

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

A JOURNAL OF POLITICS & CULTURE

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Image of the South



Hillbillies, Black Republicans, and Whatever Happened to Southern Democrats?

The Hampton and Tuskegee Photographs of Frances B. Johnston



Charles Barkley

*NBA professional and future
Republican governor
of Alabama?*

ALSO *The Great North Carolina Bank Heist*
Can tobacco farmers turn over a new leaf?





STUDENTS LEARN MECHANICAL DRAWING AT HAMPTON INSTITUTE, HAMPTON, VIRGINIA, 1899. THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF HAMPTON AND TUSKEGEE INSTITUTES BY FRANCES BENJAMIN JOHNSTON AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY PRESENTED A "WHITE VICTORIAN IDEAL" AND CONTRIBUTED TO THE ONGOING DEBATE ON WHAT DIRECTION BLACK-WHITE RELATIONS AND BLACK EDUCATION SHOULD TAKE. EDWARD D.C. CAMPBELL JR. EXPLORES THE HISTORY AND MEANING OF THESE PHOTOGRAPHS — AND THE LIFE OF THE WHITE SOUTHERN WOMAN WHO TOOK THEM — IN "BLACK PRISM, WHITE LENS" BEGINNING ON PAGE 12.

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SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

SPRING 1995 ISSUE

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From the Editor

When I arrived at the Institute for Southern Studies to become editor of *Southern Exposure* last July, Research Director Bob Hall was putting finishing touches on the "Gold and Green Report." The study proved conventional wisdom wrong: states with the toughest environmental laws have the best climate for good jobs (see Fall 1994 *Southern Exposure*). Bob set about to spread the word. He photocopied hundreds of reports, faxed materials, talked to reporters on the phone, and stapled the report together — all at the same time. I'm not exaggerating.

Bob Hall is the founding editor of *Southern Exposure*. When the Institute for Southern Studies was new, in 1970, he volunteered, and since then, he's done everything from writing foundation proposals to digging in courthouses for information to hauling out the trash. At various times he's been director, editor, and research director.

Now, he is making a transition. He'll still be working for social change — just not full-time with the Institute. He will continue investigating money and politics (see "Banker's Delight" page 8), and he and Mary Lee Kerr, the new Research Director of the Institute (formerly Research Associate) are compiling a new *Green Index*, a guide to the nation's environmental health.

David Cecelski — former Institute board chair, historian, and writer (see Roundup, page 3) — recently spoke with me about those who maintain a commitment to social change.

He remembers when people thought revolution was possible. By the 1980s, "When people realized it could get worse, they started dropping like flies." Being around Bob Hall and the Institute, he said, showed him that there was no reason to "sit around and pout."

But David wondered how Bob — and Executive Director Isaiah Madison — have "been going as long as they have." They have both been serious activists since the 1960s.

"You personally have to feel change can happen, change does happen. We organize to help people get greater power over the institutions that too often abuse the prerogatives they have because of their wealth. The South is a better place than it was 40 years ago — 25 years ago when the Institute began. People do make a difference," said Bob.

Change is certainly happening with *Southern Exposure*. This issue marks a chance for me to team up with Jean Speer, who produced the cover section, "Image of the South." Jean is director of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services at East Tennessee State University, which publishes *Now and Then*, the magazine I edited for eight years — until I came here. It is a pleasure to work with her again.

In this issue, we also say farewell to Jacob Roquet, who designed the magazine for 12 years. "He is an extraordinarily talented graphic designer and friend. He's been steadfast in his partnership with the Institute, significant in our life and the life of the magazine," said Bob.

We welcome Mia Kirsh, another dedicated activist and fine designer from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, as our new graphic artist.

It's been the teamwork — with Mia, Jane Hillhouse, who designed the cover, Jean Speer, the staff of the Institute, section editors, and volunteers — that has made this an exciting venture for me and, I hope, a stimulating issue for you to read.

It's true. People do make a difference.

— Pat Arnow

In our last issue we featured the Southern Journalism Awards. Thanks are still due to three of the judges: Linda Rocawich, Vernie Singleton, and Gordon Young.

People do make
a difference,"
said Bob.

GOSHEN'S LAND

"You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me — you, your children and grandchildren."

— Genesis 45:10

In Pollocksville, North Carolina, town leaders are building a sewage treatment plant that threatens an African-American farming community called Goshen. The plant will trespass on a historic cemetery and displace one of the county's last black farmers. The waste odors and run-off could make Goshen an undesirable home for anybody. Local citizens are organizing to stop the sewage plant. Around Thanksgiving I toured Goshen's cemetery with Hattie Loftin Brown.

Driving east on Highway 58, the last landmark before Goshen is the E.E. Bell farm. A long avenue of oaks and cedars veils an antebellum manor house with Classical Revival columns. Now on the National Register of Historic Places, the 2,000-acre cotton plantation once belonged to James C. Bryan, Jones County's largest slaveholder. The main house is best known for having a crystal chandelier that once hung in the Confederate White House. The farm's cotton fields crowd Goshen against the Trent River and Goshen Branch.

In a pine grove by the Branch, Hattie Brown and I walked among Goshen's dead. A soft-spoken 67-year-old, Mrs. Brown recalled all the departed, whether buried in unmarked graves or under marble headstones. She had at least a few words for every soul.

Hattie Brown learned Goshen's history from her grandmother, Luvinia Smith Loftin. A midwife and lay doc-

LOW WATTS IN LETCHER

It was a rainy afternoon in late September 1993 when Letcher County Judge/Executive Ruben Watts declared his innocence in the face of rampant rumors that he would shortly be indicted. "I will vigorously defend myself because I have been faithful to my trust as a public official to the citizens of Letcher County who elected me," he said, his voice crackling with storm interference on the radio. Everyone in the offices of the local newspaper listened intently. The press conference was, they hoped, a precursor to a turn in Letcher County politics.

Four days later, Watts, who was elected as a reform candidate 12 years ago, was indicted on 28 counts of theft and forgery. The allegations brought against him were the result of a three-year Kentucky State Police investigation of Letcher County courthouse corruption. In October 1994, he pleaded guilty to only one count — of theft by deception.

Watts and his two co-defendants, local businessmen Ted Amburgey and Michael Orick, were charged with designing a plan to scam \$19,000 in county funds for road supplies that were never delivered. It was a small-time operation officials said worked like this: Amburgey, owner of a local grocery store, was awarded a bid to supply culverts and other supplies to the Letcher County Road Department. Amburgey purchased the culverts from a supply company in Harlan

County and resold them to Letcher County. Orick was an employee at the Harlan store; he eventually began providing Amburgey with false invoices that showed culverts had been delivered to the county, when in fact they hadn't. Investigators found at least 10 separate occasions where Watts, Amburgey, and Orick obtained checks from the Letcher Fiscal Court ranging from \$1,195.80 to \$3,529.32, and then split the money three ways.

Watts, who opted not to run for re-election, received a jail sentence of just one year and was ordered to reimburse the county for \$9,000. The other two men received similar sentences.

The decision and sentence were bitter pills to swallow for many who had followed the story.

"It stinks!" began the resulting editorial in Letcher County's *Mountain Eagle* newspaper. "It stinks because it says yet again that public officials in Kentucky can get by with any amount of wrongdoing and walk

away with only a slap on the wrist. It stinks because only a full trial with detailed testimony would bring out all the facts concerning Judge Watts, who was accused by state police of systematically robbing Letcher County over a period of many years. Some investigators have estimated privately that Watts stole more than a million dollars."

Throughout the year before his trial Watts maintained his full innocence, insisting the investigation and the resulting charges were brought about by political enemies. "We're going to fight it to the end," he said at his press conference.

The end came this fall.

Photo by Jeff Whetstone



The conviction of Judge Ruben Watts helped clean up Letcher County, Kentucky, courthouse corruption, but some still smell a stink.

tor, Luvinia forbade her descendants to forget Goshen's past. What Mrs. Brown told me, Luvinia had taught her.

Born a slave in 1848, Luvinia grew up on Richard Oldfield's plantation on the White Oak River, about 10

miles south of Goshen. Her father, Luke Smith, had rebelled against the wealthy cotton planter. He secretly gardened in nearby woods. He taught Luvinia to read by slipping books from Oldfield's library. He led clandestine prayer meet-

ings. He also ran away many times. Luvinia had seen him maimed yet still disappear back into the woods.

In 1863 Luke Smith and his wife Melissa led their children to freedom. To reach Union-occupied New Bern, they crossed two

rivers and the Lakes Pocosin, a wilderness crawling with cottonmouths and gators. Luvinia had barely kept up and nearly drowned fording the White Oak River.

Luvinia later married William Loftin, a former slave from Lenoir County. They sharecropped at first. But in the 1870s, they joined the Jordans, the Bests, and other Loftins and purchased a remote woodland called "the Goshen tract." Wild plums, not pines, shaded the graveyard in those days.

Together they cleared the land by hand, grubbing enough earth for cotton, corn, and sweet potato fields. They raised hogs. They mortgaged everything to buy seed and a mule. A single crop failure

Everybody knew everybody and the community looked out for its own. Only when walking past town to the Garnett Heights' school did Goshen's children suffer racial taunts.

could have left them homeless.

Few locales posed more danger to black landowners. During Reconstruction, the Ku Klux Klan terrorized Jones County's black majority. And years later, the county's most famous son, future U.S. senator Furnifold Simmons, led the state's white supremacy campaign that created Jim Crow.

Amid this racial turmoil Goshen was a rare sanctuary. Reached only by an old Indian trail, the community was very secluded. Luvinia freely roamed the forest for her herbal cures. The children played without inhi-

bition. And at Christmas, they wandered by every home to share good food and tidings. Everybody knew everybody and the community looked out for its own. Only when walking past town to the Garnett Heights' school did Goshen's children suffer racial taunts.

After Luvinia Loftin's death in 1941, her descendants continued to struggle to hold onto Goshen. Like all farmers, they faced bad weather, feeble mules, and low prices. But Jim Crow also prohibited them from challenging corrupt merchants and produce buyers. And the county sheriff showed little mercy to black farmers delinquent in their tax payments. Hattie Brown saw her cousin Laura's family dispossessed; the family stayed for years in a drafty tobacco barn.

We walked past small plastic signs marking the evicted family's graves. "They lived with so many heartaches," Mrs. Brown sighed.

To hold onto the land, Goshen's citizens worked off as well as on the farm. The men traveled to distant sawmills and logging jobs. The women and children picked tobacco on white farms. In spring, they harvested strawberries 100 miles away and rushed home on weekends to tend their own farms.

Holding a family together was a feat. For years after their father Lucius died,

Hattie Brown and her sister Minzelle Dillahunt ran the Loftin farm by themselves. They plowed fields and fought off merchants who tried to take advantage of two women doing "men's work." Their brothers Lucius Jr. and William staved off foreclosure by sending military paychecks home. Sister Leora Murray, a Philadelphia nurse, helped out when she could.

Black-owned farmland dwindled away. When a black-top replaced the Indian trail in 1952, Goshen's citizens began

to commute to domestic and factory jobs in other counties. Mrs. Brown's cousin Julia was like many. For decades, she cooked for a white family in Kinston. She only came home on weekends — but she kept her land.

Then, the drowning of Minzelle's young son in 1956, followed by the flood of '57, nearly shattered the community.

Yet Goshen has somehow survived. Today blacks comprise 43 percent of Jones County's population, yet own less than 3 percent of the land. Landlessness has led to widespread poverty and hopelessness. But in Goshen, land ownership has meant independence and strong roots. Goshen now boasts teachers, lawyers, engineers, and scientists among its children.

Recently those younger Goshenites have been coming home often. They have returned to join the struggle against the sewage facility. They seem to know — or at least intuit, as I did that autumn afternoon in Goshen's cemetery — that the real meaning of history has little to do with antique chandeliers and Doric columns. One finds the genuine significance of historic preservation in the collective experience of a community and in the stories passed from generation to generation by women like Luvinia Loftin and Hattie Brown. By all the criteria that truly matter, Goshen has earned all the historic protection that it can be given.

— David Cecelski

MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS IN MISSISSIPPI MURDERS

When the bodies of two gay men were discovered, one with his pants around his knees, bullet holes in their foreheads indicating an execution-style murder, no one in Laurel, Mississippi, knew quite how to take it. The bodies of Robert Clyde Walters, 34, and Joseph L.

Shoemaker, 24, were found by two women taking a walk along Laurel's railroad tracks.

Visitors and workers at local Camp Sister Spirit, a lesbian educational retreat, contended it was a hate crime. The sheriff's department speculated it might have been the result of a robbery — despite the fact that the men's jewelry and credit cards were in their vehicle — approximately five miles away from the bodies. Likewise, a number of gay rights groups, the national media, and the growing number of people following the story were left with a bundle of questionable information and little more.

Upon learning of the murder, the G/L Friendly, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and the Gay and Lesbian Americans slowly filtered into rural Jones County in order to monitor the investigation.

As the story unfolded, the situation became not less, but more confusing. Sixteen-year-old Marvin MacClendon was picked up at school and taken in for questioning, where he eventually confessed to shooting the two men.

"I can definitely say it was not a hate crime," said Jones County Sheriff Maurice Hooks. "Robbery was definitely the motive. I maintained that all along. I don't appreciate outside interference when we're trying to do a job we have to do."

Ten days later, MacClendon's story was different from what the sheriff had reported: He'd been standing under a streetlight talking with his friends when the two men pulled up and asked him if he had any marijuana. He didn't, but he said the two men offered him \$20 to take them to a place where they could buy some.

Though the story directly contradicted earlier statements made by the sheriff's department, Sheriff Hooks would only say, "I'm not going to try this case in the media."

MacClendon's lawyer was on the defensive, too, telling the *Hattiesburg American*, "We're going to try this case on the

facts. We're not going to try it in the news media, like these folks from New York or wherever."

MacClendon's story was that after he got in the Blazer with Walters and Shoemake, the two men propositioned him. Eventually, according to MacClendon, Shoemake reclined his seat to a point where he could grab the young man. Walters, too, allegedly turned around in the driver's seat and grabbed him.

At that point, says MacClendon, one of the men told him, "Nigger, you're going to get it tonight unless you . . . (vulgarity describing oral sex)."

So the boy panicked, shot the men, and dumped the bodies.

It was exactly what the gay and lesbian activists in town were afraid would happen. "It's what we call a 'gay panic' defense," explains Todd Emerson, founder of G/L Friendly.

"Someone who's straight saying he killed a homosexual in self defense because he was propositioned by the victim. That is a hate crime because the victims he killed were gay."

Emerson also charged that law officers had refused assistance from the gay and lesbian activists in town, kept the visitors under surveillance, tried to break into their hotel room, and threatened to have them kicked out of the county.

Sheriff Hooks countered, "I don't even care to read [their statements]. That's a bunch of lies out of the pits of hell. All they want is just to keep this thing going."

Resentment towards the activists who came to town was obvious both from statements made by community members and the general attitude of the local coverage. "Gay activists robbed Laurel murder victims of dignified farewell," read the headline to one of the *Hattiesburg American's* editorials.

MacClendon is awaiting trial now. Most of the groups have pulled out and gone back to D.C., New York, San Francisco. The young man's lawyer, J. Ronald Parrish, has requested

SOUTHERNERS ON MEDIA IN THE SOUTH

BOB EDWARDS

On John Egerton's *Speak Now Against the Day*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1994:

The book covers the period of Southern history from Roosevelt's election to *Brown vs. Board of Education*. It is an extraordinarily insightful look at the attempt to remake the South, at the people who were trying to ease the South into inevitable integration. As a social history of the South, it is wonderful, magnificent.

Egerton faces things very squarely and head on. He manages to neither sugarcoat — it's not banjo pickin' and gospel — nor trash the people, places, and events that he writes about. He reports what he sees and hears and researches.

Bob Edwards is a reporter with National Public Radio. He grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, where he read John Egerton in the Courier-Journal.

ADORA DUPREE

On the media coverage of the South Carolina woman who said a black man had abducted her two children but who later confessed that she had killed the children herself:

I thought it was significant that she first accused a black man, and that was later found not to be the case. I think it points to the fact that historically, black men have been accused of crimes that were not theirs. They have been the scapegoats.

It was significant that it happened in the South; the genesis of the race question is in the South. Even when they reported on the funeral, they commented on the fact that initially a black man had been accused.

Maybe as a nation now we won't be so quick to accept that (kind of story).

Adora Dupree is a professional storyteller living in Johnson City, Tennessee. In her work she explores the connection between culture and communication.

the victims be given post-mortem AIDS tests — to bolster the self-defense plea.

He says he doesn't want to tarnish Walters and Shoemake's reputations, or cause more trouble for their families. "But if the radical perverts try and put this kid in the electric chair, then we'll let it land where it falls."

MY OLD PCB HOME

Choccolocco Creek flows smooth and shallow past the home that Jerry White built here in rural northeast Alabama a few years ago. He and his wife Barbara wanted to be on the water, in a place where they could swim and fish.

But for them, Choccolocco is not the inviting stream it was little more than a year ago. When White's grandchildren went fishing there at Thanksgiving, he had them throw their catch back.

The reason is polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs. In mid-1993, the toxins turned up in Choccolocco fish in amounts far above federal guidelines.

There's nothing unusual about that; Choccolocco is now only one of many waterways and

lakes tainted by PCBs. And their presence in the creek should have come as no surprise, only as an unhappy irony. What has become one of the world's most widespread environmental hazards was first commercially produced in the nearby town of Anniston.

More remarkable is that the hazard went largely unnoticed around its hometown for more than two decades. In 1970, tests showed the Choccolocco fish contained PCB residues up to 72 times federal guidelines. Any worries at the time were downplayed by state environmental officials and managers at the Monsanto Company plant in Anniston that produced the chemicals.

Fire resistant and thermally stable, PCBs were widely used for decades in chemical equipment. They are now suspected carcinogens and have also been linked to immune and reproductive system damage. Although the federal government banned their manufacture and most uses in 1979, PCBs are long-lived. They've turned up around the globe.

PCBs were first manufactured by the Swann Chemical

Company in Anniston around 1930. After buying Swann in 1935, Monsanto continued PCB production at its Anniston plant for another 37 years. The amount discharged into local waterways during more than four decades of production is unknown.

Monsanto ceased PCB production in 1972. During the next 20 years, however, sporadic tests of fish continued to register unusually high readings of PCBs. For the most part, state regulators never showed much interest in fol-



Elvi Fly

Seeing Elvis floating down from the ether may not be a sign that you have finally lost it. The Flying Elvi, a troupe of parachuting King of Rock 'n' Roll impersonators, have made several appearances in the South lately. In October, they flew into Miami Beach for a live broadcast of the "Breakfast Time Show" on the Fox cable channel.

The Las Vegas-based skydivers sport long sideburns and rhinestone-bedecked white suits. Several of them performed in the 1992 movie, *Honeymoon in Vegas*, but demand for Elvis in the sky is not constant for some reason. The men also hold regular jobs.



lowing up. Action came only in 1993, prodded by a private contractor. Alarmed by deformed fish, White had some tested at his own expense. A few months later, the state public health de-

partment — 23 years too late — posted warnings against eating any fish caught along a 25-to 30-mile stretch of creek.

"I guess it's like anything else," says White. "You get into

bureaucracy and they kind of drag their feet."

Now that the creek is off limits, "It just takes a whole piece out of your life," says Robert Downing, a local county commissioner and life long Anniston resident. And as the threat of PCBs was setting off alarms nationally, why did no one pay attention locally?

"Number one, I think there was not much interest," Downing says. "People were not made aware of the potential problem. And number two, people were not educated as to what the ramifications of those chemicals would be."

White wants the creek to be cleaned up. But state officials expect years to pass before the stream will again be safe for fishing. Like White, dozens of property owners, fishermen, and business owners are now suing Monsanto, charging that the chemical giant knew about the residual contamination and did nothing. Defense lawyers respond that the evidence will show that the company acted responsibly at all times.

—Sean Reilly

DR. C. GETS OFF THE BEATEN TRACK IN GEORGIA

In the tranquil cotton country of Calhoun County, Georgia, no one ever suspected that a wiry, gray-haired school superintendent named Corkin Cherubini would blow the whistle on his own segregated schools.

"That's when things got nasty," says the scholarly man they call "Dr. C."

Now, after one tumultuous semester that included rumors of riot, an anonymous flier declaring "the war of the races" and a federal clamp-down on Calhoun, the harmony of this rural northern county, population 5,000, has been lost in a wrenching soul-searching.

Cherubini, at the center of the turmoil, had been an English teacher in Calhoun County for 22 years before he was elected superintendent in 1992. Soon after taking office, he found a glaring

pattern in the paperwork crossing his desk.

Although formal segregation was long gone, most of the 1,200 pupils still followed strict tracks that led whites to college preparatory work and consigned most blacks to vocational classes.

The segregation started early: Of the four kindergarten classes at Calhoun County Elementary School, Cherubini found that two were completely black. The other two kindergartens were largely white. The same pattern held true through elementary grades.

The pattern blossomed with letter-coded classes in the middle grades — "A"-track classes for top students, "D"-tracks for the slowest learners.

In the slowest, D-section of sixth-grade math, there were 11 blacks and no whites. In sixth-grade math, section C there were 24 blacks and no whites. In the faster-track A and B sections, there were 26 whites and 17 blacks.

Reading, science, and social studies showed the same pattern.

Seventh and eighth grades told the same story.

By ninth grade, only two tracks really counted: college preparatory and vocational. College prep was dominated by whites and vocational education by blacks.

"Really, this is more insidious than regular segregation," Cherubini says. "Here you are tracking 75 percent of your black kids, kind of casting them into the lower echelons automatically."

Nancy Peck, associate director of the Miami-based Southeastern Desegregation Center, calls the class structure of Calhoun's public schools one of the worst cases of *de facto* segregation she has ever seen.

"I do understand what they are saying about ability grouping," says banker Chuck Cowart, the white chairman of the School Board and a board member for 22 years. "Obviously, it's not done 100 percent by ability. If it was, all of the whites would not end up in the top two classes."

At the insistence of the Federal Office of Civil Rights, by next fall, classes are to be reorga-



nized in Calhoun County.

It wasn't until this summer that Dr. C. made his goals clear.

"At the end of last year, I told the elementary principal we were definitely going to randomly sort kids and make sure we had things better balanced."

When notices went home to parents this fall, the phone started ringing at Cherubini's house. Anonymous calls threatened personal harm.

That was when Cherubini called in the Office of Civil Rights, which quickly concluded that Calhoun was out of compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

His actions inflamed much of the white community.

