on behalf of the individual right of free expression.

**National Campaign for Freedom of Expression**  
1402 3rd Ave. #421  
Seattle, WA 98101  
206-340-9301  
Fax 206-340-4303  
ncfe@nwlinc.com  
<http://www.artswire.org/~ncfe/>

NCFE is an educational and advocacy network of artists, arts organizations, audience members, and concerned citizens that was formed to protect and extend freedom of artistic expression and fight censorship throughout the United States. Members receive the *Freedom of Expression Quarterly* and the monthly *Update*.

**National Coalition Against Censorship**  
275 Seventh Avenue,  
New York, NY 10001  
212-807-6222  
Fax 212-807-6245  
ncac@netcom.com

Forty-six national nonprofit organizations — including religious, educational, artistic, labor, professional, and civil liberties groups — are dedicated to fighting censorship. Founded in 1974, the Coalition engages in public education and advocacy at both local and national levels. Publishes quarterly newsletter, *Censorship News* and summary of book banning controversies, *Books in Trouble*.

**People for the American Way**  
2000 M Street NW  
Suite 400  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
202-467-4999  
Fax 202-293-2672  
pfaw@pfaw.org  
<http://www.pfaw.org>

A 300,000 member, nonpartisan constitutional liberties organization, People for the American Way publishes annual reports including *Artistic Freedom Under Attack*, a guide to censored art, and *Attacks on the Freedom to Learn*, a survey of censorship and related challenges to public education.

**Southern Arts Federation**  
181 14th St. NE, Suite 400  
Atlanta, GA 30309-7603  
404-874-7244  
Fax 404-873-2148

Founded in 1975, the Southern Arts Federation is a nonprofit, regional arts agency dedicated to providing leadership and support to effect positive change in the arts throughout the South.

Photo by Laura Drey / Photo manipulation by Mia Kirsh

# Community Newspapers

Activists around the South are writing between the lines and off the grid.

By Eric Goldman

Because most daily, mainstream Southern papers depend on profits and must be careful not to alienate advertisers, it falls to community newspapers to cover issues shunned by bigger media enterprises.

Such papers have a long and distinguished history. The *Manumission Intelligencer*, the South's first abolitionist paper, began publishing in Jonesborough, Tennessee, in 1819 for six subscribers. The *Anvil*, an underground paper in Durham, North Carolina, dogged politicians in the '60s and '70s. The *Plow*, published in Southwest Virginia in the 1970s, offered a place for Appalachians to work out their own destiny.

Today, most Southern towns of any size have publications covering women's issues, gay men and lesbians, the black community, environmental issues, politics and social issues, and entertainment. Profits and fame aren't the factors that move people to get involved in producing these papers. *Southern Exposure* talked with a few of the people involved with some of the dozens of small community papers across the South specifically dedicated to social change.

The nonprofit *Point* in Columbia, South Carolina, is a typical community newspaper. The free 16-page tabloid, which is distributed across the state, focuses on

South Carolina politics and carries some local advertising.

The paper began as a weekly in 1990, but the pace was too fast and the work too much for the small staff. They revamped the paper as a monthly. Restructuring didn't make it that much easier. Becci Robbins, the 35-year-old editor of *Point*, said that even today the paper is struggling.

Robbins has no regrets. Before her six years at *Point*, she put out a magazine and newsletters at the South Carolina Bar Association. Though she picked up the "nuts and bolts" of publishing there, she soon felt repressed and stifled, she said recently. When she came to *Point*, she did an article on an AIDS service organization, and fulfilled activist longings which

had lain dormant all her life. "I owe something back to the community," she said.

The paper supports local and state progressive politics and culture, and tries to foster local talent by publishing local writers. Like most community papers, writers work for free, but the contributors do not go unrewarded. *Point* "provides a stage for people to perform on." The monthly also provides a forum for "dissatisfied citizens" whose voices are not always heard in bigger news organs, said Robbins.

The more investigative articles in *Point* deal with issues that bigger papers either can't or won't touch. A recent article examined how politicians can become addicted to polls, tailoring their platforms to the latest results — not to issues important to their constituents.

*Point* should not be pigeonholed as a left-wing publication, said its editor. "*Point* tries to peel it all back and go beyond partisanship." The paper encourages activism with a "Do Something!" section, which is "a bulletin board for political and social activist groups to post upcoming events."

The *Prism*—an all-volunteer, monthly out of Durham, Raleigh and Chapel Hill, North Carolina—is unabashedly left-wing. A group formed to start the *Prism* seven years ago "because no paper in this area provided a forum for political analy-

Cartoons by Jeff Saviano/The Prism Newspaper



Every small community paper must find funds.

## TOOLBOX



For more information about progressive newspapers in the South, contact:

### **Moon**

14 East University Avenue, Suite 296  
Gainesville, FL 32601  
(352)-377-5374

Bi-weekly, free at distribution points, by mail \$25 for one year.

### **The Gainesville Iguana**

P.O. Box 14712  
Gainesville, FL 32604  
(352)-378-5655

Monthly free progressive events calendar and newsletter. Subscriptions \$10-20 individuals, \$0-5 low/no income, groups \$25, rich groups \$40.

### **New River Free Press**

P.O. Box 846  
Blacksburg, VA 24063  
(540)-951-7320 (540)-951-2013 fax

Monthly free all-volunteer paper. Subscriptions \$30/year-sponsor, \$10-regular, \$5-low-income

### **Point**

P.O. Box 8325  
Columbia, SC 29202  
(803)-254-1803

Monthly, free at distribution points, one copy by mail free; additional copies by mail are \$1 in advance. \$26 for one year.

### **The Prism**

P.O. Box 16025  
Chapel Hill, 27516  
(919)-968 3154 (919)-968 7840 fax  
web site <http://sunsite.unc.edu/prism/>  
Monthly, free at distribution points. \$20 per year by mail (as a Friend of *The Prism*).

### **The Trumpet of Conscience**

P.O. 3354  
Durham, NC 27702  
(919)-490-6923  
Free quarterly (donations appreciated)

sis, opinion and news beyond isolated items," said David Kirsh, an editor and distribution coordinator. He and his wife, Mia Kirsh, who works on production and is treasurer of the not-for-profit corporation that runs the paper, joined a dozen others including some members of the Orange County Greens to start a publication that would be written by people in the community, especially those who are underrepresented in other media.

As Jeff Saviano, another editor, put it, "We hope to forge stronger and stronger links between all types of leaders and members in grassroots community activism but that task is difficult because there are no easy models to copy from — in fact, we believe we're trying something new."