"That's like calling in the IRS to do your tax returns," says Frank Miller, a banker and white member of the school board.

"Most Yankees don't understand life in the South," grocer Richard West wrote in an open letter to Cherubini in a local newspaper. "If you haven't learned to like it in 23 years, Delta is ready when you are."

But what really shook the little towns of Morgan, Edison, and Arlington was an anonymous flier that circulated early in November: "Support Dr. C. . . 100 percent black Calhoun County schools. No white teachers! No white workers! . . ."

"We have the chance to obtain what we deserve in Calhoun County!" the flier declared. "We must arm ourselves and be ready to fight for it. Whites have their own school in Damascus. We must make them go there by any means necessary! The war of the races has started!"

One Friday in November, someone anonymously called the Riverside sewing plant near the high school in Edison to report a race riot at the school. Parents left work and home to pick up their children.

There was no riot.

The suspicion and fear spawned by the controversy has depressed the young and old alike.

"For your leader to stand up and say your school system is the pits, it just hurts so much I

can't tell you," says a guidance counselor. "It's like going through a grieving experience for something that has died."

—Mark Silva

This story first appeared in the December 6, 1994, Miami Herald in a longer form. It is reprinted with permission of the author and publisher.

YOUR JOB OR YOUR HEALTH

The National Labor Relations Board filed suit against OxyChem in the summer of 1993, when Vice President Peter Pieckenbrock threatened workers with a plant shutdown if they voted for a union.

The plant workers voted to join the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union nonetheless. Emboldened by their victory, they began to raise serious questions about health and safety violations at the plant throughout the past year.

Late this fall, though, OxyChem made good on its threat. The company, a subsidiary of Los Angeles-based Occidental Petroleum Corporation, shut its doors on its West Virginia plant. The Belle facilities made chemicals used in paint strippers, silicone caulking, and plastics like Teflon.

Union officials, who have still not been able to negotiate a contract with the company, put it down to old-fashioned union-busting. Though 16 of Occidental's plants are union, they were all acquisitions; the company hasn't lost a union election in 23 years. Non-union workers received a much richer benefit and pension package than those in the 16 union plants. Workers at the Belle plant had initially tried to keep their benefits and pension plans. OxyChem informed them those were for non-union workers only, and their next scheduled pay raise was cancelled.

On closing, Occidental countered the union-busting allegations by saying it would cost too much to upgrade the plant to current environmental

HE WARNED US, BUT WE GOT TIME BOMBED ANYWAY

Stetson Kennedy, writing in *Southern Exposure: A Documented Exposé of the Anti-Democratic Forces in the Deep South*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1946:

"... the reactionary forces of the whole nation concentrated their efforts on the region in their all-out 1944 campaign to get rid of 'That Man' in the White House and his supporters in Congress. . . .

"The record of this attempt by reactionary industrialists to bamboozle the South and nation holds many lessons for the future. It revealed that these elements were willing — even while America was engaged in a life-and-death struggle against fascism — to employ the fascist propaganda weapons of racial and religious bigotry to pervert a national election toward fascist ends. The fact that the South was chosen as the focal point of the attempt shows where the greatest danger lies.

"The Southern revolt against democracy fizzled in 1944. But it was not a dud. Unless the fuse is pulled, it may prove to be a time bomb and explode someday in our faces."

standards. Terry Short, a worker at the plant and a union spokesman, points out that the company has spent \$7 million upgrading the plant and "it wouldn't take much more. We're already there, really."

At no time during the 40 bargaining sessions with the union did OxyChem mention financial problems. When the environ-



mental standards became an issue in 1993, the plant manager at the time, Tony Santavicca, said the new regulations would actually improve the market for one of the types of chemicals made in Belle, and wouldn't affect the others. During a shut-down directly preceding the closing, Occidental Chemical spent an additional \$750,000 in repairs to the facility.

OxyChem already faces massive fines for non-compliance with a bundle of environmental and safety regulations. The al-

leged problems include a sludge dryer which is often vented directly into the air, emitting toxic pollutants; sulfuric acid dumped into trucks without a vent, allowing vapors to escape; and a failure to protect workers from exposure to asbestos.

In late November OCAW initiated a lawsuit against OxyChem. "If OxyChem's actions go unchallenged, regulators will be serving notice on workers throughout the state that they must choose between jobs and health," Leonard said. "This is a horrible message to workers, who are on the front lines of the movement for a cleaner environment."

"All we've wanted is our jobs," said Short. "We've found out the company lied to us and was not providing us with safe working conditions. They were doing things the old way and we were exposed to many carcinogens. The technology is there; they just chose not to use it."

The National Labor Relations Board, OCAW representatives, and company officials are now in conference with a federal judge. Short says he, along with the rest of the workers at the Belle plant, have hopes the plant will be ordered to reopen after a round of federal hearings in the spring.

*Edited by A. Lorraine Strauss.
Illustrations by Steven Cragg.*

Banker's \$ Delight

How to win friends, influence people - and get richer.
Banks in North Carolina have discovered how to keep their loopholes open.

Forget precious metals. Get rid of those mutual funds. For a real return on your investment, put your money in political influence.

That's the strategy North Carolina bankers follow — and it's paid off handsomely. Consider the example of the state's fifth largest bank, First Citizens. It earned \$42 million in 1990, and because of a tax loophole provided by North Carolina lawmakers, First Citizens paid nothing in state income taxes. Not a dime.

The tax loophole saves North Carolina banks over \$50 million each year — and to help keep it in place, banking interests annually invest \$1 million in political donations and lobbying. The investment's return: 5,000 percent!

The loophole lets banks pay no income tax on the earnings from U.S. bonds *and* also deduct from their taxable income the cost of depositors' money used to buy those bonds. In 1992 and 1993, an old-school Democrat tried to close the banks' loophole. "People told me, 'You're messing with the gorilla,'" recalls John Gamble, a 73-year-old state legislator from conservative Lincoln County.

William Baker, who heads the North Carolina Revenue Department's corporate tax section, admits the loophole "doesn't make sense from the state's point of view or for the taxpayers who don't get this privilege."

An accounting firm hired by the legislature found that North Carolina's big banks pay nearly the lowest income tax rate in the nation and less than one-fourth the rate paid by the typical Mom-and-Pop business in the state. Despite the experts and the evidence, Gamble's bill to close the loophole never got out of the House Committee on Financial Institutions.

Why?

Goodwill Bundles

The Institute for Southern Studies recently investigated the \$50-million tax break and other bank privileges. The report, "Bank Heist," provides a case study of how private money has poisoned the political process, forcing ordinary taxpayers to subsidize wealthy interests that can afford to invest in politics.

Here's an overview of how bankers invest in political influence:

Campaign Contributions

By bankrolling promising candidates, banks win the allegiance of elected officials. From 1989 through 1992, banking interests gave about \$3 million in campaign donations to state-level candidates and political committees. Only the broader-based health care and real estate industries funneled larger amounts to politicians.

Ten bank-related political action committees shelled out \$466,000 to 159 of the 170 state legislators elected in 1992. More money came from bank directors, such as First Citizens' top stockholders Frank and Lewis Holding, who gave \$22,564 over four years.

The banking industry's 40,000 employees also offer fertile ground for "bundling"; for example, a Wachovia lobbyist presented the state treasurer's 1992 re-election committee with 179 checks from company executives worth \$9,300 — more than twice the limit of a PAC contribution. The treasurer strongly opposed Gamble's anti-loophole bill.

Hired Lobbyists

"Giving political contributions is an entree into [legislators'] offices," explains Zeb Alley, a lobbyist whose clients include the North Carolina Banking

Association. In the past three legislative sessions, banking interests reported paying lobbyists \$457,000.

Lobbyists make their clients' views known in committee meetings and — more frequently — in informal settings where far-from-home legislators rely on them for food, drink, and friendship. Most of what lobbyists spend remains unreported, but sometimes a glimmer emerges. In 1992, lobbyists for the North Carolina Bankers Association reported spending \$790 feeding and entertaining Thomas Hardaway on 10 visits to Vinnie's Restaurant and a popular country club. It was the same year Hardaway chaired the House committee that oversaw most banking legislation.

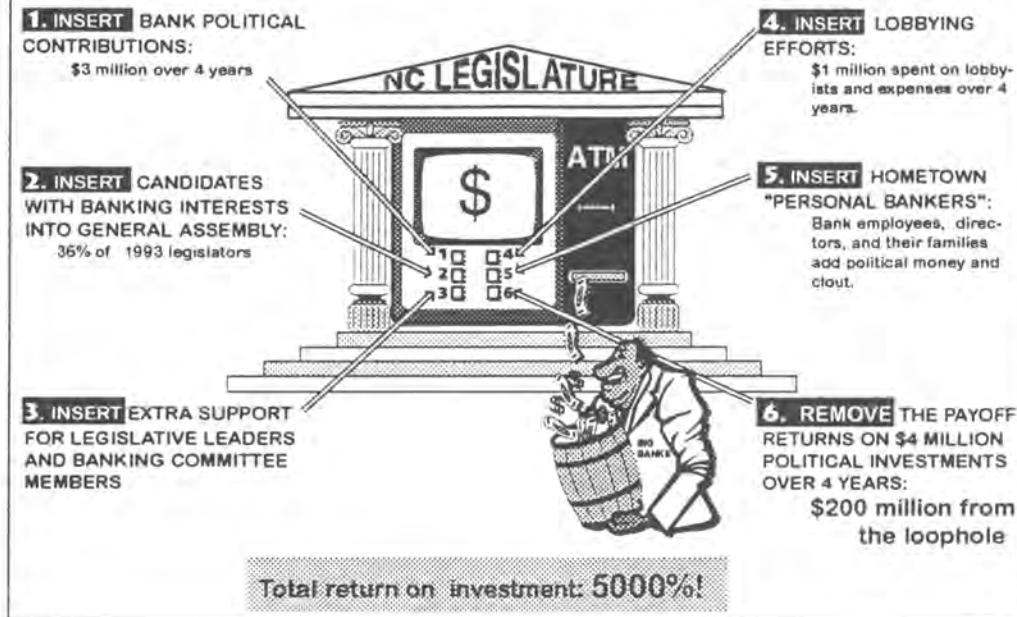
Bankers on the Inside

Banks encourage their executives to get involved in civic affairs, build relationships with policy makers, and recruit them onto local boards of directors. More than one third of the 1992-93 legislators had significant economic interests in banking. Fourteen of the 50 state senators either served on bank boards, or they or their wives worked full time for banks. Another five listed themselves as attorneys for banks.

The 1993 House Committee on Financial Institutions that killed Gamble's anti-loophole bill included vice chair George Holmes, a director of First Union's Yadkinville branch; Bob Hunter, whose wife is a director of First Union's Marion branch; Jerry Dockham, a director of Central Carolina Bank in Denton; Walter Church, chief executive officer of SNB Savings Bank; Tim Tallent and Julia Howard, who list themselves as doing real estate appraisal work for financial institutions; vice chairs Mary McAllister and Ronnie Smith, who disclose substantial stock ownership in

The Bank's Money-Making Machine: The North Carolina Legislature

To Use: Push numbered button & follow instructions



Winner lists himself as on "retainer" with at least one bank.

In such a subservient legislative climate, the biggest North Carolina banks have thrived. The state legislature has allowed banks to engage in branch banking, Southern regional mergers, and now national interstate banking. NationsBank has grown into America's third-largest bank, a colossus with 1,900 branches in nine states and \$171 billion in assets. First Union and Wachovia have also ballooned; the top six banks now control over 80 percent of deposits and loans in North Carolina.

While big banks expand, the losers are small businesses and average citizens who pay more taxes and have a harder time getting loans at reasonable rates. Reports cited in "Bank Heist" reveal that banks fail to provide access to credit, even though they get cheap money from the Federal Reserve and from de-

positors protected by federal insurance. The chief accountability tool local activists have — the Community Reinvestment Act — may soon be gutted by Republicans in Congress.

The ability of bankers to get favorable laws will only increase as the cost of campaigns climbs and candidates become more dependent on big contributions. Ironically, if the North Carolina legislature closed the \$50 million loophole for banks, the new revenue could provide public financing for all candidates for governor, council of state, and the legislature — with more than \$40 million left over. Mention of public financing brings cries of "welfare for politicians." But when wealthy contributors pay the price, they put politicians in their debt and reap their own brand of welfare — like the banks' tax subsidy. By closing the loopholes, voters could "own" their government and still save on their tax bills.

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The full "Bank Heist" report by Calvin Allen, Lisa Hamill, and Bob Hall, is available to Institute for Southern Studies members for \$10 (\$35 to non-members). To order, fill out coupon in magazine and attach with payment — or send check to Institute for Southern Studies, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702.

United National Bank and Centura Bank, respectively; and John Nichols, president and major stockholder of 1st Choice Mortgage Corporation.

Rewards for Loyal Incumbents

By supporting legislators who have done their bidding, banks help their friends gain seniority and get appointed to key committees. The top two recipients of bank money on the Senate banking committee were its chairman (a BB&T director) and an incumbent who faced a tough re-election campaign.

Bankers gave \$8,800 to House Speaker Dan Blue's 1990 and 1992 campaigns, plus \$12,000 for his 1991 and 1993 receptions. Blue assigns bills to committees. "As a tax bill, my bill should have gone to the Finance Committee," Gamble claims. "My bill was as good as dead when Blue assigned it to the Banking Committee."

The Hometown Lobby

The bank lobby mobilizes an army of "personal bankers" — local employees who push its agenda in every legislator's home district and who reap immeasurable "goodwill" by donating to local arts councils, colleges, United Way drives, and other area charities. Representative Gamble believes hometown pressure was the banks' most lethal weapon

against his bill. "When you go home, your personal friends come to see you and tell you how this bill will destroy the banking industry," he says. While the Christian Coalition uses hot-button emotional issues, banks gain loyalty by spreading cash around — or withholding it at key moments.

Merged Interests

Connie Wilson, a NationsBank trust officer and state legislator, describes bankers' political gifts as "civic-mindedness." Lawmakers insist they cannot be bought. Indeed, a review of policy debates reveals that most legislators don't distinguish between public and private interests; to them, what's good for banks is good for the state.

"The question is: What kind of business climate are we going to have in the state?" says House financial committee member Larry Justus, a Republican. "Having banking laws more in line with other states would take away North Carolina's advantages."

"Legislators I've talked to are proud of the North Carolina banks," says 1993 Senate Finance Committee chair Dennis Winner, a Democrat. "They are a great economic benefit to the state." On his economic-interest statement, attorney

Belly Up on the Mississippi

The booming new riverboat gambling industry in Tunica, Mississippi, isn't playing with full decks anymore.

By *Jenny Labalme*

Mississippi may have more riverboats than any state, but a few are starting to sink. The four-year-old riverboat gambling industry, which is exploding nationwide, witnessed its first bankruptcies last year. There could be more.

Last year, *Southern Exposure* reported on the burgeoning riverboat gambling industry in Tunica (Summer 1994). It was an economic boom that made some residents uneasy. While the casinos did create jobs, profits went elsewhere. Low tax rates meant the area experienced little civic improvement. Roads clogged with traffic led to more highway deaths.

And now, some of the boats are being swept away. Bell Casinos, Inc., which owns two Mississippi casinos, went belly up at the end of August, filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. On December 1, Palace Casinos, Inc., filed for protection from its creditors in bankruptcy court. Palace owns one riverboat in Mississippi. Another outfit, Treasure Bay, missed a bond payment in November, and it's now in default since it didn't ante up the cash in December. Industry watchers say it won't be long before Treasure Bay's two boats also capsize financially.

Wall Street analysts and gambling experts say Mississippi is suffering from a glut of riverboats. While most states that allow riverboat gambling have capped the number of floating casinos, Mississippi set no limit and currently has 31. Added competition comes from nearby Louisiana, which opened at least seven boats in 1994.

Bill Eadington, professor of economics and director of the Institute for the Study of

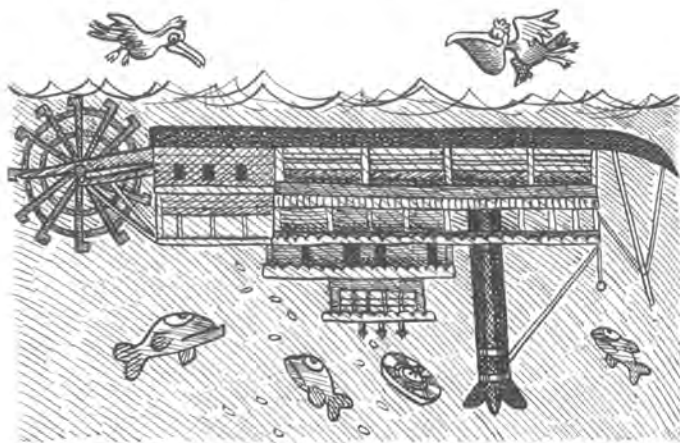


Illustration by Steven Cragg

Gambling at University of Nevada in Reno, says that what happens in Mississippi will likely parallel Atlantic City's experience between 1988 and 1990. During that time, the New Jersey city watched eight of its 18 casinos go bankrupt. "What's happening (in Mississippi) is very predictable from an economic perspective," Eadington says. "We're seeing the by-product of a classic shakeout. And we'll probably see more attrition, more bankruptcies, and possible mergers of some companies."

Proponents of gambling sell riverboat as an economic development tool to jump start decaying areas — a theory anti-gambling groups challenge. It wasn't long ago when Tunica, Mississippi, became a hot site for waterborne wagering. Located about 30 miles south of Memphis, Tennessee, it was a perfect location to entice would-be high rollers to drive south. The first floating gambling hall opened in October 1992. At the end of 1994, there were nine.

But Tunica, which is in one of the 30 poorest counties in the nation, and Memphis could support only so many gamblers. So

companies started flying in players from Atlanta and busing them from Little Rock, Arkansas, and Birmingham, Alabama.

But the competition in Tunica got to be too much for some riverboats. President Riverboat Casinos, Inc., shut its doors in July 1994 and is planning to relocate to the Iowa/Nebraska border. Lady Luck Gambling Corporation floated its boat 20 miles downstream to adjacent Coahoma County where a bridge leads to Arkansas.

During the most recent 12-month period, casino gaming brought in a hefty \$1.6 billion.

However, a look at financial indicators reveals this new industry may be facing serious decline. A July report by Salomon Brothers, Inc., an investment brokerage firm, estimates the average Mississippi casino operating profit will decline from 28 percent in 1993 to 13 percent in 1996. Operating profit is the difference between the revenues and the related costs and expenses of a business. It's a gauge often used by analysts to measure the health of a company.

As winter set in, industry watchers expected more boats to find themselves in chilly financial straits — especially on the Mississippi Gulf Coast where there are at least a dozen floating casinos. "If these guys were in trouble during the best months of the season, what will happen during the bad months of the year?" asks Larry Pearson, publisher of *Riverboat Gaming Report*, a casino industry newsletter.

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Jenny Labalme is a reporter with The Indianapolis Star.



What is it about the South? No other region of the United States attracts so much scrutiny and study, so much celebration and derision, so much media hype and misperception. Recent elections, pitting Bill Clinton and Al Gore against the likes of Newt Gingrich, Jesse Helms, and Strom Thurmond — Southerners all, and now all in potent political positions — produce a new urgency for examination of the South and the kind of people who come from the region.

Why does the South need so much explanation? In the 1930s, W. T. Cash wrote about *Culture in the South*; in the 1940s, W. J. Cash explored *The Mind of the South*. Much more followed. C. Vann Woodward's *Burden of Southern History*, Reed's *Southern Folk, Plain and Fancy*, and King's *Southern Ladies and Gentlemen*. Even after numerous studies suggesting changes in traditional notions of the South including Egerton's *Americanization of Dixie*, other writers such as John Shelton Reed spoke of *The Enduring South* and, most recently, Dewey Grantham argued, in *The South in Modern America*, that there is a "persistence of Southern distinctiveness."

Grantham concluded that cultural patterns in the South — attitudes toward religion and physical violence, musical expression and literary creativity — suggest that, "in spite of drastic change, the South remains the most distinctive region in the nation. Southerners continue to be profoundly conscious of their regional identity." It is this richness of cultural life and complexity of identity that keeps writers and sociologists, photographers and moviemakers, political pundits and a host of others coming to dip from the endlessly flowing Southern spring and probing the oozy muck underneath.

In this special section, we hear from an assortment of perceptive observers who have been dipping and mucking in the South's past and trying to divine its future. Edward D. C. Campbell Jr., looks at literal images — photographs — made at the turn of the century by one

We Southerners may seem compelled to explain every nuance of our culture, but our strong sense of place may be our salvation.

of those complex Southerners, a woman born in West Virginia, educated in Paris, ahead of her time in feminism, and creator of photographs that encouraged development of a Southern black middle class.

Jerry Williamson offers a wry and witty account of the upland South's hill-billy stereotype and its serious function in American culture. Writer Jo Carson anguishes over confronting Southern mountain stereotypes as she travels in and out of the South. Researcher Ron Nixon explores the flip side of a common image with his exploration of Southern black conservatives. Finally, Keith Miles, former press secretary for former Senator Jim Sasser (D-Tennessee), ruminates on the political upheavals in the South in the 1994 elections that left him looking for a new job. The writers of these essays, like their subject matter, are all products of the South.

All of these essays in some way confront the issue of cultural hegemony, the notion of who has the power to shape definitions, to set the terms of a community's or region's self-understanding. We have learned in studies of the Appalachian South that cultural images of the region have been largely created outside the region for much of this country's history. Increasingly, improved education, political and

economic power, and access to media have given the South more control of its own image-making and now its own cultural analysis.

The regional differences do persist. This was made abundantly clear to me when I learned and told a new joke last Christmas season. The joke goes like this: The three Magi, after long travel, finally arrive at the manger. They are blackened and covered with soot and ashes. Mary asks them, "What has happened to you?" to which the Magi reply: "We have come from afar." I told the joke to uproarious laughter in Appalachia and in Memphis, but, when I told it to friends from Kansas, they looked at me blankly. I hastily supplied an explanation, so they would "get" the joke, but by then it was a lost cause. If Kansas is the heartland of America, then the South is clearly an extremity — by definition, more radical, culturally "dangerous," eccentric, extreme, more ripe for rich imagery.

The great Southern writer Eudora Welty wrote that "one place comprehended can make us understand other places better. Sense of place gives equilibrium; extended, it is direction." While Southerners may seem enamored with our past and compelled to explain every nuance of our culture, our strong sense of place may be our salvation, keeping us grounded and our compass for the future on course. More importantly, in this time of often overwhelming problems regionally and nationally, we may be uncommonly equipped to follow John Todd's dictum that "elegant solutions will be predicated on the uniqueness of place."