"Over our seven years, I think we have succeeded in publishing many diverse voices that previously had no way to communicate," said Mia Kirsh.

Getting the paper off the ground took time. "It was very painful. Every aspect of the paper had to be hashed out for days and days. It took about nine months to get it off the ground, about like having a baby," said Kirsh. "In fact, I was pregnant at the time and gave birth to my daughter after the first issue came out," she added.

The labor paid off. Many policies decided in the beginning are still in place. "We decided we'd never have more than 20 percent of the space devoted to ad-

vertising so that we'd have lots of print. We decided that none of the staff could personally subsidize the paper so that no one would have undue influence." It's worked out so that approximately 70 percent of the paper's income comes from advertising with the rest made up of donations. The paper is free at racks in the area, but it can be ordered by mail. Because there is an all-volunteer staff, costs remain low. The approximately \$500 to print 6,500 copies of each issue is usually the only expense.

It takes "around a dozen with a core group of around four of us" to do all the editing, production, and distribution, said Mia Kirsh, who is also *Southern Exposure's* designer.

The paper covers a range of issues. David Kirsh explained, "There has always been some tension in creating a balance between our desire to cover local issues and the ease with which we can get people to write on national and international issues. But we try to point out the interconnectedness of the issues—between the local and the not-so-local, between the attacks on the social safety net and declining real wages, between the media circus around O.J. Simpson and the promotion of Nazi race science." The *Prism* has covered health reform and welfare reform. There was a series called "Belly of the Beast" written by a 20-year



**Finding consensus of ideas on a community newspaper can be painful.**

veteran of the Green Berets and the Army who exposed the true aims of U.S. foreign policy. And the paper recently did a

two-part investigative piece on homelessness in Durham.

A regular column, "Eye on the Media," offers local and national media criticism. "Ask Kropotkin" is a sardonic political advice column. The paper has also featured columns reviewing books for children and on products made by progressive companies.

The people who put together *The Prism* have other jobs and fit their newspaper effort into hectic evenings and weekends.

*Moon*, a free bi-weekly newsmagazine in the Gainesville, Florida, area has served for the past six years as a watchdog, exposing the dark side of politics in the northern Florida city. Writer and publishing board member Colin Whitworth, 31, a former reporter for a



**The editor has a pivotal role, putting in the most hours—often difficult if he/she is a volunteer.**

daily newspaper in central Florida, said the inspiration for founding the paper along with four other writers disillu-

***Every aspect of the paper had to be hashed out for days and days. It took about nine months to get it off the ground, about like having a baby.***

sioned with big-paper politics, was "a distaste for mainstream journalism." The bigger papers are afraid to pursue stories that would alienate commercial interests. *Moon*, by contrast, tries to be a vehicle for



**Newspaper production is now mostly done on computers, but sometimes paste-up gets hands dirty.**

information important to the community. "[We try] to lend a hand in helping people in seeing how things work so they can decide what to do," Whitworth said.

A report last year on campaign contributions to city and state government candidates and officials showed the strong economic influence builders and contractors exerted on local government. This work caught the eye of *The Gainesville Sun*, and they published a report on campaign contributions shortly afterwards. "We made them look bad because we did something they wouldn't think of doing," Whitworth said.

Another community newspaper which takes its social responsibility seriously is *The Trumpet of Conscience*, an 11-year-old free quarterly newsletter with four to eight pages for Durham, North Carolina, and the surrounding area.

The founder and publisher of *The Trumpet of Conscience*, Sam Reed, is an 88-year-old activist who organized unemployed workers during the Depression and helped union workers in the

electrical, steel, auto, and mining industries in the '50s and '60s in Pittsburgh. Reed, who is also an army veteran of World War II, has been involved in the Durham political scene for 23 years.

"The whole starting point of *The Trumpet of Conscience* was the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.," said Reed. Mainstream media are restrained by commercial interests, "the power structure, those that own 80 percent of the wealth of the country and make up 2 percent of the population," he said.

*The Trumpet of Conscience* tries to combine the variety of mainstream press with the purpose and mission of activist groups. Reed pointed out that voter education must precede voter registration. "If the voters don't read, don't reason, you can register everybody in the city, and this isn't enough."

*The Trumpet* also sponsors events that recognize and bring together community activists. At a Labor Day program this year, union workers and friends discussed a voter education plan for the November 5th election, "with a focus upon labor issues and the economic well-being of the forgotten majority."

In addition to reaching people at the grassroots level, Reed listed among his 4,000 readers "all four floors" of city hall, the chair of the board of education in Durham, and the chancellor of North Carolina Central University. The newsletter also goes to state politicians, local libraries, bookstores, bakeries, and the major universities in the area. *The Trumpet*, Reed says, "tries to follow the teachings of Martin Luther King, Jr. — organize to fight for opportunities, organize to fight injustice. We are part of the struggle for centuries of the common people against oppression," he said. "*The Trumpet of Conscience* doesn't solve all their problems. . . . We try to be an example of the importance of bringing people together. Without that, you can't fight drugs, discrimination, or corruption." **S**

**E**  
Eric Goldman recently received a master's degree in English from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and worked as a Southern Exposure intern.

# Bo Willie **St**rikes Again



Illustration by Patricia Ford

## Religion is a troubling business.

By Junebug Jabbo Jones

**O**ftentimes people ask me, "Junebug, how come you so hard on preachers and church people?" And I must confess, the question gives me cause to ponder. First of all, I don't hold special grief for Christians — far as I'm concerned, it matters less than a tinker's damn whether you're talking Christian, Jew, Moslem, or what have you. The fact is that most church people I know are just as good, if not better, than most the people I know who don't go to church.

The problem is that I *expect* religious people to do better than others do. If they can't really *be* better people, at least they should try to *act* better than everyone else. When it turns out that a good many priestly people can only *act like* they're better than other people, it gives the serious ones a bad name. And that makes it so a bunch of folk who had no good in-

tentions in the first place can jump in and hide themselves among the flock like wolves in sheeps' clothing. That's the kind of holy roller that gets my goat. When enough scoundrels of this type hook up together, you get a real mess on your hands.

A case in point is Bo Willie Redd down in the Treme district in New Orleans. You might remember him as the guy who had the gall to steal the battery out of my car and then try to sell it back to me.

Bo Willie's Daddy, Mr. Chink Boudreaux, had "The Famous Bar on Barracks Street." Mr. Chink suffered with a heart condition and high blood pressure. Well, in point of fact, Bo Willie's the one who was due to step in, but his sister Bernice is the one who actually took care of things. Bernice is a serious, churchgoing Catholic herself, but she was the only

one of the six kids with enough business sense to take care of things. When Bo wasn't in jail due to one scheme or another, they couldn't get him to work. He wouldn't even let you say the word "work" when he was listening.

About 10 years ago, late in the evening in the fall of the year, I was on my way to The Famous Bar on Barracks Street. As I reached for the door, Bo's girlfriend, Velma Bertrand, came tearing out. Nearly knocked me down and didn't even say "excuse me" or nothing. She wheeled around on one high heel as she cleared the sill. She pulled her tight-fitting print skirt down with as much dignity as she could manage and shouted back into the dusky room, "... and bet' not be here when I get back."

I was about to tease Bo Willie about it till I noticed that his wife, JoAnn, was sitting with him at a table near the jukebox. Her jaw was tight, tight, tight, and he was intense, too.

"Hey, everybody." I felt really lame. You could feel the tension in the room.

Bernice, who was usually the loudest one in the place, said quietly, "Hey Junebug." She dug down into the cash box and came from behind the bar with a fistful of quarters. She rolled her eyes at Bo as she rocked from one hip to the other in front of the jukebox punching buttons.

B.B. King growled in his heavy tenor voice, "The thrill is gone. ..." The sharp, shrill stings of Lucille's strings underscored the point.

Fast-talking Henry Turner, who called himself "The Soul Burner" on his radio program, chug-a-lugged the last half of a Miller horse and said, "I got to go see a dog about a bone. I'll plant y'all now and dig y'all later." Henry looked both ways before disappearing out the door, too.

The rest of us left in the bar tried to keep conversation going, but everything pointed back to Bo Willie and JoAnn at the table by the jukebox leaning into each other, talking quietly so no one else heard what they said.



As B.B. King's plaintive wail came to its last lingering run, I heard, THWAT! PLING-A-DING! THUD! As I turned around, Bo Willie flung the small cocktail table aside with one hand, and JoAnn was sliding down the wall next to the jukebox staring at Bo with fierce and fearless eyes. Bo caught the dark glasses slipping down his nose in his left hand. He stood over JoAnn, his short, wiry frame taut. "Bitch!" The word squeezed out between clenched teeth. "I told you!"

"You a sorry 'ho, Bo! A sorry 'ho!" JoAnn said from the floor. "You can't even take care of your own children."

Bo glared at her for a moment like he was intending to reach down and separate her soul from her body with his two hands.

"You a sorry 'ho. A sorry ass 'ho," JoAnn said again.

Bo quickly crammed his glasses back on as if he was afraid that we'd see the fear that her words had awakened. He turned and walked out, slamming the heavy wooden door behind him.

I went to help JoAnn up from her crouch beside the jukebox. She jerked back from me. "Don't you touch me, man!" The way she said "man" made it sound like a cuss word. "You sorry son-of-a-bitch. You don't know me! I can take care of myself." She rose. With puffy cheek and still tearless eyes, she collected her purse and cigarettes, uprighted the table and chairs, and looked at each of us in the room. Without a word, she walked from the bar in the same direction that Willie had gone, toward her own home down the block.

It was silent in the little barroom except for Marvin Gaye's pained falsetto plea which now seemed much too loud, "Mother, mother, there's far too many of you crying . . ."

Velma busted through the door, her right hand jammed into a heavy pocket, "All right, Mother — they better've been gone! Give me a g oddamn Heineken, Bernice."

Armed with no more than the spirit of righteousness, Bernice stepped from behind the bar. "You come in here gunning for my brother with that filthy language dripping from your mouth, and you think I'm going to give you a beer? You

*"Junebug, I've been born again. If I had known how easy this racket is, I would have been all up in the holiness business a long time ago."*

better get out, and think twice before you come back again."

"You wrong, Bernice."

"You don't know how wrong I can be if you don't leave your hand in pocket and back your butt out that door."

The next day Bo came over to my house. He said, "I'm sorry you had to see that yesterday. I blew my cool. Bernice told me I had to come over to apologize to you."

"I'm not the one you plastered up against the wall, Bo Willie. You apologize to JoAnn?"

"What I need to apologize to her for? She's the one who started all the mess!"



About six months ago, I was walking down Lynch Street in Jackson, Mississippi, on my way to Jackson State University where I had been telling stories. I passed by this little church with a hand-painted sign that said, "A Powerful Revivalist From New Orleans." I glanced in the front door as I was passing by, and who should be up there preaching the sermon just as big as day? You guessed it. "REV. WILLIAM R. BOUDREAUX!!" Bo Willie Redd himself! I couldn't believe it. He was 10 years bigger and bolder, but it was Bo Willie.

I eased into the back pew and listened till service was over. The place was crowded. They had a really hot choir. I was surprised to see them doing a Gospel Second Line. While the choir sang, Bo

opened the doors of the church, and at least 30 people of all ages stepped forward looking to find a church home.

After the singing and soul saving was done, Bo got down to the serious business of raising the offering. It was a big offering too.

Afterwards I waited for him outside the church. He and the pretty woman who had directed the choir were about to get in this big, brand new, black BMW. "Bo Willie? That is you, ain't it?"

"Junebug! What are you doing here?"

"What are you doing here is the question. I was work—"

"Whoa, man! You know how I feel about that word. Where're you staying? Let me give you a ride?"

"I can't imagine you as a preacher, Bo Willie."

"Junebug, I've been born again. If I had known how easy this racket is, I would have been all up in the holiness business a long time ago. It's easier than running a barroom and a lot less dangerous. As long as I have something to say, I never run out of stock."

"But do you believe what you're preaching about?"

"That ain't got nothing to do about it, Junebug. It's a business proposition. As long as *they* believe it, that's what's important. You can see how well I'm doing. As a matter of fact, I'm on my way to Virginia Beach. I want to join up with the Christian Hundred TV Club. I've heard that they're running short of black preachers over there."

Whether Bo Willie makes it to the Christian Club or not, I believe that the covers are bound to be pulled off of Bo Willie and other professional distributors of holiness like him. When they're exposed, we'll see a bunch of angry people who'll make JoAnn and Velma look like chumps.

SE

*The stories of Junebug Jabbo Jones are brought to Southern Exposure via his good friend, New Orleans storyteller John O'Neal.*

# On Race, Rage, and the Underclass

## A Prison "Tell"

By **Mansfield B. Frazier**

Illustration by Paul Walters



For a long time, I believed (privately, lest someone accuse me of simply attempting to exculpate my 25 year criminal career) that the untrammelled racism most blacks face on a daily basis in America was, at least in part, responsible for my blatant and repeated breaking of the social contract we are all responsible for upholding. I avidly read the theories vis-à-vis crime, punishment, and their attendant violence. Reading helped me escape the vacuum all convicts live in while allowing me to deepen my understanding of the cutting-edge issues facing my race. By extension, and perhaps by fate, I have also used my incarceration in the gently rolling hills of Kentucky to embark upon a nascent writing career.