—Jean Haskell Speer

Jean Haskell Speer, a native Tennessean, is director of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services and professor of anthropology and folklore at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City. She is author of The Appalachian Photographs of Earl Palmer (University Press of Kentucky 1990) and co-editor of Performance, Culture, and Identity (Praeger 1992).

Black Prism, White Lens

Frances Benjamin Johnston's turn-of-the-century photographs showed the white Victorian ideal of Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes

By Edward D.C. Campbell Jr.



Students work on stairway of the treasurer's residence at Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia, 1899. Meticulously posed, "almost believable," Frances Benjamin Johnston's photographs of Hampton and Tuskegee were made to promote the "Hampton Idea" of Industrial education for blacks.

During World War II, critic and editor Lincoln Kirstein found a remarkable set of photographs at Lowdermilk's, one of Washington, D.C.'s old and much-visited bookshops. Although the pictures had often been admired by many of the shop's customers, no one really knew much about the leather-bound album except that the images had obviously been carefully assembled, numbered, then each protected with transparent paper on which brief captions were written. It was with the help of Grace Mayer, a curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, that Kirstein learned he had found a collection of turn-of-the-century photographs of Virginia's Hampton Institute, most of which were the work of Frances Benjamin Johnston. In 1966, the museum sponsored an exhibition of the 159 original Hampton images, accompanied by an abridged collection in book form. Aside from the intrinsic value of the images he had found, Kirstein might well have been struck, too, by the irony that a predominantly African-American educational institution had hired a middle-aged, white, and Southern woman to photograph its students and facilities.

In April 1949 *Life* magazine had described the then 85-year-old Frances Benjamin Johnston as the nation's "court photographer." For years Johnston had specialized in pictures of the Washington, D.C. political and social elite, and it was solely from that aspect of her career that the periodical's editors drew samples of her work. When Johnston died in New Orleans three years later, *Time* magazine echoed the same narrow theme: She had been a "onetime news photographer who had an inside track to the White House because of her friendship with Presidents

Harrison, McKinley, and Theodore Roosevelt."

Born in 1864 in Grafton, West Virginia, Frances Benjamin Johnston grew up there and in Rochester, New York. After her family had moved to Washington, D.C., she studied art at Notre Dame Convent in Govanston, Maryland, and in 1883 embarked on a two-year period of study in Paris' famed Academie Julien. Back home, she decided to pursue an early interest in writing and was by then a capable artist, contributing her own artwork as

arrived from Brooks Brothers. She took the last "official" picture of William McKinley only minutes before an assassin mortally wounded the president. In the early 1890s a series of her pictures of the White House was published in book form.

Johnston was not overly concerned with photography's more technical aspects. "I wore out one camera after another," she once exclaimed, "and I never had any of those fancy gadgets. Always judged exposure by guess." She, like the far-better-known Alfred

Stieglitz, saw photography as more than a straightforward journalistic device; at its best, photography was an expression of artistic sensibility. Thus, despite her clientele and milieu, Johnston was increasingly less drawn to portrait photography for its own sake and began, instead, to bring a studied documentary perspective to her work, especially in the everyday details surrounding her various subjects. This, after all, was the woman who for a circa 1896 self-portrait flouted convention by posing with a cigarette in one hand, a beer stein in the



Johnston's photographs of Alabama's Tuskegee Institute, like this one of students cultivating onions in 1906, emphasized humility and hard work. "If we cannot turn out a man here who is capable of taking care of a pig sty," Booker T. Washington once asked the students of Tuskegee, "how can we expect him to take care of affairs of State?"

illustrations for her first magazine stories. The publishing industry, however, was steadily abandoning the use of zinc line-cut art and moving toward halftone photographic illustrations. Johnston soon adopted what she admitted was the "more accurate medium" — photography.

Relying on a combination of her own skills and her family's social connections, Johnston for 15 years served as an unofficial photographer of Washington's social, political, and intellectual life. She captured Rough Rider colonel Theodore Roosevelt posing in his new uniform, just

other, and with her leg crossed, ankle on knee, and petticoats showing.

Johnston, like many other female photographers of her day — Jessie Tarbox Beals, Edyth Carter Beveridge, Lillian Baynes Griffin, Gertrude Kaesebier, and Edith H. Tracy — saw the unique opportunities such a profession offered to women. In her essay, "What a Woman Can Do With a Camera," for the September 1897 issue of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, Johnston remarked that the successful woman photographer must have "good common sense, unlimited patience to carry her

through endless failures, equally unlimited tact, good taste, a quick eye, a talent for detail, and a genius for hard work.”

Although her reputation had been built primarily on studio and architectural photography, Johnston gradually turned her camera toward photojournalism. The March 1892 issue of *Demorest's Family Magazine* included her photo essay on “the innumerable risks and ever-present dangers” faced by Pennsylvania coal miners. She later completed one series of pictures on the Massachusetts shoe industry and another on the District of Columbia’s public schools. In 1899, aided by a note of introduction from the former Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Theodore

Roosevelt, Johnston took a series of more than 150 pictures of life above and below the decks of Admiral George Dewey’s Great White Fleet.

It was in that same year that Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia, hired Johnston to take a series of photographs intended to capture the school’s mission and day-to-day life. Hampton was founded in 1868 as a coeducational, secondary school for blacks by Samuel Chapman Armstrong, an agent of the Freedmen’s Bureau and a former colonel of United States Colored Troops. First known as the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, the school had traditionally stressed a practical, or vocational education and in its first years had

been financed with donations from philanthropic and religious groups such as the American Missionary Association. Since 1872, Hampton had also received federal land-grant funds and since 1878 additional federal support for a program for Native American students. The school also relied heavily on outside funding. The photo series was expressly meant to present the institute attractively to the widest possible general public as well as to prospective students and especially to potential donors and employers, black and white.

The school weighed several factors in selecting Johnston for the task. She was, as the institution’s own *Southern Workman and Hampton School Record* called



Johnston's photographs illustrated the Hampton idea in contrasts. She posed the affluent beside the poor, the old against the new. The series was expressly intended to appeal to prospective students, potential donors, and employers, black and white. Here, the family of a Hampton graduate eats dinner in their home, 1899.

her, “an artist of high rank.” She was also near at hand and, more important, fairly well known for her photographs of the workaday world: of laborers, their tools, and their surroundings. The institute was also aware of her “excellent work” in photographing student life within the Washington, D.C., schools. Johnston’s rates, moreover, were less than those of many other skilled photographers — in part because she was a female trying to make her way in a profession still overwhelmingly male, and in part because she sometimes paid less attention to the business side of her art than was always prudent, whatever the competition.

Johnston and an assistant arrived at Hampton in November of 1899 and for at

least the next several weeks took pictures of the campus and classroom life. Each finished image — what Johnston chose to show, how she posed her subjects, even how she framed an image — carried with it unique aesthetic and technical demands, primarily because Hampton Institute hoped each view would meet a particular cultural need and social philosophy. Indeed, Johnston’s work was to be both a documentary record of the campus at the turn of the century and, more important, a response to the debate on what direction black-white relations, and black education, should take.

Since its founding, Hampton Institute had debated the effectiveness of what by the turn of the century had become

widely known as the “Hampton idea” — the concept of “industrial” or “vocational” education for blacks as opposed to an academic or business curriculum. Although he had first supported schooling primarily in farm and other labor skills, Samuel Chapman Armstrong by 1872 had seen the value of a strong academic course of study. After Armstrong’s death in 1893, Hampton Institute reassessed its mission. Four years later his successor, the Reverend Hollis Burke Frissell, declared that thereafter “the academic department is now made the stepping stone to the industrial and trade work.” By then similar educational philosophies had spread to other schools and, indeed, had become closely



A photograph in the Hampton Series, “The Old Folks at Home,” contrasts the poor black households outside of Hampton with the clean, well constructed classrooms and buildings within. Johnston did not seem to be chastising her subjects for their destitution and backwardness in her portrayals of black life outside Hampton and Tuskegee; rather, she gave expression to a hope for the advancement of an entire race.

identified with Booker T. Washington.

A Hampton graduate and founder of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama's black belt, Washington argued that the "Hampton idea" could revolutionize a rural South plagued by black poverty and illiteracy. Southern white leaders for years had been extolling the benefits of a "New South," one driven by a diversified economy. Schools such as Hampton and Tuskegee, Washington and his followers believed, should take advantage of the change and push a vocational curriculum expressly designed to produce capable farmers, bricklayers, carpenters, draftsmen, or factory workers. Other black leaders, such as W.E.B. DuBois, pro-

tested the narrow emphasis on trade over academic education and on economic over social and legal equality, pointing out that both paths only reinforced white efforts to keep the black population politically subservient and economically dependent. In response to such warnings, Washington replied that for the present at least "the opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house." Thus every picture Johnston made of Hampton's students and classrooms was by its very subject a statement in an ongoing debate.

In January 1900, within weeks of her arrival, the institute's *Southern Work-*

man outlined how Johnston's work would be presented that year to an international audience at the Paris Universal Exposition. The school's plan was that Johnston's photographs would both reinforce "the importance placed by the school authorities on the training of the Indian and Negro in the arts that pertain to home and farm life," and portray how "every part of the school life bears upon the home and the farm." Even before using the pictures for the Paris exhibit, the school planned to convert the images to slides so that "friends of the school" could attend "stereopticon lectures in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston" that winter.



Photographs of students in a history class at Tuskegee in 1902 capture both the innocence of the students, many of whom had never before seen a classroom or been allowed even an attempt to read, and the modesty of the school's academic facilities. Hampton and Tuskegee represented the only ivory tower in which most students would ever find themselves. As Lorenzo Ivy, a Hampton student, marveled, "Times have changed so fast in the last ten years, that I often ask myself who am I, and why am I not on my master's plantation, working under an overseer, instead of being here in this institution, under the instruction of a school teacher."

Johnston's pictures for the exposition were also to be part of a very limited *American Negro* exhibit, designed to present a view of "Negro progress and present conditions" but subsumed within numerous other and much larger presentations on the United States as a whole. In the entire American Pavilion, the commission had allotted only about 12 square feet of exhibit space to the theme of black life; thus photographs — as opposed to student projects and products or teaching materials, for instance — were ideal. It was Thomas J. Calloway, a young black appointed as a "Special Agent" by the commission, who devised a system of cabinets for displaying pic-

tures from both Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes and from Fisk, Howard, and Atlanta Universities.

Johnston was in Paris attending the Third International Photographic Congress, scheduled to coincide with the exposition. Johnston spoke to the conference, in French, on the work of artist-photographers in the United States. It was not her lecture, though, but her photographic work which generated the most interest — and garnered several awards, including the Grand Prix. Calloway reported that the Hampton images were regarded as "the finest photographs to be seen anywhere in the exposition," and that "it was the general

opinion that nowhere had the photographer's lens been so eloquent and impressive in the story of a great work as was silently narrated by these photographs."

Johnston's pictures meticulously idealized the "Hampton idea." John Szarkowski, director of the Museum of Modern Art's photography department, in commenting on the Hampton photos, remarked that Johnston was a stern taskmaster: "In her photographs no head or hand moves during the long exposures; no undisciplined individualist clowns for the camera; no property, no matter how interesting in itself, is allowed to violate the taut, flat planes of her compositions.



Students at Hampton, Tuskegee, and other training institutes labored inside and outside the classroom. These young people pick the school's cotton crop at Mt. Meigs Institute in Alabama in 1902. Critics like W.E.B. DeBois questioned whether an emphasis on vocational training was really in the best interest of the race. "We do not feel," DuBois wrote, "at present, that Hampton is our school — on the contrary, we feel that she belongs to the white South and to the reactionary North, and we fear that she is a center of that underground and silent intrigue which is determined to perpetuate the American Negro as a docile peasant and peon, without political rights or social standing . . ."

"She ordered life," he added, "to assume a pose that conformed to her own standards" — and to the "Hampton idea" as well. In each image the carefully posed students are hard at work absorbing the institute's straightforward education. Thus, although there are photographs of pupils studying the poems of John Greenleaf Whittier or the cathedral towns of Europe, there are far more images of students involved in more utilitarian work: animal husbandry, brick-laying, carpentry, dairy science, domestic service, dressmaking, mechanical drawing, metal-working, and shoe-making. Even in the arts and sciences, the applications were on the practical: classmates in a physics laboratory study "the screw as applied to the cheese press," while young artists gather in a field to sketch "agricultural work," and mathematics students study the proportions of a brick staircase with the assistance of "a student mason."

To her initial images of campus and classroom life, Johnston added another series of photographs comparing the comfortable life of Hampton alumni with the harsh, poverty-stricken rural existence to which many other blacks were condemned. That way, as the *Southern Workman*

reported, "the old-time one-room cabin and the old mule with his rope harness, just tickling the ground with a rusty plough, will be contrasted with the comfortable home of the Hampton graduate, the model barn, and the team of strong horses making a deep furrow with a heavy plow." Johnston took the latter views in the Virginia countryside near Hampton, pitting "The Old Folks at Home," "The Old Time Cabin," and

"The Old Well" against a Hampton graduate's family seated in a formal dining room or "three Hampton grandchildren" gathered about a modern backyard well.

Johnston's photos, as James Guimond pointed out in perhaps the most perceptive analysis of the *Hampton Album*, strongly implied that the students were dutifully learning "the white man's way." The series, Guimond added, "was probably one of the first attempts to use photography to document the application of the American

as "frozen . . . habitat groups," as groups "almost, but not quite entirely — believable." More to the point, the photographs presented a "white Victorian ideal" as the "criterion towards which all darker tribes and nationals must perform aspire."

At the time, however, the response was overwhelmingly positive. Hampton Institute, for example, initiated a series of essays in its *Southern Workman* featuring the Johnston photos. Moreover, 41 of the Paris exhibit's photographs were published in the April 1900 issue of the

American Monthly Review of Reviews and the collection as a whole was exhibited at the 1901 Pan American Exposition in Buffalo. It was perhaps no surprise to Johnston that she received a letter from Booker T. Washington in the summer of 1902 about her work. Only the year before Washington had dined with Theodore Roosevelt at the White House, to the considerable discomfort of most white Southerners, and seen the publication of his autobiography, *Up From Slavery*. Washington wanted a photo portrait of himself and for Johnston to do for Tuskegee what she had for Hampton.

Johnston wrote from Atlantic City in August with an



A class in American history at Hampton Institute shows this Native American man as a nostalgic curiosity — and a subject of study for this group of Hampton students, the men and women of the future. The photograph reflects the convictions of the age. As the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Thomas J. Morgan stressed in his annual report of 1889, "The Indians must conform to 'the white man's ways,' peaceably if they will, forcibly if they must . . . This civilization may not be the best possible, but it is the best the Indians can get. They cannot escape it, and must either conform to it or be crushed by it."

Dream of prosperity and progress to the nation's minorities — in this case to the blacks and Native Americans who were students" at Hampton in the autumn of 1899. Every class and recreational group, the men usually attired in uniform and the women in starched pinafores, is arranged "in poses that are replicas of the group photographs made at white colleges and universities." Lincoln Kirstein described the same views

approximate idea of what the work at Tuskegee might entail and cost. Assuming that Washington wanted her "to cover every phase of the life and training there" and that he needed prints "both for exhibition and publication," Johnston proposed "the same terms as I received at Hampton"; that is, for a thousand dollars, plus "the living expenses of myself and assistant, with our transportation from Washington to Tuskegee and return," she

would “fully cover your Institution and its work estimating 150 to 175 8x10 plates for it and furnishing you four complete sets of prints, one set on platinum paper mounted for exhibition.” “Incidentally,” she added, “I will leave your negatives filed and cataloged, and doubtless during my stay I could train some of your young assistants to make such prints as you might require in [the] future.”

Johnston eventually made two trips to Tuskegee, the first one in 1902 and another in 1906. It was her first that attracted attention, and proved a harsh reminder that beyond the confines of a Hampton or Tuskegee campus, the realities of Southern life could be quickly encountered. As part of her work, she was supposed to photograph several of the smaller industrial-education schools popularly known as “little Tuskegees.” In late November, Johnston took the train to Ramar, Alabama, where she was met by Henry E. Nelson, a graduate of Tuskegee and principal of the Ramar Colored Industrial School, and two of his associates. On the same train was George Washington Carver, the head of the agricultural department at Tuskegee. That Johnston, a white female, had arrived in a small Southern town, after dark, accompanied and met by black men led to what Carver later recollected as “the most frightful experience of my life.” Carver, in fact, had wondered “whether I would return to Tuskegee alive or not.”

Carver believed that somehow “the white people evidently knew” Johnston was coming. Once there, she and Nelson boarded a buggy and drove off into the night for Nelson’s home, several miles away. When Johnston realized how long the trip might take, she decided it might be best to return to town and find a hotel room. By the time they got back, though, it was already eleven o’clock. Before they could reach the hotel they were accosted by two men, a fellow named Armes, who was regarded as “something of a desperado,” and another man, identified only as the son of the local postmaster, George Turnipseed. The former fired three pistol shots at Nelson, who fled for his life. Johnston somehow made her way to where Carver was staying and it was Carver “who got out at once and succeeded in getting her to the next station where she took the train the next morning.”

By daylight, the white community was in an uproar. There was already a

mob looking for Nelson, who quickly fled to Montgomery. Carver spent at least one night wandering the countryside, trying to stay out of view. The Ramar school itself, “was patrolled by a white man walking up and down in front of the school house with a shot gun.” As Carver wrote Washington on 28 November, Nelson had done “great work there and it grieves me to know he must give it up.”

Johnston, however, was not quite finished. Indeed, Carver thought she was “the pluckiest woman I ever saw.” Threatening to file a suit against the two attackers, she went to Montgomery to protest and, if she could not get to her attackers directly, even threatened to have her friend, President Roosevelt, fire the town postmaster. The governor, William D. Jelks, listened but could only offer that they “must face the facts and consider the locality and the people we were dealing with.” The local sheriff was sympathetic, and even complimented Nelson’s work in the community. In the end, though, the white men never faced punishment, the school closed, and Nelson had to move. He did eventually open another institution in China, Alabama. Johnston completed her work, photographing the “little Tuskegees” at Mount Meigs and Snow Hill, Alabama. Thirty-two of the photographs of Tuskegee and the other schools appeared in the August 1903 issue of the *World’s Work* with an essay by Booker T. Washington, “The Successful Training of the Negro.”

Following her Tuskegee series, Johnston apparently became less interested in portrait photography and photojournalism and turned toward garden and architectural photo work. From 1913 to 1917 she lived and worked in New York City and by the 1920s had become a popular lecturer on gardens. But she had never completely abandoned the South. After collaborating with Henry Irving Brock on a 1930 book, *Colonial Churches in Virginia*, she received a \$26,000 foundation grant for what became known as the Carnegie Survey of the Architecture of the South. Throughout the ‘30s, Johnston traveled across the region. Perhaps influenced by her earlier work in the Virginia countryside around Hampton and in rural Alabama, she avoided the larger 18th and 19th century homes — which, she proclaimed, had already “been photographed often and well” — and instead looked for structures

reflecting “everyday life”: “the old farm houses, the mills, the log cabins . . . the country stores, the taverns and inns.” Much of her work appeared in studies of the early architecture of North Carolina (1941) and of Georgia (1957). In 1947, Johnston donated a huge collection of correspondence, prints, and negatives to the Library of Congress. The library in 1953, a year after her death, purchased additional materials from her estate.

Johnston had difficulty achieving the fame she deserved outside her profession and a relatively small circle of appreciative curators and architectural historians. In a December 1935 profile in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Johnston related an earlier conversation with a female reporter. “In due time,” she remarked, “the young lady arrived. I assumed, of course.” Johnston continued, “that my interviewer had some idea of my work, or that she had some reference clippings before she started which would make her at least conversant with my objectives. Imagine my chagrin when after going industriously through a score or more of my pictures, my young caller exclaimed: ‘Oh, Miss Johnston, these pictures are marvelous! Who does your photography?’”

At her death in 1952 Frances Benjamin Johnston was still best known for her photographs of Washington society. The rediscovery of her Hampton and Tuskegee images have since then renewed critical interest in her photographic art. There is no doubt, too, that they offer a profound glimpse into the debate that raged among black leaders and educators as to how African Americans should make their way in the South of the early 1900s. There is no doubt, either, how important Johnston’s images were to her employers and their students. “Outside of Hampton,” Lincoln Kirstein observed, “there is an ogre’s world of cruel competition and insensate violence.” But within the idealized educational environment Johnston so carefully constructed and forever fixed in time, “all the fair words that have been spoken to the outcast and injured are true. Promises are kept. Hers is the promised land.”

SE

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A MIRROR WISE- CRACKED

Filthy and free, the hillbilly image mirrors the best and the worst in us.

By Jerry Wayne Williamson

That's the fellow — the classic American hillbilly, the dark one with the black pelt and dangerous ways. He is found on ashtrays, plates, trivets, placemats, plaques, figurines, cigarette lighters, cups — in plastic, tin, ceramic, copper, plaster of paris, wood, and coconut shell — in a thousand knick-knacky venues across this hugely rural continent.

Our richly symbolic American country cousin provokes a range of responses, from an odd kind of comfort to a real kind of terror. When he looks like an ultimately harmless cartoon, we indulge him, even emulate him in public displays and pageantry. But put the hillbilly in the movie *Deliverance*, and he can fill us with horror. In both roles — in safe cartoons and in representational depictions meant to scare us — he's the same hillbilly serving different purposes.

The hillbilly mirrors us, and like most mirrors he can flatter, frighten, and humiliate. As a rough-and-ready frontiersman, he complements our notion of the independent, fearless American man. Put him in the same woods, but make him repulsively savage, a monster of nature, and he turns quickly dangerous,



becomes the Whang Doodle of dread who lives "in the darkest corners of our consciousness alongside cancer and cannibalism," as one of my students once put it.

The hillbilly shows rank disregard for all propriety. He drinks hard liquor — and not at cocktail parties. He's bone lazy but remains virile. He nearly always

possesses the potential for physical violence — especially involving dogs and guns. He's gullible when skepticism would be wiser, and he's stupid when smart would be safer. He reminds us of filth, of disgusting bodily functions. Why else is he so frequently pictured with outhouses? That particular prop links the hillbilly to what William Willeford (author of *The Fool and His Scepter*) calls our "developmental past," an uncomfortable history we have tried to forget, our conflicted memory of the pain and heartache of living in the dirt on the frontier. The hillbilly's outhouse is a pig's bladder at the American garden party, an abstract and ironically glorified memorial to the democracy of human hygiene, a symbol of the plain fleshly equality of all people. When the hillbilly is depicted as sexually loose — another category of symbolic filth — his easily available Moonbeam McSwine is a fantasy of that same democracy.

Some groups in American society take to the hillbilly more readily than others. After all, who buys the tourist items, the wall hangings, and the yard art? (That is, who besides me?) Who buys these icons of negative identity, these decorative snapshots of the subconscious? Not the upwardly sashaying

urban class, the managers, the professionals, the office warriors. Hillbilly souvenirs do not find a home in condos but in countryside abodes where ground sense is acknowledged and accommodated. Stuck-working people buy them, the purely salaried buy them, and *they* get the joke. The hillbilly takes his durn ease right in the middle of all these working people. He gives the horse-laugh to middle-class respectability. He's absurdly and delightfully free. He seems never to suffer. He thrives in filth, is impervious to weather and to dominant economics.

The hillbilly is often used as a negative object lesson, a keep-away sign on the far edge of our own possibilities. A common context for the word "hillbilly" in the mainstream culture is:

A dim-witted hillbilly inadvertently gets _____ed. — *TV Guide*.

Fill in that blank with one of many sitcom plots on American television, from *I Love Lucy* to *Father Knows Best* to *The Andy Griffith Show* to *The Doris Day Show* to *Lobo* (whose "dim-witted hillbilly" gets involved in an armored-car robbery.) The assumption in this context is that the word hillbilly names something different from us.

Consider the group "... monsters, hillbillies, psychotics, and drunken brutes" named by Dr. Lee Salt in a *TV Guide* article. Salt, a psychiatric case-worker, was describing the "make-believe" men who — most other men want to assume — commit the crime of incest. Salt's point: We in our suburbs are not so immune to our own natures, which may not be what we think. Our secret dread is that the dark, drunken hillbilly is no Other, but us.

Most popular-culture hillbillies induce no such teetering ambiguity. In 1977 histo-

rian John Higham said that hateful American xenophobia thrived longest "among the hicks and hillbillies"; in 1984 novelist Elmore Leonard joked that Albanians were the hillbillies of Europe; in 1985 the political cartoonist Herblock skewered the anti-family planning triumvirate of Jesse Helms, Orrin Hatch, and Jack Kemp as hillbillies; in 1989 the *Texas Monthly* explained away a neo-Nazi, KKK-allied skinhead in Dallas as "one tough hillbilly" with roots in *Tennessee*, not in Texas. Human beings with

something to lose — which means most of us — usually move in the direction of ego comfort, which means putting psychic distance between us and hillbilly land.

In the countryside, denials of the hillbilly identity can become heated, probably because so many people understand the power of the image as class marker, and "hillbilly" becomes a fighting word:

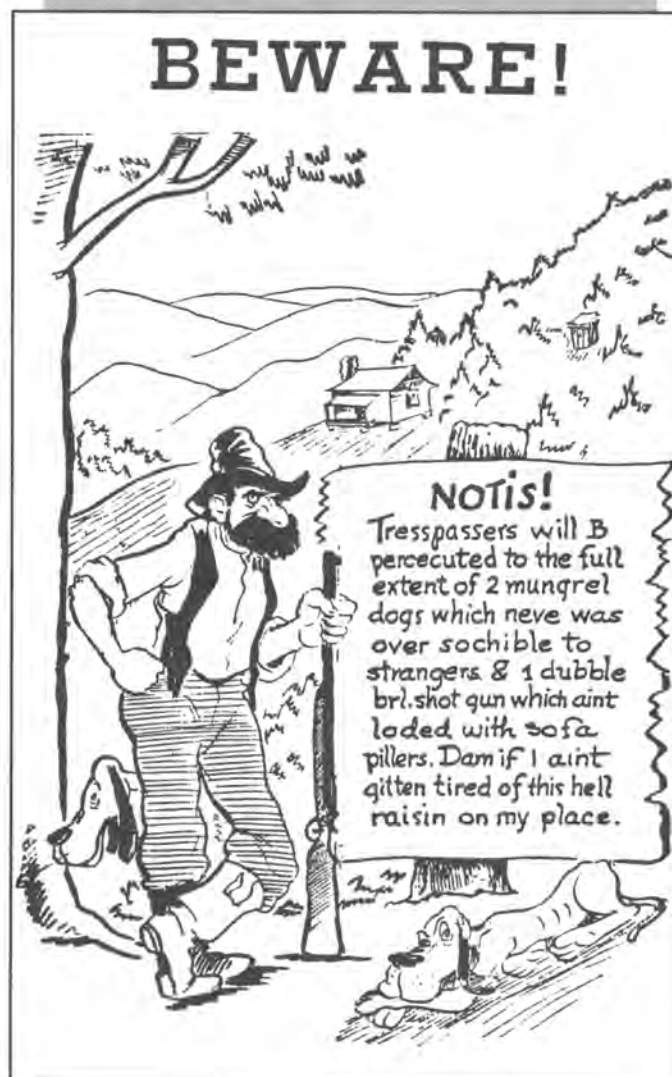
"We are afraid that, once again, we will be portrayed as a bunch of hillbillies." — Johnny Fullen, mayor of Matewan, West Virginia, worrying about John Sayles's movie, *Matewan* (1987).

Meanwhile, others from the country and from the city assume parts of the hillbilly identity and find it profitable, especially in Nashville. According to Minnie Pearl, Nashville's business community dismissed the Grand Ole Opry as just "a bunch of hillbillies" until they realized in the 1950s that country music could make big bucks for them, too. Steve Earle, Buck Owens, Ronnie Milsap, Dwight Yoakam, and Marty Brown have all embraced the word and found a surge in their personal freedom and their personal fortunes as a result.

Dwight Yoakam, born in the coalfields of eastern Kentucky, plays the smart-alecky country hell raiser, prancing in "strategically ripped jeans and dirty-dancing his guitar." He titled his 1987 breakthrough album "Hillbilly Deluxe."

"That's one smart Hillbilly," said Ken Tucker in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. The Judds were fetchingly humble while accepting Nashville's Horizon Award in 1984, calling themselves just "two red-headed hillbillies" as they strolled off with the industry's heart. Recently Marty Stuart grabbed the word, despite his Tina Turner hairstyle. Stuart

Hillbilly souvenirs do not find a home in condos but in countryside abodes. Stuck-working people buy them, and they get the joke



Lithograph — postcard on wood

was born in Mississippi, cut his musical teeth in fundamentalist tent revivals, learned his licks from country legend Lester Flatt, was married for a time to the daughter of Johnny Cash, and self-consciously talks about “the importance of passing wisdom to each new generation of juvenile hillbillies” like a country-culture Moses.

“Hillbilly” as positive identity is not based purely on geographic location. Non-Southern rocker John Mellencamp, born and raised in the Midwest, explained to an interviewer: “I hated Seymour [Indiana]. The first time I came to New York I was embarrassed that I was from that town because the first thing everybody said to me is, ‘What kind of accent is that?’ . . . Let’s face it, I’m a hillbilly and there’s nothing I can do about it.” Nothing to do but let it fill the wellspring.

Politicians in Kentucky and Tennessee and other states far removed have embraced some part of the identity — usually the dirt sense without the danger — for generations, from Andrew Jackson and David Crockett to Estes Kefauver, Albert Gore Sr., and Ned Ray McWherter. Playing dumb but showing smart was just good sense in a politician, a purely symbolic but useful leveling of power in the eyes of voters so that power could continue to be unlevel.

The political expediency of playing the hillbilly is common, too, in places not even remotely associated with Appalachia or the Ozarks. In Montana in 1989, freshman Republican Senator Conrad Burans was said to be turning Big Sky Country red with embarrassment by playing the egregious rube in Washington.

An extravagant and institutionalized example of hillbilly role-playing is found among the Shriners. The Grand and Glorious Order of the Hillbilly Degree was launched in 1969 as a “side-line degree” by Shriner Jim Harris of

the El Hasa Shrine Temple in Ashland, Kentucky. He wrote out the requirements and the ritual based on hillbilly jokes remembered from his boyhood in West Virginia and from living in the Kentucky hills. By 1970 the Grand and Glorious Hillbillies from Ashland were parading in their officially sanctioned hillbilly garb and driving moonshine-still-equipped jalopies at the Imperial Shrine Convention in Miami, Florida. Immediately, Shriners at the Hejaz Temple in South Carolina saw the fun of it all and installed the Hillbilly Degree in their lo-

cal temple. Clans quickly followed in several West Virginia towns and in Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Roanoke as well as towns in many other states far outside the south. By 1981, 60 hillbilly clans rollicked in Shriner parades — two clans were in Canada — and by 1992 the number had grown to 137 separate units.

In no time, the Grand and Glorious Order had a newsletter, *Hillbilly News*, and a copyrighted mascot. They launched the first annual Hillbilly Days festival and street parade in Pikeville, Kentucky, in 1977. Middle-class men, upstanding citizens, professionals of one sort or another, dressed as hillbillies and drove comically disreputable jalopies down the main drag, occasionally

being as vulgar as imagination allowed. Such goings-on horrified some. To others, the hillbilly display celebrated self-affirmation and regional pride. The Pikeville Shriners sent out an invitation to their sixth annual Hillbilly Days in 1982: “Come all of you including Jack Grace from California and Paul McCutcheon from New Mexico. Meet some genuine mountain people here deep in the Appalachian mountains. We were born and bred hillbillies before we ever heard of a Shriner or Mason. We are civilized, good, common, help-your-neighbor kind of people.”

That same year, the Grand and Glorious Order caused a ruckus in Cincinnati. The Ohio Shriners planned a convention and street parade and invited all the guys who came to nearby Pikeville’s

The hillbilly mirrors us, and like most mirrors he can flatter, frighten, and humiliate.



— from *Herblock at Large* (Pantheon books, 1987)

celebration. But Cincinnati-based Appalachian activists objected. Hillbilly Days, they said, implicitly and explicitly ridiculed and humiliated new arrivals to the big city from the mountains of Kentucky. The behavior of the Shriners would be considered "insulting and distasteful" to as many as 250,000 residents of Greater Cincinnati, Mayor David Mann was told. Mann had already agreed to stand on Fountain Square and officially welcome the Shriner hillbillies to the city and then review their parade, but under pressure he withdrew. The irony is clear: The offending group, thoroughly middle class and influential in their own home towns, adopt the hillbilly as a cheeky affirmation of regional identity in the larger American context — their own assertion of equality. Yet they wound the self-esteem of their co-regionists who *are* relatively powerless in the city setting and thus vulnerable to policymakers who act on stereotype. For the first group, the mirror flatters and energizes; for the second, the mirror mocks and diminishes.

The Shriners, by playing the country fool in public, raise big money for crippled and burned children. Their satisfaction, however, is not solely philanthropic. They are also giving vent to a common human urge to kick over authority — what Willeford calls the urge to eat sausages in the cathedral. If you're a member of the church, you can afford the pretense of being symbolically what you are saved from being in actuality.



ctogenar-
ian Estill
Drew

lives in wooded Hamil-ton County in southern Illinois. Estill, along with his septuagenarian brother Dale, has made a series of Super-8 mm home

movies featuring hillbillies and the standard breakdowns of propriety — moonshining, drunkenness, failure to support the family, outhouse high jinx, and even murder. Estill's *We Live by the Code of the Hills*, the movie that got him on *Donahue* and on the *CBS Evening News* in 1984, is partly a plotted story-film: A revenue agent stalks a moonshiner, is killed, and goes to heaven, where he is entertained by a circle of winged angels (one of whom

looks pregnant). The film is also a variety show including vaudeville bits by Estill himself with a ventriloquist's dummy, scenes of pie auctions, barn dances, hay rides, and church services — all portrayed by Hamilton County people playing themselves, sometimes intentionally trying to *act* funny while *being* funny in the best human sense.

Brother Dale always gets the dangerous hillbilly role. In *We Live by the Code of the Hills* and *Our Country Cousin*, Dale hams it up as a drunken, no-account moonshiner. In actuality, Dale Drew, like some Shriners, is a shy, self-effacing, religious, Pat-Robertson-for-president teetotaler. He enacts a hillbilly character as an example of the worst he might fall to if he were to lose what he has. His hillbilly is a mirror image warped into caricature like the reflection in a funhouse mirror, outlandish but nevertheless recognizable.

I grew up in the Texas Panhandle. Everybody there scraped the soil to survive or depended on people who scraped the soil. Visible class divisions were rare. Some farmers made a lot of money when irrigation came in. Some didn't. You could hardly tell one from the other. Everyone worked hard. My father farmed and managed another man's three thousand acres of dry-land wheat. We lived in his houses on his land, grew gardens, raised chickens, milked cows. My mother's family, greats and grands, were around us everywhere. They'd gather, 75 strong, for a major dustup at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter, and there'd be fiddles and guitars and, in a spot where the women and children couldn't see it, some drinking.

I witnessed my first hillbilly foolshow in a west Texas "Womanless Wedding." I sat with my mother and my grandmother and several of my aunts

Because so many people understand the power of the image as class marker, "hillbilly" becomes a fighting word.

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See
y'all
there!

(including two of my grandmother's sisters) in the auditorium of the local high school and watched while my uncles and cousins and cousins-in-law conducted a raucous burlesque wedding, some of them taking the men's

Someone is always beneath us, lending proof that the twig on which we stand is really the rung of a ladder leading upward to something we must defend with our lives.

parts — the groom, the two fathers, the parson, numerous idiot kinfolk — but many of them starring as the women — the bride, the two mothers, the tarted-up sisters and aunts. One man came as a giant girl baby in a wheelbarrow.

Even a 10-year-old could get the plot. It dealt with a shotgun wedding between two clans, hillbillies of the classic cartoon type. The bride, played by the biggest, most macho tub-belly in Silverton, was visibly, extravagantly pregnant. The groom, one of the smallest men in town, was forced to the altar by the bride's pappy, who was toting a rifle and swigging from a moonshine jug. The parson was a mis-namer and a mis-stater, a monumentally dumb hick. The ceremony was full of interruptions and general vulgar high jinx — simulated drunkenness, belching, hiking of dresses and showing of underwear, the poking of long rifles up other people's butts. The centerpiece of the evening was unembarrassed pregnancy out of wedlock. It was the sort of village hoohaw that Huck Finn might have stumbled onto.

These antics put us on the floor. We were country people who saw ourselves as ordinary, mainstream, middle-class, 1950s Americans who never would have laughed at such things in our real, day-to-day lives. But these hillbilly

clowns helped us to release our dread. The foolshow allowed us to make sport of what frightened us. Our uncles and cousins performed a protective magic by acting out the very antithesis of what we believed ourselves to be.

In our world, when a pregnancy occurred outside of marriage, it was too shameful to speak of in the open. Drunks were werewolves who tore apart their own families. Country tatters were real; severe poverty was a recent memory for too many people, and it was no laughing matter, either. Sons got bailed out of jail. Families sometimes had to take extra people into an already crowded house but would fight for you, if it came to that. Fathers yelled at their daughters and saw them married anyway to ducktails with loud pipes. Nobody made fun of such things because we were all too vulnerable — except in the foolshow of the Womanless Wedding. It was our safe mirror for seeing what we could not look at otherwise.

Many hillbillies in the mass media are there to make the normative middle-class urban spectator feel better about the system of money and power that has him or her in its grasp. Someone is always beneath us, lending proof that the twig on which we stand is really the rung of a ladder leading upward to something we must defend with our lives.

Everyone can feel reassured about his or her own standing and about the rightness of lining up on such a scale as long as someone else is standing underneath. To someone in Connecticut, it's someone else in Maine. To someone in Austin, it's someone else in the Panhandle. To someone in Salt Lake City, it's someone else in southern Utah. To someone in Gainesville, it's someone else in the Everglades. In Carolyn Chute's *The Beans of Egypt, Maine*, it's someone across the street.

Hillbillies live even in China. In November 1984, the official Chinese news agency denounced the peasants of Guizhou Province for their "shocking backwardness" and "narrow-

mindedness." The Japanese have the "hairy Ainus," middle Europe has the mountain-dwelling Slovaks, the Iranians and the Iraqis have the mountain Kurds.

So, *hillbilly* means rough, rural, poor but fruitful, blatantly anti-urban, and often dangerous, but not necessarily hailing from the Southern Appalachians or even from any mountains. The hard scrabble of rural Arkansas or of rural Arizona, for that matter, can breed hillbillies just as well, and has (*Thelma and Louise* and *Raising Arizona*). It's the hilly sides of the American economy, the parts out of the mainstream, that I'm interested in, and the conflicted urban memory of necessary frontier rudeness that produces the rural fool who up-ends our complacent assumptions about ourselves.

Such characterizations, whether applied by urban outsiders or worn as self-defining and defiant badges by the rural folks themselves, fill a common need for economic reassurance through the spectacle of want. Buried within that reassurance is an appalling ambiguity for an urban audience: the sense that these people survive and even thrive despite our low opinion of their worth, and they survive and thrive on their own terms. **S**

Jerry Wayne Williamson was the founding editor of *Appalachian Journal* in 1972 and continues in that role. The *Journal* is now in its 22nd volume. He is on the faculty at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. He is author of *Southern Mountaineers in Silent Films* (McFarland 1994) and *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies* (University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming). This article is adapted from *Hillbillyland* and used by permission.

"Jesus, the South is fine, isn't it... It's better than Ben Hur, isn't it."

—William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom

Special thanks to Sarah Nawrocki and Pam Upton at University of North Carolina Press.

REVENGE IS SWEET

BY JO CARSON

WHEN FACED WITH DAUNTING STEREOTYPES, THE EAST TENNESSEE WRITER RESTRAINS HER DARK AND TERRIBLE INSTINCTS.

What follows is a baker's dozen of little dilemmas taken from my experience as a writer/performer working out of a place that has strong stereotypes attached to it.

There are three general categories of stereotypes included here. One has to do with being female, one has to do with being an artist, one has to do with being Appalachian. They are not so pure as that — nothing in this business is ever pure — but if you care to make recipes, these are the basic ingredients.

I have stated these dilemmas with what I hope are enough details to give the picture; I have not gone into what I did in the next moment with any of them. There is a reason for the omission. In the psychology of learning, there is a phenomenon called the Zeigarnik Effect. The basic idea is that within a situation or a story, it is human nature to seek a resolution, and if one is not provided, the individual will seek his or her own resolution and remember the experience better for it. Have at it.

1. You write a series of monologues and dialogues from people you have met in the region, and you stay as close to the bone as you can, but some of them are funny, and you play them all over this country and on the radio, and you become something of an exotic because the region gets fashionable in the arts and funding communities, and you sound like you are from it, and people laugh, and you wonder, standing in front of an audience in Washington or Los Angeles, whether they are laughing at you or with you, because the line is a fine one, and the problem with a

moment's truth of the sort you can capture in a monologue is that it sometimes lends itself to stereotype whether you had it in mind or not. You wonder sometimes if you are feeding the stereotype instead of combating it. So you . . .

2. A young woman accosts you outside the stage door after a performance of the monologue/dialogue material in Atlanta, Georgia, and she is furious because she is convinced you have been to east Texas and stolen stories, she is sure one of the pieces is from her great aunt and uncle from east Texas, and that you just say you are from east Tennessee because "Appalachia is a much more fashionable place to be from." The piece in question is from your aunt and uncle, who never in their lives left east Tennessee.

3. In a regional magazine, you read that you are from California and have moved to Appalachia and have been collecting stories that obviously take an outsider's ear to hear. Someone who was from here couldn't do it. You are very surprised by this, you are from here, or you were, last time you checked. You're pretty sure you're not from California.

4. Other people begin to perform the material, and you have the misfortune to see one actor with a tooth blacked out, in overalls, spitting fake

tobacco amber, standing in front of a stage barn door, doing a piece so wrong it makes you cry. The whole production is like that. And you are supposed to speak to the actors and director after it is over. When you meet them, they want to know how you liked it. You say . . .

5. When the book, *Stories I Ain't Told Nobody Yet* (a collection of performance material), is published, the cover comes with a shack on the side of a mountain with the porch turned to the hill and not even to the view, and you throw a fit, you will not have this stereotype on the front of a book you've taken pains to make sure helps combat the regional stereotypes. And the publisher agrees to spend the money for a second run on the cover and sends the work back to the artist who causes a bush to grow over the cabin, and you are happier. When you meet the artist, he had represented his grandfather's home.

6. When the book is finally out, you get letters from students who inform you that the "ain't" in the title is not proper English and that most of your characters in the book don't seem to know proper English, and didn't they go to school? What's wrong with them? What's wrong with you? Don't you know proper English either? You write them back, you say . . .

7. You do a reading as a favor for a teacher in a local high school. You feel it is important to show up in local schools, because you are from here and the books have your name on them, and your very presence is a sort of permission for students to dream of these things for themselves. So you take the time and do it free. You finish the reading and the teacher says, "It's all right for Ms. Carson to sound like she does, but none of us want to sound like that, now do we?" You say . . .

8. You are refused payment for a performance you drove 150 miles to do at a Christian school in North Georgia because you "profaned the chapel with laughter." You can think of several more profane things than laughter, some of which you can imagine yourself doing, but instead you . . .

9. You write a play, *Daytrips*. It is autobiographical and hard stuff about duty and madness. You are told repeatedly it will be more universal if you set it somewhere besides Appalachia, and if you want it to sell, you need to do that.

10. The play is three weeks into rehearsal for its first professional production (in Los Angeles), and you are in a producer's meeting and the producer finally turns to you and says, "It (the play) is not dark enough yet, the South is a dark and terrible place, I know James Dickey, I saw *Deliverance*." You want to crawl across her desk and prove that the South is a dark and terrible place, Dickey or no Dickey, but you don't, you say. . . .

11. A Northern city. You sit through hours of rehearsal at a major theater in which a speech coach is trying to teach the actors an "Appalachian accent" to use in the play. It sounds to your ears like a combination of Scarlett O'Hara and Sut Lovingood, and terribly fake. You finally say that the rhythm of delivery is much more important to you than accent, and that people could probably pick up enough of that to make it work by listening to you. The speech teacher, who has never been to Johnson City,

or to the mountains for that matter, says, "Oh, no, dear, your speech is not authentic."