Naturally, I studied the writings of national black newspaper columnists. They — while having an excellent grasp of the

problems of the underclass — always seemed to fall short on workable solutions. I felt I could do better since I not only shared the black skin of those who posed to America its greatest social conundrum; I also shared lifestyles with them — I was “down by law.”

Whenever I would read a particularly incisive article — or one which I felt missed the mark entirely — I would write to the author of the piece. Realizing how convicts are viewed by the populace, I made sure that my missives were as free from errors as I hoped they were germane to the issue I was writing about. I never personalized my comments never carped or complained about my incarceration — the fact being I was as guilty as hell and probably deserved more time than I received for the years of credit card fraud I committed. I asked for nothing more than an enlightened ex-

change of ideas. After all, I was one of the people they were writing about. They wanted to hear from me. So I thought.

Later, waiting at mail call for letters that never came, I thought of how busy they must be coming up with fresh columns every few days and answering all the mail they received from those still at liberty with whom they undoubtedly felt more comfortable corresponding.

Undeterred, when the 1994 Crime Bill was being debated, I wrote to every member of the Congressional Black Caucus. I imagined that my 15 felony arrests and five convictions made me something of an expert on the subject. Again, no response. Since I couldn't vote, why should a politician waste a stamp on the likes of me? I did get a nice letter from Arlen Specter, the Republican senator from Pennsylvania. Must be my situation, I thought.

It then hit me that I'd been attempting to establish dialogue with the wrong people. The individuals I should have been writing were the passionate magazine and book writers who, in a recent spate of publishing activity, had been taking moral stands on the issues facing black Americans of the underclass. I managed, by hook or by crook, to obtain copies of as much of their work as possible. After much feverish reading, I wrote what I thought were excellent letters appropriately praising them for what I thought they had right and posing questions or offering opinions whenever I thought they were wrong. I tantalizingly made reference to information and insights to which my situation made me privy. The response — nonexistent. Nada. Zip. Zilch.

My one out of two hundred or so batting average on replies to my letters (and that single letter from a white moderate) led me to an inescapable conclusion. First, even *I* can't write so badly that only one person would respond, so my experience shows that middle-class black writers have fallen victim to the same malady their white liberal counterparts suffer. They have been infected by "arms-length liberalism." They might champion the underclass, but they want nothing to do with them. They write passionately about the wrongs perpetrated by our racist society and how it marginalizes the have-nots, but they wouldn't care to live next door to the have-nots and, evidently, would not even correspond with them. My experience, unfortunately, isn't unique. There is a discernible pattern which I discovered talking to other convicts about their experiences with the outside world.

What is happening is a carry-over from Reconstruction. During that period, whites promised newly freed blacks better treatment if they dissociated themselves from their poorer, less educated brothers and sisters. The favored ones were urged to disown the "bad niggers." This "divide and conquer" tactic has proven its utility even into the present day where we find half of the black community moving into what they think will

be middle-class parity with whites while the other half is mired — and daily sinking deeper — into poverty, crime, drug abuse and violent self-destruction.

In his turn of the century book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. DuBois wrote that races advance when exceptional members advance and then reach back to bring their duller and less gifted brothers and sisters up to their vantage point. Sadly, this is seldom the case in the black community. As blacks move into the middle class, they are often more assiduous in their dissociation from the less advantaged of the race than are whites. History does not provide evidence of *any* race making real advancements piecemeal, half moving ahead and half staying behind. This moral blind spot of the black middle class is, more than anything, responsible for the sorry state of the civil rights movement today. Even during the 1960s and '70s, when seem-

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## **They have been infected by "arms-length liberalism." They might champion the underclass, but they want nothing to do with them.**

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ingly great strides were being made, the black underclass was largely ignored. The collapse of gains in recent years is proof that the movement did not include all blacks and therefore had no solid moral base.

The seeming intransigence of the underclass is due largely to the fact that the very people who are afflicted are effectively shut out of the solution formulation process. In early 1994, the country's leading blacks convened a national conference on crime. Not a criminal or former criminal was to be seen. Few, if any, poor people were invited. Missing was the understanding that if the problems of the underclass are going to be successfully addressed, then those suffering the problems must be a part of the solution process.

One astute black female politician re-

cently stated that "building prisons to solve the problem of crime is like building cemeteries to solve the problems of AIDS." The country is moving closer and closer to permanent warehousing of a large segment of the underclass — black males. Young black men are going to prison for petty drug crimes that white youth have trouble getting arrested for, a phenomenon many feel is a strong case for "unconscious genocide." Yet, the small and growing cadre of black conservatives applaud, along with racist whites, the ratcheting down on poorer blacks by police who blatantly practice selective enforcement of the law. The failure to protect the rights of all blacks — even those accused of crimes — ultimately results in society failing to respect the rights of any blacks.

As they move into the middle class, many blacks, knowingly or not, adopt the mores of the majority culture — the good and the bad aspects of it. The disgusting "arms-length liberalism" practiced by whites for years is now practiced by blacks on blacks. Within the black community, professional civil rights workers, political leaders, and writers have emerged. They eloquently complain and lay blame about the conditions of the underclass, but for them problem solving would conflict with their

long-term self interests — how they make their living. Our mindless pursuit of integration as the road to equality has cost us precious time and valuable energy for what is, at this juncture, an unattainable goal. While it is certainly true that the problems of blacks in America are of white construct — white racism is responsible for the wretched conditions found in black ghettos — it does not necessarily follow that white society will solve these problems.