12. You are to receive a substantial award for the play, and a reading is being rehearsed for the occasion. The director keeps calling you asking for line changes for one character. Finally, you go to the Northern city early, and the rehearsal is a wreck because he has cast a vaudeville sort of comedian who, with his encouragement, bounces in her seat to show agitation, delivers every line as a punch line, and mugs till she gets a

"IT'S ALL RIGHT FOR MS. CARSON TO SOUND LIKE SHE DOES, BUT NONE OF US WANT TO SOUND LIKE THAT, NOW DO WE?" YOU SAY...

laugh. This is for the hardest, most ironic role in the play. It doesn't work. You try to explain that the comedy of the role only works if it is ironic, the character cannot find herself funny, she is dead serious in what she says and does, it is the circumstance that makes a given moment comedic. He tells you to shut up. He says, "Women playwrights never know what they've written, and if you'd just change a few lines, you'd have a decent play." You want to say a change in testosterone levels might help more than a change in lines, but you don't. Instead you . . .

13. You publish a collection of short stories, *The Last Of the Waltz Across Texas*, and, in keeping with what you seem to be able to make work as a writer, they are set in this place and they are hard/ironic and comic, but they are as real as you can make them and still make short stories, and during questions and answers after a reading with about two hundred people in the audience, a

student stands up to tell you he thinks you've done a lot of damage with this book, that it's all stereotype, and if you're so concerned about that, how could you publish it? You want to throw up but you don't. You say . . .

Enough. Listing this stuff just makes me mad all over again. I always said something in the moment, but hindsight means that now, I have better things to say, and I spend time saying these better things to nobody, to the view out my window, than I do writing the situations.

This is by no means all of the situations I've run into, this is a selection from several years. I should add that moments like these are not all that common, or I wouldn't do performances or readings or show up in public as a writer. I'd probably still write. You risk yourself as an artist when you publish, even more when you stand up as a performer or speaker, and if someone, through prejudice or ignorance, or whatever else, did this every time I showed up in public, I'd not be near so inclined to do it. On the other hand, I've grown a thicker skin and a sharper tongue than I used to have — in part, for these experiences — and I might do it now for the fun. And revenge — well, I tell these stories for revenge and revenge is sweet.

One more note: The young woman who thought I'd been to east Texas and stolen stories paid me a tremendous, if backhanded, compliment. And what I learned from that moment is that the closer I can get to the specific eccentricities of a real human being with a real place in the work I do, the more universal the work becomes. That was a gift, though in the moment, it felt a lot like the slap she delivered. Similar stuff is true of several of these moments. Sometimes it takes a confrontation for me to learn anything, and these have all been, to say the least, learning experiences. §

Poet, playwright, and author Jo Carson is Southern Exposure's fiction editor.

*"The Southern accent may be the most widely recognized and imitated accent in North America, but it's also the least understood and faking it isn't as easy as it seems."
—Jeffrey Scott, True South*

Plantation Politics?

Some African Americans are returning to the party of Lincoln, but these Republicans bear little resemblance to their Reconstruction-era forebears.

By Ron Nixon

Illustrations by Jennifer Miller



Two prominent black conservatives, basketball star and potential Republican candidate for governor of Alabama, Charles Barkley, and Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas had lunch together in Washington, D.C., in January.

When National Basketball Association star Charles Barkley announced his intention to run for governor of Alabama in 1998, few people paid attention. After all, the Alabama born athlete had made more than his share of outrageous statements

during his professional basketball career. But when Barkley announced that he would run as a Republican and that he would ask conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh and former Vice President Dan Quayle for support, more than a few people took notice.

“People assume that because you’re

from the South and you’re black, you must be a Democrat,” Barkley told a crowd of supporters at a conservative function.

Barkley is not alone. Across the South a small but growing number of African Americans, left disenfranchised and alienated by the Democrats, are join-

ing the Republican Party.

"Many blacks have seen the light," said Armstrong Williams, a South Carolina native and conservative talk show host in Washington, D.C. "We have seen what the Democrats have done, and we still see little progress in our communities. In abandoning the liberal faith, we stand only to lose a ruling philosophy that has brought us nowhere since the 1960s."

After the recent Republican sweep of the U.S. Congress, Williams wrote in a *USA Today* editorial, "For too long we have been the silent ignored minority in the black community. No longer. As of this month the conservatives in the black community hold the keys to the kingdom."

In spite of Williams' optimism, the vast majority of African Americans remain loyal to the Democratic Party. Most black elected officials are Democrats, and African Americans make up 20 percent of the Democratic National Committee, the decision making body of the party.

While black Republicans in the South and across the nation do not wield that kind of clout, they are growing in size and influence. In 1994, 24 blacks ran on the GOP ticket in the national election. This was up from 15 in the 1992 election. They included J.C. Watts, a former quarterback at Oklahoma University, who became the second black Republican and the only one from a Southern state to be elected to the U.S. Congress in modern times.

In North Carolina two blacks on the GOP ticket were elected to the state legislature. Another black legislator switched parties and became the third black Republican in the North Carolina General Assembly. In Georgia, state Senator Roy Allen, a childhood friend of Clarence Thomas, switched from the Democratic Party to the GOP.

Isaac Washington, publisher of the *South Carolina Black Media Group* in Columbia, South Carolina, attributes the appeal of the Republican Party to values it shares with the black community. "If you look at the majority of black people, you'll find them to be quite conservative," said Washington,

who joined the Republican ranks in the late 1970s. "We need a viable two-party system that lends itself to checks and balances. Blacks shouldn't put all their



In spite of Armstrong Williams' optimism, the vast majority of African Americans remain loyal to the Democratic Party.

eggs in one basket. We need to get beyond labels and lever pulling and instead look at issues."

PARTY OF LINCOLN

Being black and Republican may seem strange in today's political climate, but it was not always so. Following the Civil War, blacks naturally flocked to the ranks of the party of the president who they believed had freed them. In 1868, 703,000 blacks registered to vote, compared to 627,000 whites. From 1870 to 1881, 16 blacks, all Republicans and all from the South, served in the U.S. Congress — two in the Senate and 14 in the House of Representatives. On a local level, blacks in the Republican party served in many prominent positions.

In South Carolina, Robert Brown Elliot, a black Republican was elected state attorney general. Black Republican P.B.S. Pinchback held the Louisiana Governor's seat for 36 days after the

white governor was impeached. Thousands of other black Republicans served in elected positions. Black Republicans also helped to create the first public school system and pushed for land ownership for the recently freed slaves.

Republicans drafted the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the Constitution. These provisions granted African Americans freedom, citizenship, and the right to vote. In 1866 the party also spearheaded passage of the nation's first civil rights bill.

The election of Rutherford B. Hayes to the presidency in 1877 brought an end to many gains blacks had earned with the Republican Party. Hayes pulled the Union Army out of the South in order to gather Southern support for his presidential campaign. This compromise left blacks at the mercy of the Southern Democrats who were once again in power.

For the next few years both blacks and Republicans were systematically eliminated as participants in Southern politics. African Americans in the North, however, remained loyal to the reform-minded Republicans. This began to change during the great Depression of the 1930s. The Republican party's refusal to address pressing social needs during the Depression and the popularity of Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt prompted a shift in party loyalty. Blacks ceased to vote Republican in great numbers, except for a brief period during the 1950s when Eisenhower won a majority of the black vote.

Many blacks left the party permanently when Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater ran for President in 1964. In his so called "Southern strategy," Goldwater urged the Republican Party to forgo the black vote in the South and concentrate on building the white vote.

In 1961 the senator told a group of supporters in Atlanta, "We're not going to get the Negro vote as a bloc in 1964 and 1968, so we ought to go hunting where the ducks are." While this "Southern strategy" failed to win Goldwater the presidency, it did succeed in giving the new Republican Party a strong base among white voters in the South.

Black Republicans who have emerged in the past few years bear as little resemblance to their Reconstruction-era forebears as the party itself bears to its own roots in strong centralized government and antislavery sentiments. Today's black Republicans express deeply conservative values and ideas. They oppose most government aid and social programs. Instead they support:

▲ **AN END TO AFFIRMATIVE ACTION**

According to black conservatives, affirmative action programs lessen the achievements of blacks and lead to resentment among whites who feel that African-American gains are the result of governmental action rather than individual efforts. "We're not in the business of special treatment for anybody," said Armstrong Williams. "That's the message that has to get across."

▲ **AN END TO WELFARE**

Like their white counterparts, black conservatives advocate changing or ending welfare programs. They argue that social programs like welfare create a culture of dependency. They approve of proposals to link welfare to job training programs and to end support after two years.

▲ **SELF-HELP**

Echoing the philosophy of Booker T. Washington (see sidebar), conservative blacks support self-sufficiency and entrepreneurship. Their proposals would put government programs into private hands, including private ownership of public housing. They also endorse school choice (the use of vouchers to attend private or public schools).

▲ **FAMILY VALUES AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Black conservatives say they want to foster traditional black values, including family, self-reliance, and self-restraint. These values, says Alan Keyes, a black conservative from Maryland who ran for the U.S. Senate and hopes to get the Republican nomination for President, will end the social ills of drug use, teen pregnancy, and fatherless households.

SHIFT TO THE RIGHT

Black conservatives contend that African Americans in general are becoming more receptive to their message. They cite a poll by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies and Home Box Office (HBO) in 1992. Nearly a third of the African Americans surveyed considered themselves conservatives and supported much of the conservative agenda:

- ◆ 88 percent of the respondents favored school-choice proposals.
- ◆ 91 percent supported letting tenants buy public housing, a proposal suggested under former Bush Administration Housing and Urban Development Secretary Jack Kemp.
- ◆ 88 percent supported eviction of tenants from public housing if convicted of selling or using drugs.
- ◆ 57 percent opposed additional benefits for single welfare mothers who have more children.



"These people are nothing more than political mercenaries," says Bob Holmes.

Reflecting a trend in the rest of the population, more black men than women voted for conservatives; 22 percent of black men voted for George Bush or Ross Perot in 1992, but only 12 percent of black women voted that way. David Bositis of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, which conducted the study, says use of the poll by conservatives is "highly selective and misleading." The poll found, for instance, that blacks who considered themselves conservatives endorsed programs many conservatives dislike: 79 percent favored affirmative action; 76 percent wanted to cut defense and use the money for urban programs; 81 percent thought too little money was being spent on education; 83 percent favored Afrocentric education; and 80 percent favored government initiatives to help young black men. Two thirds of all the respondents were Democrats, and 75 percent rated Jesse Jackson favorably.

Given these facts, Rickey Hill, professor of political science at South Carolina State University, doubts that blacks will ever support the Republican party in mass numbers or view black conservatives as leaders. "Black conservatives have no base of support among the masses of black people," says Hill. "What they do have is access to the airwaves and a presence on editorial pages of some of the leading newspapers. They don't have a bottom up approach."

Hill adds that the relatively small black constituency in the Republican Party is not likely to grow. "The last election was billed as a revenge of white males, a population that felt that blacks and other minorities were getting more attention than them," Hill says. "The Republican party is not going to risk alienating them to attract black voters."

Data from the Federal Election Commission support Hill's claims. At the national level blacks make up only three of the Republican National Committee's 165 voting members. Two of these African Americans come from the U.S. Virgin Islands. In addition, black support for Republican candidates in congressional elections actually

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From Booker T. Washington to Clarence Thomas

The voice of the pre-eminent black leader of his time resonates for black conservatives today.

By Rickey Hill

Conservatism as ideology and practice among black people in the United States, can be traced back to the late 19th century South with the emergence of Booker T. Washington. The pre-eminent black leader of his times, Washington was at once conservative, accommodationist, and nationalist.

From the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, a school established to teach industrial education to blacks, Washington engaged in race complicity with white employers and governors, offering to keep blacks "down on the farms" and in the trades. The focus on industrial education and Protestant work ethic attracted the attention of prospective Northern donors, particularly the Rockefellers and the Carnegies, who made the Tuskegee Institute one of the best supported black educational institutions in the country.

Washington's views represented one side of the great debate with W.E.B. DuBois, a founder of the NAACP and a leading intellectual of the time. While Washington appealed for accommodation, DuBois advocated political protest, cultural uplift, and autonomy among black people.

Washington's speech at the 1895 Atlanta Exposition set the stage for what was to propel him into the spotlight as national leader for blacks in the eyes of white America. He disavowed any claim that black people had to political activism, social inclusion, and civil rights. "In all things that are purely social," Washington said, "we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." He added, "The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial

forcing."

Washington's conservatism was predicated on his "love for the South and his faith in the Southern white man's sense of justice," according to historian August Meier. He deprecated agitation and protest and believed that black people should be conciliatory about their conditions and life chances. Washington was satisfied with "separate but equal" facilities. He was more concerned with the harm that lynching did to whites, their moral fiber, economic conditions, and the reputation of the South.

While Washington advocated self-help, thrift, and racial solidarity among black people, he did so within the context of Southern race relations and their exclusionary practices. Washington blamed black people for their own condition, asserting that they were a backward race. His stress upon economics was primarily directed toward the rising black middle class of his day.

Between 1881, the founding of Tuskegee Institute, and his death in 1915, Washington held sway among blacks and within dominant white circles as the quintessential black conservative. According to historian Louis R. Harlan of the University of Maryland, Washington further consolidated his power with the founding of the National Negro Business League in 1900, publication of his autobiography *Up From Slavery* in 1901, his celebrated dinner at the White House in 1901, and his control of patronage politics as chief black advisor to Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft.

He kept his white following by conser-



Booker T. Washington

"The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly."

vative policies and moderate utterances. But Washington fended off critics like DuBois by using his political connections and public stature to undermine their efforts.

Within a decade of Washington's death, black people — especially black intellectuals led by DuBois, Washington's chief nemesis — began to fashion an activist-centered ideology for the "New Negro."

Urbanization, the consolidation of industrialization by the end of the first quarter of the 20th Century, the Harlem Renaissance, and the emergence of a black business and professional class by the late 1920s brought an end to Washingtonian conservatism. Collective action and group solidarity in politics, economics, and cultural life pushed black political thought far beyond conservatism. The Garvey Movement and identification with Africa provided the trajectory for activist protest politics that would last well into late 20th century.

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dropped from 21 percent in 1990 to 12 percent in 1994.

In the South, where the majority of the nation's blacks live, Republicans have made few inroads into the African-American community. This is due in large part, says Bositis, to recent history.

Destructive tactics by Republicans included race-baiting in the 1990 United States Senate campaign of black candidate Harvey Gantt who ran against Senator Jesse Helms in North Carolina. The creation by the late Lee Atwater of the Willie Horton ads in the 1988 Bush campaign set up an ugly, unwelcoming atmosphere for blacks in the Republican party. Recent campaigns used references to black women as welfare mothers and covert references to race and crime designed to appeal to Reagan Democrats and play on white fear of black criminals.

"The present leadership in the GOP, the Congress, and the Republican National Committee is increasingly Southern in make up," says Bositis, "The Southern conservative wing of the GOP is most insensitive to the feelings of the African-American community and generally offers nothing to attract black support."

This, says Hill, means blacks can expect little from the Republican Party or their conservative allies in the black community. "What we need to be concentrating on is independent politics," says Hill, "Nothing can be gained by repeating the Republican party line."

Armstrong Williams disagrees. "We need to take advantage of having a choice by giving the GOP a look," Williams wrote in a *State* newspaper editorial. "The have begun to reach out, but it takes two hands to shake."

THE RACE RACKET

Critics charge that black conservatives, in sharp contrast to their public stance on black empowerment and self-sufficiency, have opposed programs that would empower the black community. "These people are nothing more than political mercenaries," says Bob Holmes, Director of the

Southern Center for Studies in Public Policy at Clark Atlanta University. "They are trying to help reimplement policies that have been shown to be detrimental to the black community."

One example, says Holmes, is the battle over black congressional districts in the South. Created as a result of the Voting Rights Act, black districts have given African Americans the largest number of representatives since the Re-

James Meredith supported the presidential candidacy of Louisiana Klansman David Duke in the 1992 election.

construction era, ensuring that blacks have a voice in the electoral process. A court challenge to the district was initially filed by a white Democrat.

But many black conservatives have also attacked the districts as racial gerrymandering. In Georgia a panel of three judges struck down Representative Cynthia McKinney's newly created 11th district as unconstitutional based on a dissenting opinion in another voting rights case by Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

In the opinion, Thomas called for a complete reinterpretation of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. He wrote, "This court is not a centralized politburo appointed for life to dictate to the provinces the 'correct' theories of democratic representation, the 'best' electoral systems for securing truly 'representative government,' the 'fairest' proportions of minority political influence."

Gary Frank of Connecticut, the lone

Republican member of the Congressional Black Caucus prior to the 1994 election, joined several whites to testify against the district, saying that it was a form of racial gerrymandering that would only divide voters along racial lines. Brenda Reddix Smalls, a civil rights attorney in Columbia, South Carolina, says the black conservative rationale for speaking out against black districts is flawed. "Those who would argue against single member districts or redistricting, anything that gives blacks a chance to have some form of power in the political process, are lacking in one historic truth," she says. "You can't deal with people in power without having power. . . . The idea that if we all somehow become mainstream, just all be Americans — not black or white, then we wouldn't need these districts — simply doesn't hold up."

Not all the attacks have come through the political arena. Some black conservatives, critics say, have used their political and business ties to derail other forms of black advancement. One target of frequent criticism is James Meredith, a veteran of the civil rights movement and the first black to attend the University of Mississippi. In 1990 Meredith threatened to expose civil rights leaders, saying they were being controlled by 15 powerful white men of the liberal elite and engaged in illegal and immoral acts.

Meredith surprised those who knew him from his civil rights days by going to work for North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms as a congressional aide, despite the fact that Helms had opposed programs aimed at helping blacks, supported the apartheid government of South Africa, and opposed creation of a Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

Responding to the charge of Helms' hostility to blacks in a 1990 interview, Meredith told the *New York Times*. "I have never seen anyone sustain that charge or give one iota of evidence. The truth of the matter is that the liberal elite with knowledge and full thought on the part of the black elite have deliberately set up a phenomenon as part of their political power control of taking a handful of selected blacks, giving them

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A Goldwater Republican

Conservatism as an ideology among blacks re-emerged in the 1960s. George Schuyler's *Black and Conservative*, published in 1966, provided an explicit rendering of black conservatism. Schuyler had achieved early note as a critic of the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro Movement. Though he had been a socialist at the time, he ridiculed the culturalist goals of the Harlem Renaissance.

As a journalist with the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Schuyler had achieved a great deal of influence and respect within black intellectual circles. Later he would disavow that influence for linkage with official American conservatism.

In 1964 Schuyler endorsed ultra-conservative Republican Barry Goldwater for president. He also used the financial resources of leading conservative groups to promote their ideas and to run for public office. Though Schuyler was not as prominent as Booker T. Washington, his explicit conservatism evolved at a critical juncture in the civil rights movement. Schuyler did not have the institutional and organizational appeal of Washington, but his conservatism represented a linear connection to Washington and served as a nexus to the new black conservatism of the 1980s.

Reagan Republicans

With the election of Ronald Reagan to the U.S. presidency in 1980, new black conservatives emerged. They were intellectuals and, for the most part, baby boomers who had benefited from the gains of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. These new black

power and using them to control the black population."

Meredith also supported the presidential candidacy of Louisiana Klansman David Duke in the 1992 election. Meredith himself ran an unsuccessful campaign in 1992 for the Mississippi congressional seat vacated by former Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy.

Another black conservative who has

conservatives opposed affirmative action, public welfare, equal opportunity, racial protest, and labor agitation. They argued that black people's problems were due, in large part, to their own pathologies and a psychology of dependency on the national government. Moreover, they argued that black people had failed to commit to the capitalist profit-oriented ethos, slavery and racial segregation notwithstanding.

Chief among these conservatives were Thomas Sowell, Walter Williams, Glenn Loury, Clarence Pendleton, and Clarence Thomas. Sowell, Williams, and Loury are economists. Pendleton, now deceased, served as president of the San Diego, California, Urban League and Chairman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission under Reagan. Thomas served in the Reagan administration as Head of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Education. In 1991, after a very tumultuous and controversial confirmation hearing where he was accused of sexual harassment, Thomas was confirmed as President Bush's appointee to the U.S. Supreme Court to replace Associate Justice Thurgood Marshall.

Clarence Thomas Conservatives

The black conservatives of the 1990s emerged during the confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas. Today, incumbent Gary Franks of Connecticut and J.C. Watts of Oklahoma represent black conservatives in the U.S. Congress. They have established a political action committee; Black America's PAC. And black conservatives have several national publications including the magazines *National Minority Politics* and *Destiny*.

come under increasing scrutiny is Robert Brown is founder and President of B&C Associates in High Point, North Carolina. Brown, described in his press biography as a grandson of slaves and a self-made millionaire, served under former president Richard Nixon as a White House Advisor on Minority Affairs. Brown was also a friend of deceased civil rights leader Martin Luther

This group is younger and has relatively less formal education than its predecessors. It is a more vociferous group in its condemnation of the black masses. Much like Schuyler, this group embraces and promotes popular white right-wing rhetoric.

Black conservatism has not triumphed over political and public discourse among black people in the United States. Rather, its emergence at particular junctures of the past 100 years may well correlate with changes in institutional and racial policies. The emergence of Washington in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was strategic in suppressing Reconstruction policies that would make black people autonomous.

In the 1950s and the 1960s, when black people demanded the end of de facto and de jure racial segregation, black conservatism once again emerged. It fostered a black perspective against institutional and organizational change. The civil rights and black power movements represented the bulwark against conservatism for nearly 30 years.

Today, with marginal racial progress but some legislative reforms and inclusion in public life, black conservatism has once again emerged to retard efforts to sustain such change and shifts. It is too early to tell where this new brand of black conservatism will lead, but if history is any indication, it will, like the conservatism of Washington on Schuyler, fade in the face of black struggles for full political and economic rights and participation.

Rickey Hill, Ph.D., is professor and chair of the department of political science and history at South Carolina State University, Orangeburg, South Carolina.

King Jr. Brown bills his organization as a public relations and management consulting firm, but opponents say it serves another purpose.

"At national civil rights conferences, B&C presents itself as one of the oldest and most respected black-owned public relations firms in the nation," says Clayola Brown, Director of the Civil Rights Department of the Amal-

gamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU), "But in communities where African-American workers are struggling for basic rights on the job by trying to organize a union, B&C operates as union busters disguised as civil rights consultants."

According to a report by the ACTWU, "Ball and Chain for African American Workers," Brown and B&C are regularly employed by corporations to keep out unions among their African-American workers. The report also says that Brown and B&C have used well known celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey's fiancé Stedman Graham and former *Sanford and Son* star Whitman Mayo (who played Grady) to help improve the image of B&C clients in black communities before union elections. Graham works for a subsidiary of B&C, the Graham Williams Group. Armstrong Williams, who worked for Brown as vice president for governmental and international affairs, is president of the Graham Williams Group.

Allegations against B&C associates first surfaced during the early 1980s. The charges helped derail President Reagan's nomination of Brown as ambassador to South Africa. Even though Brown had the support of civil rights leaders Coretta Scott King and Andrew Young, his nomination was withdrawn after the alleged activities of his firm became public. Labor leaders charged Brown and his company with working for Fortune 500 corporations such as Cannon Mills and Sara Lee to discourage African-American workers from unionizing.

A former employee of B&C, Rosalyn Shelton, says she helped to organize anti-union front groups and workers and to arrange payoffs to area ministers to defeat a union drive at the Tultex Corporation in Martinsville, Virginia.

John Langford, a black attorney in High Point, North Carolina, charges Brown with using his background and ties to the civil rights movement to make money for himself and to obtain right-wing money for civil rights causes. Ac-

A House Divided

The Delany sisters, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. DuBois.

By Laurene Scalf

Sarah L. Delany and A. Elizabeth Delany were born in 1889 and 1891, respectively. They grew up on the campus of St. Augustine's School in Raleigh, North Carolina, where their father, Henry Beard Delany, an Episcopal priest, served as vice principal. Both sisters migrated north, where Sarah (Sadie) taught high school and Elizabeth (Bessie) became the second black woman to be licensed to practice dentistry in New York.

Their joint autobiography, *Having Our Say*, written with Amy Hill Hearth, was published by Dell Books in 1993. The Delanys knew both Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois personally. Their disparate views of the two leaders mirror that of the black population in general. Sadie writes, "I got to be a good driver, and when Mr. Booker T. Washington would come to visit Raleigh, he would climb into the passenger seat of [brother] Lemuel's car and I would drive him all around the county and show him my schools. He was so appreciative of the work I was doing.

"I don't think folks appreciate Booker T. Washington today; and even then, more radical Negroes looked down on him because they had higher aspirations for the race than he appar-

ently did. But Mr. Washington tried to help his people by getting them educated, getting their feet on the ground. He helped a lot of people and I don't think we should judge him harshly. He was a great American, a gentleman — a lovely man! He was a very amiable sort of man."

Bessie, who describes herself as "vinegar" to Sadie's "molasses" and "spice" to Sadie's "sugar," preferred DuBois' approach. "Mr. Washington's goals were modest for his race: He wanted you to be literate, to own your forty acres and a mule. Sadie was more like Booker T. Washington. . . . DuBois was always speaking out against one thing or another, especially about the lynchings in the South. Many people thought his approach was too fast, too threatening to white people and therefore dangerous for Negroes. . . . Papa was not aggressive enough by Dr. DuBois's standards. He thought my Papa was a 'handkerchief head' type of Negro — the bowing and stooping kind of field-hand nigger who would let white people push him around. This was not fair, because my Papa had a lot of dignity.

"Still, I believed in Dr. DuBois's approach: I would have given life or limb to the cause."

Laurene Scalf is a writer and actor in Louisville, Kentucky.

ording to Langford, Brown gives money that B&C gets from its union-busting activities to civil rights' organizations to garner their support.

Officials at B&C deny anti-union work or any ties to right-wing causes. But Brown did hold a \$100,000 fundraiser for North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms. Brown also raised money for Jesse Jackson. "He's such a good fundraiser that people like Jackson stay close to him despite the connections to people like Helms," says Desma Holcumb, research director of the ACTWU. "Brown can bring in big money from corporate sponsors."

B&C and its employer, Lee Apparel, recently settled a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) filed by the Teamsters Union. The union and the NLRB charged B&C with spying on workers at the Lee plant. As part of the settlement, the company must post a sign stating that Lee, B&C, and a consultant hired by B&C would not interfere with workers' right to unionize, would not interrogate workers, and would not discourage them from organizing.

Neither B&C nor Brown would return calls for an interview. Lee Apparel, however, denied any wrongdoing.

"There is no admission that we have done any of these things," says Don S. Hancock, Lee's area human resources manager, referring to the settlement. Hancock says the company hired B&C for advice on management, union issues, pay, and other issues. He denies that the firm was hired to defeat the union.

Desma Holcomb is skeptical. "If they hadn't done anything wrong, they wouldn't have reached a settlement," she says.

One black conservative who is unabashed in her connection to the white right is Phyllis Berry Myers, of Baltimore, Maryland. Myers is the producer of *A Second Look*, a television program aimed at black conservatives. Broadcast in more than 30 states, the show is developing a grassroots activist network within the black community in response to the traditional black leadership, according to Myers.

One of her targets is the NAACP. In an interview in *Emerge* magazine, Myers says the civil rights organization is "advancing an agenda that is anathema to black America." She urges blacks to fight the NAACP by withholding dues and boycotting sponsors.

Myers worked with white right-wing extremist Clint Bolick of the conservative Institute of Justice to sink the nomination of Lani Guinier to head the Justice Department Civil Rights Division. They produced a number of articles, op-ed pieces, press releases, and reports which portrayed Guinier as a fanatical left-wing "quota queen" bent on undermining democratic principals.

Myers' program is broadcast by the Free Congress Foundation, a right-wing think tank founded by Paul Weyrich. Weyrich is credited with rebuilding the right into a modern political force. He has built a national infrastructure of think tanks, special interest organizations, programs like *A Second Look* and a similar program aimed at Hispanics, publications, and a computerized fundraising network.

"Groups like this pose a clear and present danger to the hope of any progress of civil rights in this country," says Charles Ogletree, a professor of

law at Harvard University. "They don't have a proactive, forward-looking agenda for African Americans. They don't deserve our blessing or attention."



Phyllis Berry Myers of Baltimore urges blacks to fight the NAACP.

Isaac Washington warns that all black conservatives should not be judged by the actions of a few. "Black liberals and Democrats have people who work against the interest of black people, too," Washington says. "There are problems in both parties. You can't just point the finger and judge black Republicans."

David Harris, an attorney with the Land Loss Prevention Project in Durham, North Carolina, agrees. "But we have to remember that many of the rights that we enjoy today came about because of people like the NAACP who may be considered liberal. Many conservatives, on the other hand, have gotten into a position where they want to close the door on other African Americans to keep them from advancing."

"The importance of these ties is not white conservative patronage per se," writes Deborah Toler, a research affili-

ate with Political Research Associates. "Black liberals benefit from similar ties to liberal institutions. A critical intellectual difference is that black liberal analyses and policy ideas originate in their experience in the civil rights and black power movements . . . and continue to be shaped by their black constituents who fund civil rights organizations and elect them to office.

"It is important to question the implications of the fact that black conservatives' arguments originate in white conservative arguments, and that black conservatives are in no way answerable to a black constituency."

§

Ron Nixon is Research/Community Development Initiative Associate with the Institute for Southern Studies, publisher of Southern Exposure.

"When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his 'proper place' and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary.

"History shows that it does not matter who is in power...those who have not learned to do for themselves and have to depend solely on others never obtain any more rights or privileges in the end than they had in the beginning."

— Carter Goodwin Woodson
The Mis-education of the Negro, 1933

Whatever happened to the Southern Democrats? They Turned Republican



By D. Keith Miles

Following the 1994 election, Southern Democrats have become as rare as the old blue laws in the South, and Republicans have become as numerous — and twice as aggressive — as the strip malls on the edge of every Southern town. Will the South become a new Republican stronghold?

The election of 1994 continued the long march of the Republican Party for control of the Southern political scene. Employing a strategy which capitalized on the growing anxieties of the middle class and generated a veiled appeal to racism, Republicans swept far into the region, making inroads not only in the Deep South, but in more moderate border states as well. Throughout the region, voting patterns were nearly the same: White men and women fled the Democratic Party. According to VNS, a consortium of media outlets that conducted exit polling on election day, 69 percent of Southern white males and 61 percent of white Southern women voted Republican in Congressional races. Nationwide, the figure was 57 percent of white males voting for the GOP.

While African Americans continued to vote predominantly Democratic, low African-American voter turnouts made it impossible for many white Democratic candidates to withstand the Republican onslaught. Reapportionment and its consolidation of minority Congressional districts may also have left Democratic incumbents without the necessary minority margins to overcome the desertion of

whites to the Republican Party.

Two schools of thought have emerged to account for Southern voting patterns in 1994. One holds that November 8 marked the final shift in a realignment begun with the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts of the mid-1960s. A second views Republican inroads as the result of Southern dissatisfaction with the administration of President Bill Clinton and the stitching together of various disaffected special interest groups. While the answer may be somewhere in the middle, it is clear that the South, long a bastion of strength for the Democratic Party, has become an uncertain ground.

While Democrats still hold the majority of Congressional seats in the South, and 10 of 11 state legislatures, trends over the last 30 years show the middle class white voter slipping steadily away to the GOP. Southern Republicans gained three governorships, three U.S. Senate seats (including the defection by Alabama Senator Richard Shelby to the GOP), 16 House seats, and control of the North Carolina statehouse and Florida Senate. Republicans now hold 13 of 22 Senate seats, 64 of 188 House seats, and six of the 11 governorships.

By all accounts the November election was a nightmare for Southern Democrats. In spite of a generally robust economy, falling deficits and the advantages of incumbency, Democrats were unable to overcome a public disenchanted with government at nearly all levels. By the time the polls closed, voters had turned out many veteran Demo-

crats and captured most of the open seats. For the first time in 40 years, the Republicans were in control of both houses of Congress.

HOW EVERYONE CHANGED SIDES

In the post-Civil War South, clear lines were drawn between African Americans, who were predominantly Republican (the party of Abraham Lincoln), and the whites who composed the Democratic Party. It was not until the Great Depression, when Franklin D. Roosevelt offered the country a New Deal that these old lines were crossed and new ones drawn. Many African Americans, particularly in the North, joined the Democratic party in support of Roosevelt's administration. They joined in sufficient numbers to influence white Democrats in the North and gain their consideration in policy making. This initial shift prompted a more sweeping realignment in the South when Southern white Democrats reacted to the desegregation of their party with the Dixiecrat movement of the 1948 Democratic National Convention. Disaffected Southern Democrats nominated South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond and Governor Fielding Wright of Mississippi as State's Rights candidates for the election against Harry Truman.

Thurmond, who switched to the Republican Party in 1964 (and now chairs the Senate Armed Services Committee in Congress) said, when accepting the State's Rights nomination: "There are

Drowned by the Republican Wave

Portrait of a Campaign, 1994

As press secretary for the re-election campaign of Democratic Senator Jim Sasser of Tennessee, I worked with the candidate, consultants, pollsters, and staff to coordinate a coherent message that would persuade voters to return the Senator to Washington for a fourth term. By early fall, that had become a difficult task.

As it did in so many other states, the political dynamics of Tennessee changed rapidly through 1994. The home state of Andrew Jackson, Tennessee has been strongly Democratic for decades. Democrats held all statewide elective offices going into the '94 election. The Republican Party, historically confined to East Tennessee and an enclave in eastern Memphis, had built an organization that elected governors in 1970, '78, and '82 and senators in '66 and '70. But, by and large, most Tennesseans identified themselves as Democrats.

Jim Sasser, often mentioned as the next Senate Majority Leader, was given an easy shot at re-election by most pundits in the spring and early summer. Notwithstanding his pro-labor, pro-environment, and populist stands, Sasser enjoyed a wide base of support among Democrats, Independents, and even some Republicans during his 18 years in office. Public polls in the late spring and early summer showed him with comfortable margins over possible Republican opponents.

As summer moved toward fall, disturbing signs began to appear in public polling data and on the campaign trail. Party identification among voters began to equalize between Democrats and Republicans, with an additional 15 to 20 percent classifying themselves as Independent. Much of this movement was no doubt driven by the increasing disenchantment of voters with Congress. Health care reform had proven too difficult to understand or to solve by Congress. Meanwhile, the crime bill had angered many voters who felt the legislation was laden with worthless spending projects. In addition, passage of a ban on assault weapons, combined with

the earlier passage of the Brady Bill, brought forth a multi-million dollar campaign against Congress by the National Rifle Association.

By late August 1994, once-comfortable leads had vanished for veteran Democrats including Sasser. The Republican Party, marching in lock step and sounding its siren song of less government, lower taxes, term limits, welfare reform, and traditional values, was proving seductive to voters across the spectrum.

Another disturbing sign for those of us working on Democratic campaigns was a fundamental change in the way voters were viewing their elected officials. In past elections, seniority and the ability to bring federal projects to the home state were seen as substantial reasons for re-electing a person to office. By late 1994, voters rejected those distinctions of power.

There was also the problem of the public's unhappiness with President Clinton himself. Voters across Tennessee, including Democrats, were voicing their misgivings over the personality and the policies of the president.

Finally, the Republican Party had, for the first time in several elections, put together a slate of candidates with statewide appeal and one that resonated particularly with conservatives. Bill Frist, a wealthy Nashville heart transplant surgeon with no political experience ran against Sasser. Fred Thompson, Watergate lawyer and movie star, ran a populist campaign for the Senate seat formerly held by Vice President Albert Gore.

In the Sasser campaign, we watched these new dynamics grow and watched our lead over Frist shrink. By September the race was too close for comfort, and some of us began to realize our candidate might not be able to ride over the crest of the Republican wave washing across the country.

Increasingly, the battleground was the independent voter. But the Independents were among the most vocal in demanding basic change in the political process. An 18-year incumbent, no matter what his record, was not the agent of change the

not enough laws on the books of the nation, nor can there be enough laws, to break down segregation in the South."

Passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, approved under the Johnson Administration reinvigorated Southern white support for the Republican Party. Despite a brief Republican appeal to African Americans with Eisenhower's enforcement of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision in 1957, these two pieces of legislation also marked the end of African-American support for the Republican Party. In the 1960 presidential race, Republican Richard Nixon had received some 40 percent of the African-American vote. By 1964, with the candidacy of Barry Goldwater and the abandonment of the Civil Rights issue by Republicans, African Americans had fled the GOP.

In 1968, Nixon and Independent George Wallace, the Alabama governor who was a flamboyant segregationist, split the South. Wallace captured all the Deep South states. In 1972, Nixon swept the entire South, and in 1976 even the presence of Georgian Jimmy Carter on the ballot could not bring white Southern voters back into the fold of Democratic politics. Carter received only 46 percent of the Southern white vote.

In 1980, conservative Republican Ronald Reagan swept all the Southern states except Georgia. The 1980 election also gave Republicans control of the United States Senate, which they held until 1986. The Reagan years marked a new Republican sophistication in regard to attracting the white Southern voter. The president attacked the programs of the New Deal and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, and packaged cuts as a reduction of federal intervention. Attacks on federal programs for the poor and inner cities provided a new lexicon which, on the surface, had nothing to do with race. At a time when "white flight" from the cities to the suburbs was in full stampede, due in part to the problems of urban crime and a perceived decline in educational standards, this provided uneasy whites with convenient code words to define issues of race, without seeming to be talking about race at all.

Continued on next page

independent voter was looking for.

By late October, even our most faithful supporters were worried. For myself, I was frustrated by our inability to punch through the public cynicism with an effective message. I was concerned about the increasing likelihood of a loss and the impact it would have on a man I had served for eight years and known and respected for more than a dozen years. I also began to entertain the notion that I might have to begin looking for a new career.

By noon on election day, exit polls showed us defeated. Network television declared our opponent the winner just minutes after the polls closed. In 1988, Sasser had won 94 of the state's 95 counties. In 1994, he took only 23 counties. Republican candidates won both Senate seats and the governor's mansion. The Democrats were able to win only the open seat on the Public Service Commission.

The Republican wave had crashed on Tennessee. For those of us on the losing side, it was a time for introspection, for wondering about the viability of the Democratic Party in future elections, and for polishing up resumes.

— D. Keith Miles

THEN THERE'S TRADITION

While Southern Democrats have been moving away from their party on national tickets, they have generally stayed the course on local and state races. Democrats still control the statehouses and many of the Congressional House and Senate delegations in the South. Race explains in part the phenomenon of national realignment but it does not account for continued Democratic control of the statehouse and the courthouse. The explanation lies deeply rooted in tradition, class, and economics.

In what is considered the seminal book on Southern politics, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, V.O. Key described tradition as a powerful force in influencing voting patterns, especially in the South:

"Although the great issues of national politics are potent instruments for the formation of divisions among voters, they meet their match in the inertia of traditional partisan attachments formed

generations ago. Present partisan affiliations tend to be as much the fortuitous result of events long past as the product of cool calculation of interest in party policies of today."

One example would be the Appalachian regions of upper east Tennessee, western North Carolina, and southeastern Virginia. Because of the relatively low number of minorities and their anti-secessionist sentiments in the Civil War, these regions have remained generally Republican for more than 130 years.

In east Tennessee, Republicans have held Congressional seats almost continuously since the Civil War. In races beyond their immediate vicinity, though, these voters can be swayed. In 1986 and '88, they helped to elect a Democratic governor, and Democratic U.S. senators in '82, '84, '88, and '90. In the 1994 election, east Tennessee Republicans returned to their GOP roots. Increased anxiety over economic concerns, the growth and organizational power of the religious right, and the all-out campaigns of special interest groups like the National Rifle Association and the health care industry contributed to the Republican tidal wave. Most observers agree that race was not much of an issue in this Republican stronghold. It was a renewed enthusiasm for the GOP and a general dissatisfaction with Bill Clinton that brought home the faithful.

NICKED BY THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

After waiting 40 years to regain control of Congress, Republicans now find themselves saddled with promises to keep: term limits, massive tax cuts, reduced federal spending, and a balanced budget. Should they succeed, the newly minted Republican voters of the South may become seriously disenfranchised. With its long history of sending politicians to Washington for a lifetime, and with the seniority system providing Congressional elders with the power to direct federal spending toward home, the South has been a particular beneficiary of federal largess.

The *Wall Street Journal*, in a December story about Limestone County, Texas, provides just one example: The county's nearly 21,000 residents paid about \$21 million in federal taxes in 1991. The county received back some

\$85 million in federal expenditures, a return of more than 400 percent. The figure included some \$41 million in Social Security and other federal retirement benefits, several million dollars for the school systems in the county, and \$2.6 million in food stamps, agriculture funds, and Medicare and Medicaid monies. In addition, the county received about \$25 million in 1994 to operate a state school for the mentally retarded.

The *Journal* wrote, "So important has such federal money become to Limestone County that its residents now instinctively turn to the government for help — and expect to get it. 'If you think people are angry now,' says Ray Carter, a retailer and . . . an official of the Mexia Lion's Club, 'just wait until you see what happens when they try to cut off some of these programs.'"

The South is full of Limestone counties that have benefited from expenditures from the energy and agricultural departments, Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security. Region-specific programs add more federal benefits. The Tennessee Valley Authority, created in the New Deal, provides cheap public power to millions and employment to thousands in the Tennessee Valley states. The TVA has long been eyed by Republicans for budget cuts or even privatization. The Appalachian Regional Commission, organized in 1965, has built nearly 3,000 miles of roads and spent millions of dollars on infrastructure, education, and health improvements in the eastern mountains. ARC has been another favorite target of Republicans.

The presence of the federal government in everyday life will become ever more clear as Congress and the Administration vie to accelerate budget cuts. In a December 6, 1994, poll conducted by the *New York Times* and CBS, 81 percent of Americans favored a balanced budget amendment. However, if a balanced budget meant more federal taxes, support fell to 41 percent. If balancing the budget meant cutting Social Security, support dropped to 30 percent. If cuts in Medicare were required, only 27 percent favored the amendment. And only 22 would favor the amendment if it meant cutting federal education spending (a favorite Republi-

The Election of 1994 Before and After in the South

U.S. House					GOP Gain	U.S. Senate				
State	Old		New			Old		New		GOP Gain
	Dem	Rep	Dem	Rep		Dem	Rep	Dem	Rep	
Alabama	4	3	4	3		2*		1	1*	1
Arkansas	2	2	2	2		2*		2		
Florida	10	13	8	15	2	1	1	1	1	
Georgia	7	4	4	7	3	1*	1	1	1	
Louisiana	4	3	4	3		2*		2		
Mississippi	5	0	4	1	1		2		2	
North Carolina	8	4	4	8	4		2*		2	
South Carolina	3	3	2	4	1	1*	1	1	1	
Tennessee	6	3	4	5	2	2			2	2
Texas	21	9	19	11	2		2		2	
Virginia	7	4	6	5	1	1	1	1	1	
South	77	48	61	64	16	12	10	9	13	3

* No Senate election

** Democrat switched parties day after election

Sources: Southern Political Report and Election Data Services

can target).

AN ABSTRACT MANDATE

If the November 8 election was a mandate for Republicans and the "Contract with America" — as they believe it was — they now risk public anger for delivering on what they promised. In the final analysis, Republican realignment in the South may be more influenced by the actions and policies of the new Congress in the next two years than by the historical foundation that has gradually bled the Southern Democratic Party of its strength. The key battleground appears to be the white middle class, and here Republicans will hold the advantage in that these voters have largely overcome (at least on a national level) the forces of tradition in their voting patterns.

While many observers agree that race was a key issue in the 1994 election, the Republican reluctance to directly discuss the issue and its place in their political strategy may reflect the GOP's piqued interest in courting the white Southern vote. In *The Two-Party South*, Alexander Lamis notes a frank and revealing discussion in 1981 with a Reagan White House official who said:

"As to the whole Southern strategy that Harry Dent and others put together in 1968, opposition to the Voting Rights Act would have been a central part of keeping the South. Now [the new Southern strategy] doesn't have to do that. All you have to do to keep the South is for Reagan to run in place on the issues he's campaigned on since 1964 . . . and that's fiscal conservatism, balancing the budget, cut taxes, you

know, the whole cluster . . ."

"*Questioner*: 'But the fact is, isn't it, that Reagan does get to the Wallace voter and to the racist side of the Wallace voter by doing away with Legal Services, by cutting down on food stamps . . .?'"

"*Official*: 'You start out in 1954 by saying: "Nigger, nigger, nigger." By 1968 you can't say "nigger" — that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, state's rights, and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes, all the things you're talking about are totally economic things and the by-product of them is that blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that is a part of it. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying that if it is getting that abstract, and that coded, that we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. You follow me — because obviously sitting around saying, "We want to cut this," is much more abstract than even the busing thing and a hell of a lot more abstract than "Nigger, nigger."'"

The Republican refinement of the lexicon continued in 1994 with welfare reform, crime, and school vouchers replacing New Federalism, busing, and fiscal conservatism.