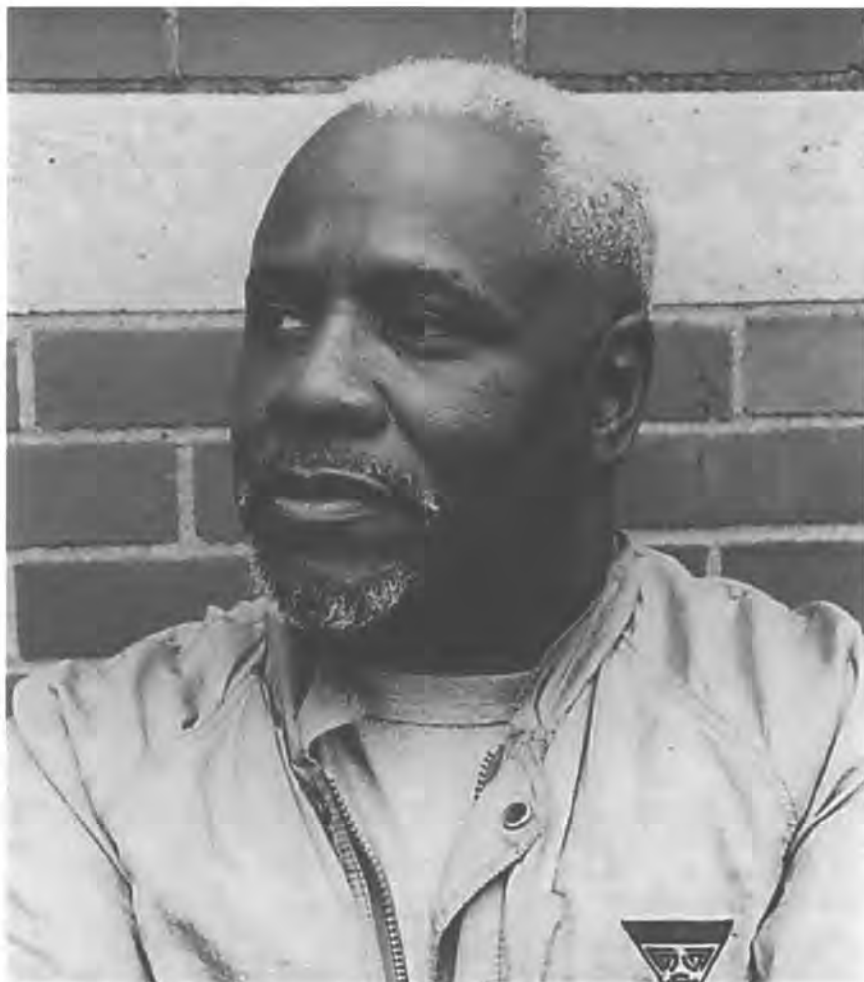
As much as I detest the appeasing tone of Booker T. Washington's ideology — the promise not to push for full rights if blacks are allowed to prosper in the service industries — prison has made me acutely aware of the need to develop the strong craftsmanship Washington advocated. By failing to step in and take care of the youth who are so unfortunate as to

be born to parents who don't have the skills to steer them in the right direction, we, the black community as a whole, are producing a generation of youth without viable alternatives to lives of crime and prison. They join gangs seeking "somebodiness." It does little to declaim that many parents are not doing their job. We have to mount efforts to save these children. We have to make every black child the responsibility of the whole black race.

For too long, blacks have held that the problems of our race should be worked out in private, that we shouldn't "wash our dirty linen in public." The end result is that a lot of black middle-class closets are overflowing with dirty linen. If remaining silent in public would cause action in private, I would remain silent. Castigating my own brothers and sisters is no fun. But silence has only provided cover for blacks who loudly proclaim to be champions of the underclass while building careers on the backs of the poor and the incarcerated. Enough, I say.

Enough of these two-faced fools, these educated ignoramuses, these "arms-length liberals" doing sad parodies of their brie-nibbling white counterparts. Enough of black elected officials who will sell out any birthright for personal or political gain. In the rise of a new breed of sellouts, we are seeing some who have been elected by promising what white politicians cannot — such as keeping black children off the buses which bring school integration, a tactic made even more invidious by a failure to insure parity in the separate school programs. And black writers have been giving these officials a free ride. Shame. Shame.

Inevitably, middle-class blacks bump their heads on the low ceilings of corporate racism and discover that the promise of equality and parity in a white-controlled corporate world is a placating lie and pernicious myth. Embittered and disillusioned, they begin the long journey back to their roots. Ellis Cose, in his seminal book *The Rage of the Privileged Class*, documents what these upwardly mobile blacks are up against and the anger they feel over not being able to overcome. The fancy titles of "Vice-President of Minority Affairs" or "Corporate Com-



**MANSFIELD FRAZIER**

pliance Director" prove to be empty positions which actually mean "Head Nigger in Charge of Nothing." The Faustian bargains they strike — to remain silent about the racism they see around them daily in return for personal gain — unravel around their ears.

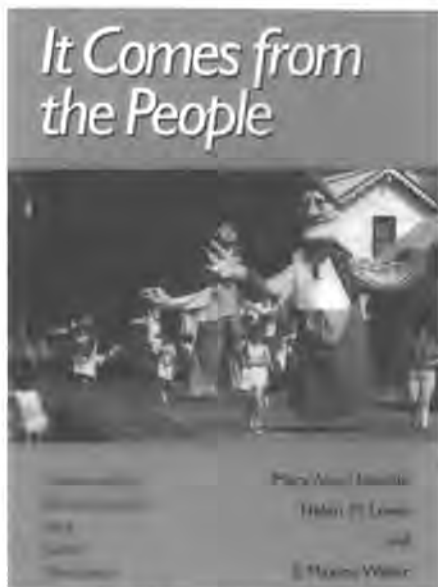
And we, we blacks of the supposedly "lower" classes, who could have told them that it was all a trick, must welcome them back even though they turned their backs on us the moment they thought they had escaped. We can show them we are bigger than they are in heart, spirit, and soul. We need them. They have skills which can create new wealth and assist in utilizing the wealth which already exists in the black community. And they need us. We are their poor, their criminal, their addicted brothers and sisters, and the race will not, nay, cannot be lifted up until — and unless —

we are lifted up, too. We are for better or worse all in this cauldron, which is white America, together, and we will rise or fall as one race . . . together. Peace . . . be still.

**S**

*Mansfield B. Frazier started writing seriously while incarcerated at the Federal Correction Institution at Ashland, Kentucky. In 1995, around the same time as his release from prison, his first collection of essays, *From Behind The Wall: Commentary On Crime, Punishment, Race, and the Underclass by a Prison Inmate*, was published by Paragon House. He is now working on a second book, is a contributing editor for *Prison Life*, a national publication, and writes for the *Downtown Tab* where he lives in Cleveland, Ohio. He has also started a greeting card company which uses the art of prisoners.*

*This article was published previously in a slightly different version in *The Other Side*, March-April 1995.*



**IT COMES FROM THE PEOPLE: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL THEOLOGY**

By Mary Ann Hinsdale, Helen M. Lewis, and S. Maxine Waller  
Temple University Press, 1995. \$49.95 hardback \$19.95 paper

**IVANHOE**

Directed by Anne Lewis Johnson  
Appalshop, 1996, 29 minutes, VHS \$150, VHS Rental \$60

**By Jeannette Stokes**

After nearly 10 years of participating in planning and leadership workshops on women, faith, and economic justice, I am delighted to read a Southern story of community development in which the spirit of the community has been restored by the faith and effort of its people. A small town in the New River Valley of southwest Virginia, Ivanhoe was once a booming industrial area. After the last of its corporations, New Jersey Zinc, closed its mines in 1981, the area fell into a deep depression. In 1986 Ivanhoe citizens undertook a series of community revitalization experiments. Now, in *It Comes From the People: Community Development and Local Theology*, some of its key participants review and evaluate their accomplishments and failures.