REALIGNMENT IN THE SOUTH?

To capitalize on the trend of Southern white flight from the Democratic Party, the GOP must devise the least painful method possible for delivering on its promises in the Contract. In an expanding economy, with healthy growth, the GOP may achieve success in its strategy of tax cuts and reduced government, so long as the voter can feel the impact on his or her personal finances.

There is a dark cloud on the horizon for Republicans, however. The Federal Reserve Board's aggressive credit policies of 1994 lead many economists to predict a sharp drop in growth rates, starting as early as next year. With control of the Congress, Republicans will be without their traditional whipping post — the Democratic Congress — as they campaign to consolidate their gains in 1996.

For Democrats, the next two years will be spent in acclimating to the role of minority status, while at the same time redefining themselves in a way to bring

back the white middle class without losing the liberal and minority wings of the party. It will be a daunting task. November 8 exposed deep cracks in the Democratic Party. Whether Clinton will be able to heal the rifts and assuage concerns about his viability in 1996 remains to be seen.

Both parties have tremendous challenges before them: the Republicans in translating a seductive philosophy into concrete policy without alienating their new constituency; the Democrats in devising and articulating a new platform that recognizes and addresses the current drift to the right without losing their liberal and minority base.

In the end, the party able to achieve its goals will be poised to either consolidate or return to power. While Republicans have been able to accelerate the realignment trends of the past 30 years, fundamental realignment has not taken place: Democrats still control most of the state legislatures. At the same time, Democrats can hardly afford to be indifferent to changing voting trends. Southern voters, particularly white voters, have broken with Key's traditional voting attachments. Added to this new paradigm is a public demanding to see immediate results from their officials and their policies. Both parties need to move quickly and correctly to achieve their goals. What happens between now and the 1996 elections will determine whether there will be real realignment in the South.

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D. Keith Miles is a writer living in Nashville, Tennessee. A former political journalist, Miles served as press secretary from 1986 to 1994 for former Tennessee Senator Jim Sasser.

**"The effect of the Voting Rights Act on this year's elections can be seen in the congressional results. Republicans gained 17 seats in the South, all 17 of them previously held by white Democrats. Not a single one of the region's 17 African-American members of Congress lost in November in the largest Democratic loss in nearly half a century."
— Hasting Wyman Jr.
Publisher, Southern Political Report**

Highlights and Low Lights of the 1994 Election

Alabama:

Republicans gained control of the governor's mansion with the election of Fob James. Immediately following the election, Democratic Senator Richard Shelby bolted his party for the GOP.

Florida:

Democratic Governor Lawton Chiles fought off a strong challenge by Jeb Bush, son of former President George Bush. House Republicans picked up two seats, one in the Northern Panhandle and the district in Central Florida that includes the Kennedy Space Center. Republicans also gained control of the State Senate.

Mississippi:

The seat Democratic Representative Jamie Whitten had held for 53 years was lost to Republican Roger Wicker.

North Carolina:

Democrats lost control of the state House chamber and held the state Senate by only two votes.

South Carolina:

In defeating incumbent Representative Butler Derrick, challenger Lindsey Graham became the first Republican since 1877 to represent the Third District.

Tennessee:

Republicans took the open seat that had belonged to Vice President Al Gore and defeated 18-year incumbent Jim Sasser, who had been in line to become Senate majority leader. In addition, Republican Don Sundquist, who vacated his West Tennessee Congressional district, was successful in his gubernatorial bid. Democrats, however, continued to control both houses of the state legislature.

Texas:

Republicans picked up two House seats, including the seat held by former Representative Jack Brooks, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. Democratic Governor Ann Richards was defeated by another son of the former President, Republican George Bush Jr.

Virginia:

Incumbent Democratic Senator Charles Robb fended off a strong challenge by Oliver North.

— D. Keith Miles

A New Leaf



As tobacco production declines across the United States, farmers explore alternatives.

By Eric Bates

Buddy Switzer smokes a cigarette as he walks through his tobacco barn in Cynthiana, Kentucky. Dried burley leaves hang high in the rafters, absorbing moisture from the late-autumn air. The local tobacco auction starts the next morning, and several men have spent the day stripping supple, reddish-brown leaves from their stalks and separating them

by color and texture.

It is an old ritual. Here among the rolling fields along the South Fork, just north of the sprawling horse farms and suburban subdivisions of Lexington, Switzer and his ancestors have been growing air-cured tobacco for well over a century. "My father raised tobacco, and so did my grandfather and great-grandfather," he says. "It's something

I've done and my family's done all our lives. It just grows on you."

Tobacco is the mainstay of the farm, but it's not all that brings Switzer out to the barn these days. Much of the dirt floor is piled high with hardwood maple logs that he hauls down from Ohio, splits into foot lengths, and sells to homeowners for heating and to restaurants for cooking. Year before

Photos by Rob Amberg



Jeff Johnson and John Henderson move cured burley tobacco into a casing house where it will be stripped and tied for sale in Madison County, North Carolina.



Like many tobacco growers, it's a family business for the Smyres of Iredell County, North Carolina. Here the family is planting.

last he delivered nearly 170 loads and made \$17,000.

Outside the barn, only a few scattered stalks of tobacco betray its importance as a crop. Indeed, the fields look more like a demonstration farm than the center of the nation's biggest burley tobacco region. Thirty-six beef cattle and their calves roam a nearby hillside, next to the skeleton of a greenhouse where hydroponic tomatoes grow. Down in the bottom, fields kept chemical-free for three years produce organic vegetables for a local grocer and alfalfa hay for thoroughbred farms. This year, only four of the farm's 80 acres were devoted to tobacco.

"We're growing less tobacco than we've ever grown," says Kim Switzer, Buddy's wife. "The idea was to give us more time to put up the greenhouse and expand our alfalfa and buy extra cattle."

The Switzers are diversifying for a very simple reason: All across the South, tobacco production has been declining steadily over the past decade. Last year tobacco farmers planted 200,000 fewer acres and harvested 14 percent less than they did in 1984. Fewer smokers and higher cigarette taxes have contributed to the downturn, but the real culprit is corporate flight.

American tobacco companies now buy and produce much of their product in cheaper African, Asian, and Latin American markets, cutting the U.S. share of the world tobacco supply by nearly two-thirds since 1959.

As increasing imports tarnish the "golden leaf," thousands of farmers like the Switzers are looking for alternatives to what has long been the most stable and profitable crop in the region. Some are turning to conventional crops like vegetables or strawberries. Others are trying to create new markets by selling directly to consumers at farmer's markets or buying clubs. A few are rediscovering old ways of farming like organic growing and other forms of sustainable agriculture.

Farmers are also organizing. In Kentucky, the Community Farm Alliance has proposed reinvesting any new excise taxes on tobacco in rural communities to help farmers make the transition to other crops. Just as the end of the Cold War created a "peace dividend" by rendering many military industries obsolete, farm advocates say, the public health battle over smoking offers a rare chance to support tobacco farmers who convert to non-lethal crops.

Far more is at stake than the

115,000 farmers who still grow tobacco. Federal price supports for the crop have preserved small family farms in an era of huge agribusiness, and many rural communities depend on tobacco for as much as half of all personal income. Without federal support to develop other high-value crops and markets, more Southerners will be driven into poverty, and more farmland will either fall into the hands of large corporate growers or disappear entirely.

"One of five dollars here in Harrison County is tobacco related," says Buddy Switzer. "Those are big numbers. You start dropping out tobacco, your banks take a licking, your car dealerships take a licking, your downtown businesses, your Wal-Mart takes a licking. I'm 40 years old and I can count on my fingers the guys I grew up with who are still farming. I graduated with 200 people and probably five of them are farmers."

"A lot of people in this area are going to be hurt hard," adds Kim. "We may be able to survive, but what's the point of staying in Cynthiana if there's not going to be a community?"

From Exporter to Importer

Tobacco was an integral part of the economy and culture of America well before the nation was founded. John Rolfe, the Jamestown settler who married Pocahontas, grew the first crop shipped to England in 1613. Within four years, tobacco exports totaled 10 tons. Bundles of leaves were used as colonial currency and served as collateral for loans from France that financed the American Revolution. By the time Thomas Jefferson had tobacco leaves engraved on pillars inside the Capitol, the new nation was exporting 100,000 tons of tobacco annually.

Like oil, coal, and railroads, tobacco was lucrative enough to attract its share of robber barons. Even after the Supreme Court busted the "tobacco trust" in 1912, a handful of cigarette companies continued using large

stockpiles and secret grades to shortchange farmers. Growers organized a voluntary association and unleashed night riders on uncooperative farmers, but the violence proved no match for the financial power of the buyers. Tobacco manufacturers "have as complete a monopoly as this nation has ever seen," Governor Richard Russell of Georgia observed in 1932.

To level the field, farmers turned to the New Deal. In 1938 Congress passed the Agriculture Adjustment Act restricting the domestic supply of tobacco. Farmers who were growing tobacco at the time were granted a quota — in effect, a federal license to raise the crop.

Tobacco farming became an exclusive club, with new members admitted only if they bought or leased a quota from a Depression-era farm. Lower tobacco supplies meant higher prices, and higher prices meant no need to support farmers with direct government subsidies.

But the U.S.

Department of Agriculture continues to support a complex infrastructure designed to keep the crop profitable. Each year the USDA determines how much tobacco should be grown based on how much tobacco companies say they will buy, and then tells quota holders how many pounds they can raise. The USDA also adjusts the "support price" for the crop, guaranteeing farmers enough income to cover rising farm costs. If any leaf fails to bring the minimum price at auction, the government lends money to a "stabilization cooperative" to buy, process, and store the unsold leaf. The co-op later sells the surplus tobacco, using the money to repay the



government loans and assessing farmers and cigarette makers to cover any losses.

In addition to protecting prices by limiting supply and providing low-cost loans, the government also grades the leaf, collects and analyzes market information, and provides funds for research and education. It's centralized planning on a remarkable scale, and it guarantees tobacco farmers prices well above what they receive for other crops. And because smokers pick up most of the tab through higher prices, the entire system costs taxpayers little or nothing. The Congressional

Research Service puts the annual price tag for administering price supports at \$16 million. By contrast, tobacco farmers paid \$22 million in special assessments last year to help reduce the deficit.

"It's always been a social program," says Hal Hamilton of the Community Farm Alliance in Berea, Kentucky. "It's never been a program to create an effective system of growing tobacco. It's a federal intervention to

disperse the benefits of the tobacco industry among a lot of people."

By dispersing an annual crop worth \$2.9 billion, tobacco has given small Southern farmers a way to survive. Kentucky and North Carolina produce 65 percent of all domestic leaf, while another 26 percent comes from Tennessee, Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia. According to the latest Census of Agriculture, three fourths of all tobacco-producing farms have fewer than 180 acres in a nation where the average farm covers 462 acres. "If it weren't for tobacco, we wouldn't have small farms," says Dick Austin, a farm activist who leases out the tobacco quota on his small mountain farm in

Dungannon, Virginia.

Over the years, however, farmers have been hit with a double whammy: smoking tapered off as evidence emerged of its adverse health effects, and tobacco companies and the World Bank helped Third World growers raise leaf at about half the domestic price. Beginning in the early 1980s, the six leading cigarette makers simply stopped buying as much American tobacco as they had promised, creating a domestic surplus of 800 million pounds. In 1985 the companies bought the stockpile — but only after forcing farmers to lower prices and cut domestic production by 10 percent annually.

"The handwriting is on the wall," the Rural Advancement Fund, a North Carolina-based advocacy group, reported at the time. "The federal tobacco program is on the verge of collapse, and the small tobacco farmer is going down first." The group called for a "Commodity Transition Program" to help tobacco farmers switch to other crops. "Our goal should not be to save tobacco, but to save those whose livelihoods depend on tobacco."

The handwriting may have been on the wall a decade ago, but it went unread by the public institutions charged with assisting farmers. Tobacco growers diversifying in the early 1980s received little support from either county extension agents or land grant universities. "Extension was way behind and the universities have been in a kind of dark age. They can't teach what they don't know," says Betty Bailey of RAF-International, who is working to shift the focus of public research with rural development funds.

Many researchers agree. "Organic and other alternatives have been a blank screen for us," says Mike Linker of North Carolina State University. "You can't give farmers any info if you ain't done the research. It hasn't been a high priority for anyone up until now. The money just hasn't been there."

Even when the money is there, however, many growers continue to spurn alternatives and support the same cigarette companies that are forcing

The Farm Bureau erected billboards of four defiant farmers beneath the slogan, "We'd Rather Fight Than Quit."

them to cut back the amount of tobacco they grow. In August, 3,000 tobacco farmers provided the industry with a much-needed grassroots lobby when they marched on Washington to protest a proposed 75-cent-a-pack increase in the cigarette tax — even though \$100 million of the money was earmarked to help farmers make the transition to other crops.

“The fight is really about manufacturers’ profits, and farmers are pawns,” John Bloom of the American Cancer Society’s Tobacco Tax Policy Project said at the time. “At the political level, the manufacturers seem to be the ones calling the shots.”

The manufacturers also strike back when growers show signs of independence. In 1992, for example, farmers backed a domestic content law limiting cigarettes sold in America to no more than 25 percent foreign tobacco. The companies responded by cutting their domestic purchases even more. By last year another 700 million pounds of tobacco had piled up, fueling fears that the USDA would slash domestic production by 40 percent to create demand for the surplus. Tobacco-state representatives forced industry officials to the bargaining table, and in December five companies agreed to buy the latest surplus — at a discount of \$66 million.

As a result, the USDA actually raised this year’s quota by 16 percent. But few think the one-year production hike signals a long-term turnaround. James Graham, North Carolina Agriculture Commissioner, calls the boost “a reprieve for a dying man.” In effect, the issue is not whether tobacco will be grown, but rather who will grow it, and who will profit. Last year Brazil surpassed the U.S. as the leading exporter of all tobacco, and Malawi took the top spot as chief burley exporter. And the flow of cheap imported tobacco is likely to increase, thanks to the recently approved General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. An international panel recently ruled that the United States domestic content law violates GATT, a decision which threatens to undermine the only real

protection for American farmers.

Even the staunchest allies of growers seem to have abandoned hopes of salvaging the current system of price guarantees. Last October, North Carolina Representative Charlie Rose, one of the most effective advocates of tobacco farmers, proposed eliminating price supports entirely by “buying back” quotas from growers. Although the plan would provide some capital to quota holders to help them make the switch to other crops, it would do nothing for tobacco farmers who rent quotas from others. What’s more, the plan would return tobacco to the inequities of the free market, eventually shifting control of tobacco production to large corporate farms that could grow the leaf more cheaply.

Making the Switch

Despite the economic and political decline of tobacco, the Southern states most dependent on the crop have done little to develop viable alternatives. Kentucky and North Carolina have encouraged tobacco growers to contract with large corporations to raise chickens and hogs — deals which generally saddle

farmers with huge debts and rob them of control over production. Others have put their hopes in genetic engineers who are injecting human genes into tobacco plants to create a new source of protein, and developing a “drug-free” strain of hemp — a.k.a. marijuana — to be used in paper and fabric production.

Many growers also remain reluctant to kick the tobacco habit. Addicted to high prices and a guaranteed market, farmers generally downplay the deadly consequences of the crop they raise. Last year tobacco killed 434,000 Americans — more than twice the combined death tolls from alcohol, car accidents, AIDS, suicide, homicide, fires, and all illegal drugs. Last year in Kentucky, the Farm Bureau erected billboards of four defiant farmers beneath the slogan, “We’d Rather Fight Than Quit.”

“Where things really differ is between old farmers and young farmers,” says Dick Austin, the Virginia farm activist. “The old farmers just want to hang on until they retire; they don’t want to think about change. The younger farmers are already moving out of tobacco. The problem is, there are a lot more older farmers than younger farmers.”



Buyers from tobacco companies and government pool bidders examine leaf at Planters Tobacco Warehouse in Asheville, North Carolina.

Some younger farmers made the switch years ago. Ken Dawson helped raise tobacco on his grandfather's farm as a boy in Pittsylvania County, Virginia. But after studying chemistry and religion at the University of North Carolina, he moved in with a friend, consulted a book, and planted an organic garden in 1973.

"I thought, 'Granddad would think this was a hoot, planting with a book.' But with beginner's luck and a lot of well-rotted manure, we were on our way," Dawson says.

Four years ago, on his 40th birthday, Dawson bought a tobacco farm just north of Hillsborough, North Carolina, and began converting it to organic produce. "I wanted to do something to have some small impact of redirecting the course agriculture is taking in this country. I realized the only thing I could do is develop an agricultural operation that showed how things could be done and do it well enough that people could see it was viable."

Dawson revitalized the tobacco-depleted soil by planting clover and a viny plant called vetch to add nitrogen. Soon he was selling 25 different organic vegetables, herbs, and cut flowers at a local farmer's market and grocery store. Most conventional crops cannot match the per-acre return of tobacco. But because organic produce is in demand and Dawson sells much of it directly to consumers, he can actually command higher prices. This year he expects to net more than \$25,000 on three acres — well above the average net of \$7,500 for an equivalent amount of tobacco.

"The small scale means I can use each piece of ground for what it will do best," Dawson says as he examines some lettuce planted on a patch of dry, sandy soil. "And the diversity of crops means I never have all my eggs in one basket. If my lettuce doesn't do well, I



always have broccoli and basil and flowers."

Such diversity is essential for growers making the switch

from tobacco. The problem is simple economics: If thousands of tobacco farmers suddenly switch to vegetables, they will flood the market and drive down prices. "The real key for growers as they move to something new is they've got to be diversified," says

Mike Linker of North Carolina State University, who uses Ken Dawson's farm as a research lab. "If they think they're going to be the squash king or the broccoli king, they're going to be in big trouble."

"If it weren't for tobacco, we wouldn't have small farms."

Broccoli and Beef

Charlie O'Dell, an extension horticulturist and associate professor at Virginia Tech, had dreams of being the broccoli king of Virginia. "In 1982, a group of tobacco farmers actually came to the university and asked for help. They had lost almost half of their tobacco acreage due to declining markets. We came up with broccoli as having a real niche at that time."

More than 100 tobacco farmers began growing a few acres of broccoli, hoping to pool their crop to compete with California suppliers. "It was profitable for a few years, but growers could not get supply and demand in balance," O'Dell laments. "Now it's a cut-throat situation — they're just trying to kill each other off." Unable to suffer any more losses, organizers closed the market and tobacco farmers gave up on vegetables.

"The answers I thought we had have turned pretty much into disasters," O'Dell confesses. "I even have a broccoli-green car. Now I don't know what crop to turn to. Maybe I should paint the car red for tomatoes or strawberries. I don't know what to do."

Such confusion arises from asking

the wrong questions, says Cornelia Flora, director of the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development at Iowa State University. "Seeing the problem in terms of replacing tobacco with another crop means we haven't been looking at the right problem," she says. "We've seen this all over the South. What happens is, the first year everybody grows tomatoes and makes a lot of money. The second year the price just goes down the toilet. There's no planning and paying attention to the market, so it doesn't work."

Tobacco brings a high price, Flora adds, "because planning eliminates the market risk. What made tobacco the wonderful crop it was for small farmers throughout the South is that tobacco farmers were organized in a small market association that allowed them to limit supply. Farmers ask, 'What other crop will I grow?' They need to ask, 'How can I get the same advantages I did with tobacco with whatever other crop I grow?'"

Laura Freeman began asking that question in 1984. Although her family has grown tobacco in the Appalachian foothills around Schollsville, Kentucky, since the Revolutionary War, she decided to raise cattle instead. "The farm my mother inherited used to have its own tobacco warehouse and everything," she says. "But when my husband and I came, we could see tobacco was a dying business."

Then came the drought of 1983, and a federal dairy buyout the following year. "I learned I had no control over the end price of the cattle," Freeman recalls. "It was devastating financially. So I said we've got to get control of our lives here. We have to get control of the end pricing."

Freeman tried to get local farmers to start a cooperative to raise organic beef and sell directly to customers at retail prices. But the marketing and packing problems proved overwhelming, and farmers were unwilling to shoulder the risk. So Freeman mortgaged her farm and started her own business buying low-fat beef from 100 farmers and selling it to grocery stores. Last year Laura's Lean

Beef sold 10,000 head of cattle to 1,000 stores and posted retail sales of \$15 million.

"We produce a more valuable critter — one with more meat — and we cut our input costs by eliminating drugs and fertilizers," Freeman says. "We go in and negotiate a pre-determined price for the cattle and pay a significant bonus to the farmers."

Freeman cautions, however, that her example offers no easy solutions for tobacco farmers. "It's very difficult to make one of these things successful. They have to make good business sense. It's a whole 'nother occupation. I don't farm anymore. I go to an office, I deal with buyers, I deal with ad agencies. I've seen 50 or 60 farmers go belly-up trying to make one of these things work. If you've been producing on a subsidy program like tobacco where you've got a government-guaranteed fixed price, it's sort of like being an Eastern European farmer. You've got to learn how to function in a marketplace whether you want to or not."

Homegrown Alternative

Across town from Freeman's office in Lexington, a fledgling group of 27 farmers has started a pilot cooperative to sell organic vegetables directly to restaurants and consumers. The Kentucky Organic Growers Association tries to provide a stable market by having farmers sign commitment sheets saying how much of each commodity they will raise. "We learned a lesson from how the burley growers control their supply," says Pam Clay, director of the project. "We tried to guess how much produce we would



Ken Dawson delivers organic peppers to Wellspring Grocery in Durham, North Carolina.

need based on how many farmers and how many buyers we had."

They guessed wrong. "We were way off," Clay laughs. "We thought we could sell \$125,000 worth of produce, but it was more like \$60,000. Reality hit us pretty quickly."

Still, the co-op has had an impact in its first year. By the end of the season, more than 100 shoppers had paid \$500 to join a buying club entitling them to a bag of fresh organic produce each week. Anti-smoking groups like the American Cancer Society pitched in to help sign up consumers, and tobacco farmers began to realize that alternatives like organic vegetables could be profitable. The co-op receives free office space in the headquarters of the Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative Association, long a vocal

opponent of alternatives.

"In Kentucky, organic growers have been stereotyped as old hippies who aren't really farmers and don't know how to make any money," says Clay. "Now no one is laughing at us. We changed the way people look at organic producers."

Martin Richards describes the change as he walks through the hilly fields of a tobacco farm he converted to organic production near Versailles, Kentucky. "You take a tobacco farm and start growing flowers and your neighbors look at you kind of funny. But it's a sign of the times that more farmers are willing to consider anything that works. Money talks."