The authors of *It Comes From the People* are three remarkable women who

worked and learned together, argued with each other, and forged an honest partnership. Helen Lewis is a sociologist who went to Ivanhoe in 1987 as a community economic educator sponsored by the Highlander Research and Education Center in east Tennessee. Lewis brought to her work a broad understanding of community development and knowledge of history in the mountains. Mary Ann Hinsdale is a Roman Catholic nun and professor of religion who went to Ivanhoe to lead theological reflection groups and examine the role of local theology in social change. Maxine Waller is the dynamic local leader who founded the Ivanhoe Civic League and became the bridge between the community and the outside world.

All three authors showed their bravery in the years of the project. Waller loves her community fiercely, believes in its future, and isn't afraid of a good fight. She let herself, her leadership style, and her community be poked, prodded, and photographed by outsiders. For their part, Lewis and Hinsdale not only analyzed Ivanhoe, they also got involved in the citizens' movement and, like Waller, were personally changed by it.

The book ends up being as much about how the movement transformed Waller as it is about how the Ivanhoe Civic League transformed Ivanhoe. These dynamics create tensions when it comes to writing the book. For example, while Waller provides most of the quoted material, she did not have much control in shaping the book. Lewis and Hinsdale do not try to hide the power struggle that went on in between themselves as academic researchers and Waller, who is sometimes colleague and sometimes subject of their research. We learn as much about the relationship between academic "outsiders" and local community activists as we do about the economic revitalization of a depressed community.

Beneath these tensions lies a dramatic story of economic decay and spiritual triumph. The impact of industrial decline in Ivanhoe is heartrending. Older workers looked for jobs in nearby communities, while young people left home for cities — and stayed gone. Buildings deteriorated. Weeds grew. The county closed

the schools and bussed the few remaining children. Church memberships declined. Alcoholism rose. Great holes opened up in the earth as mine shafts collapsed underneath. Many believed that the place was cursed. Ivanhoe was known as the "rough side of the mountain."

In 1986 a notice appeared on the obituary page of the *Roanoke Times and World News* that county officials intended to sell an abandoned industrial site in Ivanhoe. To Ivanhoe residents this notice meant that the county was giving up on their efforts to bring new industry into the town. Several Ivanhoe residents saw the notice and called a meeting. More than 50 people attended. They decided to protest the sale of the land at a county Board of Supervisors meeting the next day.

But only two people actually showed up at the Board of Supervisors meeting, Maxine Waller and George L. Lyons. Lyons wanted to go home, but he urged Waller to make a speech. Waller said, "I'll tell you one thing. If I'm going to make a speech, you're going to set here and listen to me." Thus began Waller's feisty leap into leadership. She went back to Ivanhoe, called another meeting, and 150 people showed up. They established the Ivanhoe Civic League with Waller as its president.

Waller and the Civic League spent their first year "chasing smokestacks." They lobbied and wheedled and fussed with county officials to help them find industries willing to locate in Ivanhoe. Meanwhile, Waller participated in a training program through the Highlander Research and Education Center, and Helen Lewis led economic discussions in the community. The Civic League began to catch on that "politicians prefer passive and grateful voters." The residents realized that their best hopes were elsewhere, and they began to focus on their own ability to generate economic development.

In the book, Waller explains her newfound understanding of community economic development: "I found out if you have money and put it in a place, and it stays in the community and turns over two or three times, that's what makes the community economically stable. We live here, but we pay rent to

## Life is a Sandwich Theory

A home-grown activist has her own idea about community economic development.

I got a theory. You know how you got this [theories about economic development] bottom up and top down and trickle down and wrap around and all that stuff. Well, Max Waller's got a theory. It's called the sandwich theory. . . . and what you do is, these young people sitting here writing just as hard as they can write and all of the college students that we bring [to Ivanhoe] from all over the world . . . that's their piece of bread. Now these young people are studying to be politicians, they're studying to be academic teachers.

Anyway, here's this piece of bread. And these people are all going to . . . teach sociology, they're going to teach religion, and that's their piece of bread.

And this is our piece of bread. And our piece of bread is me, and all the other people that are affiliated in rural, urban, low-income communities. We're the people that know how to survive. We're the people that know how to live. We're the people that have survived economic depressions and oppression and bureaucracy. And that's our piece of bread.

Now you know in life, there's a lot of struggle. So to make a sandwich, you got to put something in there between the two pieces of bread. And peanut butter, it's kind of like life's struggle. It ain't easy to chew through, it's kind of sticky and gummy. And life ain't easy, it's hard.

So peanut butter is kind of hard when you put it on the sandwich. But you know how you put that jelly in there? Well this is life, this is the sweetness of life. Life is sweet; it is the only life we have. And regardless, if all hell breaks loose, it's still our life.

So you put on peanut butter [and jelly] in there, and you put those two pieces of bread together. And you've got a sandwich. When you chew on it, there ain't no top and there ain't no bottom. . . . So for me, the theory of life is a sandwich theory. And you just take that sandwich and you chew on it. If that peanut butter's a little hard, a little gummy,

Whatever, that's struggle. But when you taste down on that jelly, it sure is sweet. And that's life.

—Maxine Waller  
*Appalachian Studies Conference  
Unicoi, Georgia, March 1996*

people outside . . . and it goes out of Ivanhoe — we never bring it into our town. That's the reason we are economically depressed."

Thousands of hours of volunteer labor and no small amount of private and public dollars poured into the Ivanhoe community. The book covers only five years, from 1986 to 1991, but in that time alone, the Civic League made great strides in community revitalization: the creation of Jubilee Park on the land that had been the industrial park, community education programs, a G.E.D. program, a community history book, and youth programs.

This revitalization effort had a power-

ful religious dimension. To get people to articulate their faith, Mary Ann Hinsdale led "theological reflections" but the people in the group called them Bible study. Hinsdale took seriously the language of faith as a component of the economic development process. Waller became its most articulate spokesperson.

"People are always talking about Jesus, but they're talking about him millions of years ago. But I feel like that he's alive with me. With Ivanhoe. Our cup is full. Jesus didn't want to die. And we don't want to die. But if it be God's will, Jesus was willing to die. If it be God's will, then

I would let Ivanhoe die. But I don't feel like that. That God wanted us to die. Or he wouldn't give us the cup that we're carrying now. So I know how Jesus felt there in that garden. Because I know how we feel here in Ivanhoe. I believe that Jesus is alive today. I don't believe he's in heaven. I believe he's down here with the poor people. . . ."

Though she understood herself to be "walking in faith," Waller was not overly fond of churches. She said, "The biggest obstacle I have in the community is churches." Waller did not like the fact that the ministers never even offered to let the Civic League hold meetings in their churches. "The reason is because they're afraid they'll lose their little flock," she muses.

In addition to the religious dimension, the Ivanhoe experiment has been characterized by a dynamic relationship between the community and young outsiders. Mary Ann Hinsdale arranged for the first group of college student volunteers to come to Ivanhoe in the spring of 1987. At first residents felt a little intimidated by the smart college students wearing earrings in odd places. Soon, though, people in the Ivanhoe group took control of the process. They understood that they had something to teach the students.

Waller felt very strongly about young people. "You know we have these kids come here, and Clare, she fussed at me and said that was too much. Helen said the same thing, that it's too much of a burden. But that's the only time I can feel I'm doing God's job, the job that God requires of me. This other stuff is stuff that I have to do, that He teaches me by. But I feel like when the younguns come — if you'll notice, God didn't send us a farmer or God don't send us people that are going to be slaves — when these younguns come, he sends us doctors, lawyers . . . I think the major thing with me is the younguns."

*It Comes From the People* has great potential as an academic text. But academic studies can analyze the stuffing out of almost anything, and I confess, I got a little bogged down in some of the theory in the book. My enthusiasm for the project re-

turned, however, when I watched *Ivanhoe*, a 28-minute documentary produced by Anne Lewis Johnson of Appalshop. The film makes the whole story — the place and the people — come alive. Filmmaker Johnson lets Maxine Waller and the other residents tell the history of the community, describe the events that brought Ivanhoe to its knees, and show off the results of their organizing efforts. I liked seeing the parades, festivals, meetings, and graduation ceremonies. The video also shows the black residents of Ivanhoe. The blacks and whites in the video show that they share some measure of respect for one another, in part because the men once risked their lives in the mines together.

*It Comes From the People* is a daring academic text. It is interdisciplinary. It takes the leadership role of women very seriously. It is curious about how theology functions and empowers people in a local community. Together the video and book make a great case study. They have much to teach us all about hope and building communities for the future.

S

Jeanette Stokes is a Presbyterian minister living in Durham, North Carolina. She served as the Director of the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South and is now a writer and consultant on spirituality, creativity, and social justice.

## Interesting New Books

**Collin Wilcox Paxton and Gary Carden.** *Papa's Angels: A Christmas Story.* New World Library, 1996. \$17

Christmas stories with emotional depth are rare enough. This densely textured evocation of 1930s Appalachia will entrance imaginative children. A sly parent can use this book to point a child to an appreciative interest in other good books and Southern folkways.

This story of a family's recovery from bereavement is the more poignant for its setting: a poor mountain community where if you want anything to add a little beauty or dignity to life — music for a Saturday night or a coffin for a dead spouse — you usually have to make it yourself. The voice of the 12-year-old narrator and the lyrics

contributed by real-life songwriter John Roman demonstrate the powerful eloquence of the language of Appalachia's poor. Co-authors Paxton and Carden succeed in enlivening stock characters — spunky old ladies, tomboyish girls and sensitive adolescents — with a moving freshness.

And if your child still wants to go to the video store rather than move on to *Jacob Have I Loved* or the *Little House* books, take advantage of trivia to make *Papa's Angels* a segue to fine filmmaking; primary author Collin Wilcox Paxton played Mayella Violet Ewell in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

— Kevin O'Kelly

**Jane Kohen Winter.** *Culture Shock! A Guide to Customs and Etiquette: USA — The South.* Times Editions Pte Ltd, 1996. \$12.95

The avowed purpose of this volume of the Culture Shock! Travel Guides series is to help newcomers to the region distinguish "the real South from the ridiculous South." However, despite some helpful information and a few sensible tips, the picture of the South that emerges from Jane Kohen Winter's book is as distorted as any made-for-TV miniseries.

Occasionally some hints of a South that is not all white or all upper-class break through: She mentions African-American colleges and poverty statistics for Southern children. Winter sandwiches such information between discussions of sorority rush, the cost of involving a child in Richmond's Town and Country Cotillion, what the chances are for a Junior League or Garden Club membership, and the gymnastic skills of high school cheerleaders.

Conventions she apparently thinks necessary to explain to Americans outside the South are thank-you notes, hostess gifts, and the non-literal use of "Make yourself at home. . . ." She even explains that white Southerners do not consider the word "nigger" polite.

I might look at *Culture Shock! USA—the South* for Mardi Gras trivia or tips on getting tickets for the 'Bama-Auburn football game. I wouldn't recommend it for much else.

— Kevin O'Kelly

**Videography by Eric Gravley. Music by Ned Mudd.** *Southbound.* 48 minutes Ecology Center Productions, 1996 VHS \$34.95 (home use only)

Free to PBS affiliates. (800) 543-FROG

The timber industry has set its sights on Southeastern forests. This documentary tells of old-growth forests being replaced with pine forest "crops" that provide harvestable trees every 15 years but support no biodiversity. It shows wood chipping operations that close after the three years it takes to deplete locally available timber, and leave behind polluted water. The voices of the Southerners interviewed here (almost exclusively white men) eloquently detail the "rape" of their natural resources. It would have been worthwhile to talk with women and people of color whose lives, health, and economies are directly affected by these operations.

— Anne Eckman

**Sunny Nash.** *Bigmama Didn't Shop at Woolworth's.* Texas A&M University Press, 1996. \$19.95

The Candy Hill neighborhood of Bryan, Texas, provides the backdrop for these vignettes from the author's childhood. Her part-Comanche grandmother, Bigmama, "planted ambitions" in Nash's mind. She tells of Texas' racial landscape from the 1950s through 1973 and the young lives that took hold among segregation and resistance. In 1973, Nash left for Texas A&M, becoming one of its first African-American students.

— Anne Eckman

**Edited by Scott McLemee.** *C.L.R. James on the 'Negro Question'.* University Press of Mississippi, 1996. \$16.95

This volume features many previously unpublished essays by a historian and theorist of black liberation struggles in Africa and the Americas. Written during his 1939 to 1953 stay in the United States, the essays contain themes central to James's better-known historical and theoretical works. The essays range from political tracts on the position of blacks in labor organizing to critiques of *Gone with the Wind* to a series of newspaper articles on his visit to the South. These essays deserve a wide readership for their analyses and for their status as recovered writings.

— Anne Eckman

# whiskey

**Southerners keep on making and drinking bourbon and moonshine.**

**By Mary Lee Kerr**

**D**eep in the soul of American whiskey lies the rich pioneer spirit that founded this nation," proclaim Gary and Mardee Haidin Regan in *The Book of Bourbon*. "We think most good bourbons sound like Tom Waits; their harsh-sounding voices belie their caring hearts and deep, deep souls."

While some Southerners may not find whiskey and its cousin bourbon quite so poetical, the brews have sat along side water jugs on Southern tables since Scotch-Irish immigrants brought stills over from the British Isles in the 1700s.

From the outset, whiskey was a kind of liquid gold. As immigrants moved further west in the late 18th century, it became hundreds of times more lucrative to distill rye or corn into liquor and ship it east in barrels rather than shipping it in its bulkier raw form. In the 1790s, high federal taxes on their successful enterprise spurred many western liquor producers to revolt. After the government quashed the Whiskey Rebellion, die-hard bootleggers settled in the hills of Kentucky and Tennessee, as far as they could get from meddling tax collectors.

Conditions in those two states were ideal for their work—plenty of corn, rye and barley, pure spring water, and oak trees for making barrels. Charring the oak staves and storing the liquor for at least two years gave ordinary whiskey the distinctive flavor that made it bourbon.

Over the years, strong drink has been used as a cure, a fluid for celebration, a form of payment, and a means of control. Southerners plied Native Americans with the liquor and withheld it from slaves. Churches preached for temperance while bootleggers got rich. Through taxes and politics, home brew remains a Southern tradition.

"When I was teenager, I knew where all the stills were up in the hollers," says Peggy Morris, 52-year-old secretary to the commissioner of the West Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) Administration. Her father was a coal miner and her mother ran a boarding house. When she drove boarders up to find the stills, she encountered one family that piped the moonshine right into the kitchen sink for everyone to imbibe.

Southerners continue to make and drink their own liquor. A 1968 national survey found that over 12,000 illegal stills were seized in Southern states, compared to a couple hundred for the rest of the country.

In the '90s the numbers are smaller, but there are still



**DURING PROHIBITION, DOCTORS COULD PRESCRIBE BOURBON FOR MEDICINAL PURPOSES, AS THIS OLD MEDICINE BOTTLE BEARING A PRESCRIPTION SHOWS.**

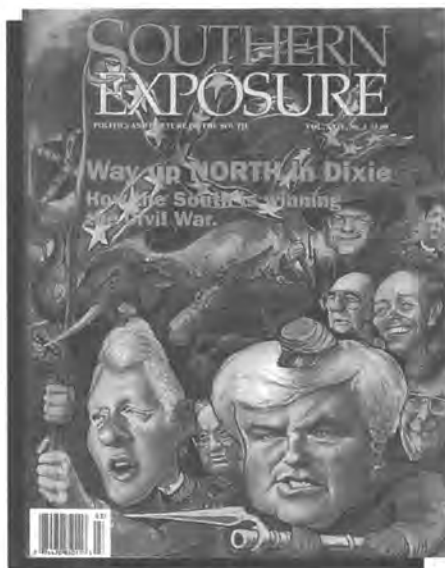
moonshiners around. In 1992, Alabama ABC officials said they were destroying about 95 stills a year. Morris says in West Virginia a lot of moonshiners hide their wares too carefully to track down, but some get caught. "There was a guy last year selling moonshine right behind his old grocery store for five dollars a pint," she says. "Didn't even think he was doing anything wrong."

In addition to moonshine, Southerners consume more bourbon as a region than any other, with Texas, Florida, Kentucky, and North Carolina in the lead. Kentucky, the biggest bourbon producer, has also started exporting globally, and Japan has become one of the industry's biggest customers. Bourbon bars (one with the name "Nashville") have popped up all over Tokyo; the clientele can sip premium brands while Japanese musicians sing country-western tunes.

Bourbon may emigrate overseas, but it will never lose its Southern identity. Air South boosted its Southern image by offering bourbon and whiskey to passengers along with plenty of South Carolina peanuts. "In today's competitive environment," says a company representative, "you have to remind customers where they are."

SE





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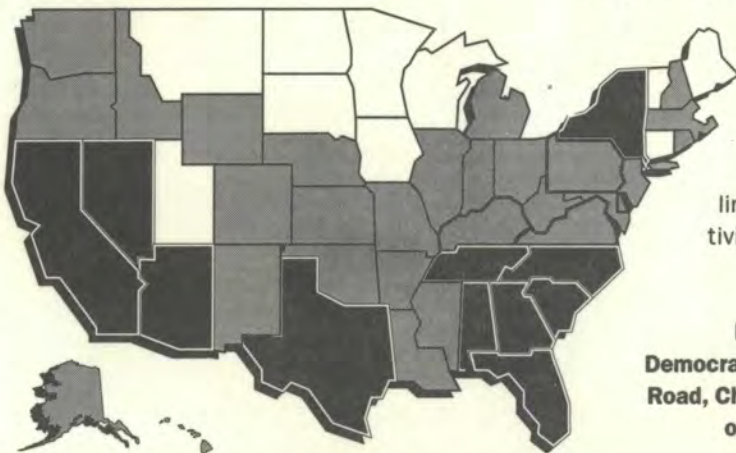
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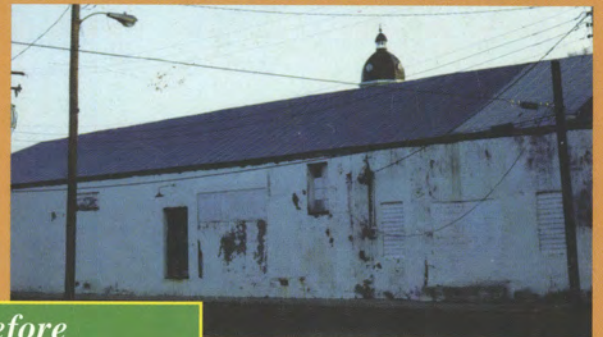
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**Painting a mural** on the side of the Mississippi Cultural Crossroads in Port Gibson brought the black and white communities together. But when schoolchildren painted the sidewalk, too, and then covered the little white posts in front of the building with color, some Port Gibson residents objected. See "White Only on Main Street" on page 39.



*Before*



*After*

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On the cover: Detail of Port Gibson's Mississippi Cultural Center mural. Photo by Patty Crosby