Richards and Clay know that many tobacco growers will never make the switch to organic, and hope the cooperative can expand into beef, poultry, and conventional crops. Perhaps more important, they hope it can help farmers forge direct links to consumers. "People who buy from us feel more

connected to farming," says Clay. "They meet farmers and hear about what they're going through. And they don't mind spending more money if they're investing in their local communities."

Investing in local tobacco communities is at the heart of the proposal by the Community Farm Alliance, the Kentucky group which launched the organic co-op. Collaborating with farmers and legislators from across the political spectrum, the Alliance drafted a plan for a Tobacco Regions Reinvestment Fund. The fund would receive a portion of any new federal excise tax on tobacco to provide loans and technical assistance to retool tobacco farms and warehouses, conduct market studies, and research and evaluate alternative enterprises.



Government extension agents provide tobacco growers with plenty of advice on pesticides, but little help switching to other crops.

“Just as there is no silver bullet to cure the nation’s economic problems, there is no one answer for tobacco growers who face a declining demand for their product,” the plan concludes. “There is no single, high-value crop to replace tobacco, nor a single market channel to be created or subsidized. Instead the answer lies in a more complex, yet ultimately more long-lasting, solution: the development of agricultural infrastructure so that farmers can grow, sell, and process a wide variety of commodities other than tobacco.”

In short, the government would do for other crops what it has done for tobacco — provide low-cost loans, conduct marketing studies, support education and research, and oversee a system to receive, process, package, and market alternative farm products. “Capital availability is one of the obstacles to successful diversification,” says Hal Hamilton of the Alliance. “We figure if there is going to be a big tax, some of it should come back to the regions that are going to be hardest hit.”

The alternative, Hamilton says, is to let corporate giants have their way. “Leaving it all to the free market means leaving it all up to Campbells and Tysons — and therefore consigning

farmers to be producers of low-value, bulk commodities. I guess we’re trying to create an enclave for small-scale, progressive capitalism in Kentucky. Socialism in one country never really worked; I don’t know if progressive capitalism in one state will fare any better.”

Whether or not the Alliance plan is adopted, most observers agree that unless the government starts helping small family farmers make the transition from tobacco to other crops, few will be able to fend for themselves. “The worst thing that can happen is for farmers to be expected to solve it one farm at a time,” says Betty Bailey of the Rural Advancement Fund International. “Outside of tobacco and peanuts, huge multinational corporations control almost all of our food and fiber. All we want is for government to be a referee and make people play by the rules.”

Farm activists concede that the Republican victory in the November elections probably killed any chance for a new tobacco tax that could fund alternatives. Representative Thomas Bliley of Virginia, who takes over as chair of the Health and Environment Subcommittee, vows he will end the congressional investigation of the tobacco industry because “I don’t think we need any more legislation regulating

tobacco.” Bliley, a pipe smoker who hails from a district where Philip Morris USA is the largest private employer, received \$93,790 from tobacco-related interests from 1987 to 1992.

Dick Austin, the Virginia farmer who helped launch the Community Farm Alliance proposal, says that the political shift in Washington simply gives farmers in the South more time to create viable alternatives. “If our dreams had been realized and we got tax money from a health care bill this year, a lot of it would have been wasted on harebrained schemes. So it may be just as well to get some real pilot projects up and running to see how these things actually work.”

Austin and his neighbors have launched projects to help tobacco farmers sell vegetables to restaurants and harvest wood for craftspeople and furniture makers. They are also developing a real estate database to help beginning growers acquire farmland that might otherwise be grabbed by land speculators or timber companies.

“All of this could obviously be done a lot faster with big hunks of federal tobacco money coming back into the community, but in the meantime there’s no excuse not to get started,” Austin says. “The world goes on despite Republicans. Sooner or later there will be a tobacco tax because it’s the only new tax the American people will tolerate. If we’re ready, we ought to be able to use some piece of it to help the people of our region.”

§

Eric Bates is investigative editor of Southern Exposure and director of the Investigative Action Fund for the Institute for Southern Studies in Durham, North Carolina. A version of this story appeared in The Nation.

Unfortunate Son

By Marc Vassallo

Last week Larry Lambert was found dead in the bathroom of a state pen in South Florida, hanged from a shower head, a rubber hose around his neck. As far as anyone knew, and to the extent that anyone cared, Larry was a suicide. His death started me thinking about my father, whose own death occurred almost two years ago, and whose relationship with Larry I am still trying to understand.

My father was blind in one eye, and I mean that in two ways. He lost his left eye in the Korean War while stationed at an internment camp; he always called it that, never a prison camp, and perhaps there's a difference, but more likely my father could not accept his part in the imprisonment of others. At the camp, he befriended a North Korean prisoner, or should I say intern, who could fashion a tin can into any number of useful items with a pair of snips and a ball peen hammer. The intern made my father a spring-loaded cigarette case from a single can of Schlitz beer.

When my father went to reload the case while off-duty one December day in 1951, the tin spring sent a fleck of metal into his eye. The eye swelled shut and

never reopened. My father always laughed softly and opened his good eye wide when he recounted the mishap. He never complained about his dead eye, and its loss had little effect on how he lived his life, except that, when backing down our driveway, he had to open the door and stick his head out to negotiate the inside curve. Judging by the way he treated me and my little brothers, my father could not have been much of a soldier: He never hit us, he rarely raised his voice, and he would not allow us to own or play with guns; I sometimes

marvel that the Army was able to teach him to use one. He returned from Korea with his own set of ivory chopsticks, scrolls of calligraphy, and a love of blossoming cherry trees, two of which he planted in our front yard. From the young boy who had cleaned his hut, my father learned a Korean lullaby, which he sang to me and my brothers years later in a raspy baritone.

The war also taught him how to smoke, a lesson he practiced three times a day with the cigarettes that came in each C-ration. He graduated to a pack a day when he returned to the states. Thirty-five years later, a Smoke Enders program helped him quit. But the cigarettes had done their work. The following year, he died of lung cancer.

The second way my father was blind in one eye was that he could forgive things in people, especially in young people — and particularly in



Larry Lambert — that others could not overlook. A few weeks after he died, my mother showed me a sympathy card that she received from Larry.

Dear Mrs. Simonetti,

I was so sorry to hear about the passing of Mr. Simonetti. Your husband was a kind man with a patient ear and an understanding heart. He was always there for me and I will miss him.

In sorrow,

Larry Lambert

0623117

It was certainly the only sympathy card my mother received from a prison.

I saw none of this coming the day the Lamberts moved into the neighborhood from a State Department post in Thailand. Larry was a bright, loquacious boy, rather fat (my father would say portly), and with such pale skin that he had the mottled look of sausage pressed against its casing. He carried most of his weight in his hips, which gave him a pear shape; even his Levi's looked like jodhpurs. Larry had been stuffed full of information by his father, who wanted Larry to go to Harvard, as had both he and his own father, the former Senator and noted wine connoisseur Benjamin Lambert.

Larry had also learned a considerable amount on his own. He could recognize virtually any military or commercial aircraft from its silhouette; many he knew from the sound of their engines. He knew almost every record in the *Guinness Book of World Records* and could quote even the most trivial as if he had the page in front of him. He had memorized pi out to 120 digits and could multiply two three-digit numbers together in his head and arrive at an answer within seconds. He routed us in chess the summer Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky brought the game to our attention.

But chess never counted for much in our neighborhood. Nothing Larry knew changed the fact that he couldn't run ten yards before the weight of his rear dragged him to the ground. He was unable even to impress himself. "Of course, it's no big deal how many unshelled whelks somebody ate," he said once after quoting a record. "Don't listen to me, anyway. I might have it wrong. I don't know why I know these things."

Coming home from a Boy Scout meeting at the elementary school one afternoon, Larry's father — who hadn't said a word since we'd gotten in the station wagon — announced to us: "Larry's going to learn 400 new vocabulary words this winter." I can still see the look of resignation in Larry's face. Mr. Lambert had big plans for Larry, but, because he was almost never home, it fell on Larry's mother to execute them. She kept Larry in his room for an hour each day after school, so that he could study his vocabulary words, which Mr. Lambert had penned in a memo pad that Larry carried in his back pocket.

When Larry finished studying, he could go out and play or invite over a friend — but only one at a time. The one-friend rule placed Larry in the position of having to choose whom

among the pack of neighborhood boys he would invite inside. None of us could stand Larry's banter, nor the smell of his room (he wet his bed), but we all wanted to be picked because we liked his method of maintaining a captive audience. He had inherited an heirloom collection of baseball cards from his Uncle Pete. "Stay ten more minutes," he would say as you started to leave, "and I'll give you a baseball card." I knew how to work this scam for an hour at a time. It's how I got my 1951 Mickey Mantle.

Larry's father came home at 6:00 sharp and told whoever was in the room to "beat it," except on some spring and summer nights, when he stopped before coming inside and sat

down on the front lawn to pull crabgrass and dandelions. On such nights, he sat for a half hour in his starched white oxford shirt and still fastened tie, plucking weeds by hand from a square yard or two. Mr. Lambert groomed his lawn as meticulously as he cared for his flat top, which he reshaped once a week before turning his shears on Larry.

It was after a particularly unfortunate haircut (he wound up looking like Eddie Munster) that Larry took a liking to my father. My father, who worked Saturdays and spent Sundays sipping espresso and reading *The Washington Post*, had joined our Boy Scout troop on what was to be his first and only backpacking excursion. Larry, as usual, had to be driven up the trail with a switch, each of the fathers who accompanied our scoutmaster serving in turn as swineherd. Larry marched ahead a few hundred feet, then crawled under some brush or hid behind a rock and waited to be dragged out by his boots. Instead of prodding Larry up the trail with a stick, my father encouraged him with kind words. Larry slept beside my father in his

Nothing Larry knew changed the fact that he couldn't run ten yards before the weight of his rear dragged him to the ground.

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cess to an unlimited supply of Thai sticks, little wooden skewers of marijuana, cannabis popsicles. He sent Larry a supply each month in an official shipment of State Department mail that was never searched, and, better yet, was paid for by the government. Larry sold the Thai sticks at school and sent a portion of the proceeds to his Bangkok connection, also at the government's expense.

The demands Mr. Lambert placed on Larry grew more stringent when we entered high school. Larry was to get an A in every subject except gym (since an A in gym, given the size of his rear, was impossible). He was to score 750 or above on both the math and verbal portions of the SAT. He would be accepted by Harvard early decision, complete graduate school, and enter into a life of public service, preferably with the State Department.

I found Larry in the woods behind our house, one night, clutching a paper bag I knew was full of Thai sticks.

"My dad kicked me out of the house," he announced. He took a drag on his cigarette. "'Course I'm such a fucking prick, I deserve it."

How's that?"

"I got a C+ on the Advanced Chemistry exam."

"And he kicked you out of the house?"

"No, but he yelled at me," Larry said. "And so I threw a

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"What say we get shish-ka-bobbed?" he said. He told me that this latest shipment included some sticks that had been dipped in opium, but that he couldn't tell by looking whether the one he held was dipped or not. He crumbled a little dried leaf into the bowl of the water pipe and lit it. After my fourth long draw, I felt lightheaded; my body begged to be horizontal.

I think this one's been dipped," I said.

Oh yeah," Larry said. "It's dipped, all right. I'm dipped, you're dipped, the whole world is

dipped." We both fell off the rock and tumbled downhill through the leaves until we came to rest at the base of what Larry identified as *Quercus Coccinea*, a scarlet oak. I lay half on top of Larry, who smelled as though he hadn't bathed in weeks, my arm across his shoulder.

Eventually we untangled ourselves and sat up against the tree. That's when Larry realized that the contents of his jacket pockets had spilled out during our roll. I helped him gather up his things, which included—in addition to the bag of Thai sticks, the bamboo bong, two lighters, rolling papers, and a condom—three small carving knives and a couple of miniature wooden Buddha statues in various stages of completion.

"Did you make this?" I said, picking up a little wooden Buddha.

"Sure," Larry said. "I learned how from an old man who lived down the street from us in Bangkok." He shined his pen-

light on the statue. I had no idea he knew how to carve so well; I'd never seen him with a knife before, not even on Boy Scout camping trips.

"How come you've never shown these to anyone?" I asked.

"Why should I?" he said.

"Because they're beautiful," I said, rubbing my fingers over the blond wood. "I love this little guy."

"Keep it," Larry said, "he's yours." I put the Buddha in my pocket, and for a hazy hour or two, I sat side by side with Larry Lambert, in awe of his handiwork. But when the opium wore off a few hours later, I crawled home, fearing that, despite the dark, someone might have seen me with my arm around him.

Larry failed his next chemistry exam on purpose. He failed a European history exam and then failed even to attend a calculus exam. He rolled joints in his room instead of studying his vocabulary words. Mr. Lambert was kicking Larry out of the house almost every night now, and in the mornings, when my brother or I opened the door to get the paper for my father, we found Larry curled up on the front porch, sleeping in the warmth of the sun like a dog. My father never let Larry's disheveled looks or his pungent odor affect the way he treated him. "Come in, Sir Lawrence," he said, "and join us for croissants."

After the night we shared the opiated Thai stick, Larry took me for a better friend than I could ever be to him. He tagged along with me at school, which was easy because we were both in the advanced classes, and even followed me into the bathroom. He walked two paces behind me, bow-legged because of the herpes he contracted after sleeping with aptly named Allison Slutter, who traded sex for Thai sticks. I almost never said a word to him, and one day, when a gang of football players shoved Larry's head in a toilet and gave him a swirly, I watched without saying or doing anything on his behalf. Larry laughed when they finally dropped him on the floor. "No hard feelings, guys," he said, shaking his wet hair. "Hey, I deserved it. I'm a fuckup. A dickhead. A genuine Class A prick. I should have given myself one long ago."

Probably because I felt so bad after the swirly incident, I agreed to accompany Larry to a Lynyrd Skynyrd concert at RFK Stadium — if he would pay for my ticket, which he gladly did. This isn't as bad as it sounds, because by this time he was

clearing well over \$400 a week with his Thai stick business. It was an Aerosmith concert, actually, with Lynyrd Skynyrd opening for Stevie Tyler and his band, but Skynyrd stole the show with a long, lazy rendition of "Freebird" that built to a fever pitch and ended with a crescendo that seemed to last all afternoon.

When the song was over, the woman sitting in front of us turned around and handed Larry a smoldering joint. Larry took a few puffs, but I declined because I was stuffing my face with a ballpark frank. "This is some smooth shit," Larry said to her. "What is it?" She smiled luridly and said, "Angel dust."

Larry showed no signs of being on PCP when we later entered the men's room. The floor was an inch deep in piss, and guys were urinating in the sinks and against the walls, and this huge biker was standing in the corner and saying, like a mantra, "LSD: Don't be shy, it'll get you high." In one of the stalls, Larry found a woman who was offering blow jobs for three dollars. He hadn't been in the stall two minutes when I heard the woman scream and a body thud against the metal stall divider (all because, as Larry told me later, the dust had made him try to screw her). The woman turned out to be the biker's old lady. The biker opened the stall door, pulled Larry out by his half-lowered pants, and kicked him across the room with the biggest black boot I have ever seen, then went back to saying, "LSD: Don't be shy, it'll get you high."

When we returned home late that evening, Larry's father was sitting on the lawn pulling weeds. He had a pile two feet high and must have spent most of the afternoon scooting around the yard on his rear end. His face was pinched in a tight-lipped scowl and he looked as though it pained him to breath. What we didn't know at the moment was that Larry's SAT scores had come in, and that the results of his experiment — he had filled in his answer sheet in the design of the symbols on Led Zeppelin's "Zoso" album — were not encouraging. In fact, he had virtually eliminated all hope of attending Harvard. Larry and I steered clear of Mr. Lambert and went inside, where we found his mother in the kitchen preparing dinner. Larry must have still been a little high, because he managed with one deft hop to land on the kitchen counter.

"What's for dinner?" he asked his mother.

"Pepper steak," she said.

"All right!" Larry shouted. By now his father was in the room, standing behind me. He pushed me aside, and I must

*My father,
who was retired
now, never tired
of saying, "Come
in Sir Lawrence,
and join me for
espresso."*

have still been stoned, too, because I recall saying, "Easy, dude," and pushing him back.

"What are you so happy about?" he said to Larry.

"No big deal," Larry said, "I'm just hungry."

"Well, keep your voice down, you're no longer competing with a rock band." He glowered at him. "And for Christ sake, get off the counter."

"Make me," Larry said.

"I said get down."

"No."

"Down."

"No fucking way."

"If you don't get down off the counter by the time I count to three," his father said, "I'm going to call the police." Larry refused to budge. So his father called the cops. A squad car showed up fifteen minutes later, and two officers stepped into the kitchen, seeming too big for the room. One of them sniffed at me and shook his head. They spent ten minutes talking Larry down from the counter while his father ranted about the SAT scores and his mother cried, but never stopped fixing dinner. When it was over, Mr. Lambert walked up to me, grabbed me by the collar, and said, "You Goddamn swarthy little twerp, get out of my house." He turned me around and shoved me down the back steps.

Early the next morning, before the rest of the family was up and the traffic got heavy on River Road, my father and I answered the doorbell and found Larry on the front steps: shirtless, shoeless, beltless, wearing nothing but a pair of blue jeans. We had been reading the Sunday paper.

"Good morning, Mr. Simonetti," Larry said.

"And a fine morning it is, Sir Lawrence," my father said. "How can I help you?"

"I think you'd better call the pigs. I just committed statutory rape."

"Larry," my father said, losing his jocularly, "I think you'd better step inside."

"Yep, it's true," Larry said. "Screwed a 14-year-old bitch in the back seat of my father's Benz. I know I shouldn't have done it. Didn't do a thing for me. God, she was ugly. Ugliest girl I've ever seen. Boy, am I a prick. What a fucking prick I am."

My father put his arm around Larry and walked him back to our kitchen. He fixed him a cup of espresso and gave him one of his blue Brooks Brothers shirts, which Larry kept and wore often after that. As it turned out, the girl was almost seventeen, and willing, and Larry was not yet eighteen, and so could not be guilty of statutory rape. Besides, the girl had punched him in the nose before he'd gotten into her, and he ended up jerking off into the back seat of the car. And so, in some sense, the story I told my friends at school the next day was true: Larry had fucked his father's Mercedes.



By the time senior year was over, Larry had totaled the Mercedes and twice pulled the fire alarm at school and been caught smoking hash oil in a neighbor's stolen car. These misdeeds and more he confessed to my father in the most self-deprecating language imaginable. He was lucky to be accepted by, as my mother referred to it, a "small Midwestern college." I wound up going to Princeton to study architecture, which disturbed Mr. Lambert, who stopped waving to members of our family. The reconciliation came only after my father died, when Mr. and Mrs.

Lambert offered to set up and serve brunch at our house while everyone else was at the funeral.

After five years at Princeton, I moved back to Washington to begin my apprenticeship as an intern architect. I decided to live at home, so I could save money and travel to Rome in the summers. Larry had long since been kicked out of school for setting his dorm room on fire. He had then entered and swiftly exited a string of menial jobs, each time showing up at our house and announcing to my father, almost with glee: "Fucked up again, Mr. Simonetti. Call me Larry-the-Fuckup. You won't believe what I did this time. . . ." My father, who was retired now, never tired of saying, "Come in Sir Lawrence, and join me for espresso," or something to that effect. One such afternoon, I found the two of them in the living room, smoking

True Blues and talking about life and jet engines.

We hadn't heard from Larry in several months and knew only that he was bumming a room at the Y.I.P. House on K Street when two policemen showed up at our door wanting to question my father about Larry. My father showed them to the living room and brought them iced coffees; I listened from the kitchen. At one point, my father went upstairs and returned with three of Larry's carved Buddhas, which he showed the policemen and commented on with the enthusiasm he reserved for things Asian. I had no idea my father knew about the Buddhas, much less that Larry had given him not one but three. I went upstairs to look for the Buddha Larry had given me, but I couldn't find it; I still don't know what became of it.

The next night my father walked into my bedroom, where I was drafting, his face ashen. "I just received a call from Larry Lambert," he said. "He's in the D.C. jail for selling cocaine to an undercover policeman."

"He's not your problem," I said.

My father pulled hard on his cigarette and shook his head. He looked down at the floor. "I thought about my lawyer," he said, ignoring my advice, "but I think I'm going to go myself and bail him out." He returned with Larry four hours later, at three in the morning. I was still working on a project that was due the next day. Larry stumbled into my room while my father was talking with my mother in their bedroom. He had let his hair grow down to his shoulders and hadn't shaved in days. On his arm was a tattoo of a marijuana leaf and the motto: "When freedom is outlawed, only outlaws are free." He smelled of beer and had apparently spilled or puked a considerable amount of it on the front of his black T-shirt. His eyes were pinpoints.

"Anthony," he said, his words slurred together, "long time no see."

He held onto my drafting table to keep from falling over.

Larry, I said, "how are you?" A pained and distant expression came over his face. "Hey," I said, "do you still carve those little Buddhas?"

"No," he said, "I don't do Buddhas, anymore." My father's voice echoed down the hall.

"Must be nice," Larry said, nodding toward the hall.

"He's all right," I said.

"Must be nice," Larry said again. My father entered the room and helped him back downstairs, where he had fixed him a bed on the living room sofa. I stayed up drafting all night, and all night, Larry lay on the couch, belching and farting and insulting himself. My father stayed with him. I said goodbye to them in the morning on my way out to work.

That was the last I saw of Larry Lambert. He was convicted and sentenced to two years in jail. My father visited him on Sundays, while my mother was at church, and brought him croissants. He always asked if I wanted to join him, and I always said, "I guess not." When Larry got out after a year and a half, my father convinced him to join the Marines. Larry wrote him a few letters from Parris Island, then abruptly broke off contact. My father died a year later, never to

learn that Larry had killed a man in Miami and was in jail again, for good this time.

On the way home yesterday, I ran into Mr. Lambert, whom I hadn't seen in months. He seemed much shorter and thinner than I remembered him. I offered to serve brunch at their house so that family and friends would be free to attend the funeral. He accepted my offer with a nod, then noted that the funeral would be a small, simple affair. I told him that, no matter what size the funeral, I wanted to repay the generosity that he and Mrs. Lambert had shown our family after my father died. But it was more than that; I wanted to do something for Larry. And I wanted to undertake an act of kindness in memory of my

father, who, unlike me, knew no other way.

SE

Marc Vassallo lives in Charlottesville, Virginia, with his wife Linda, and their young son, Nicholas. Another of his stories will appear in the fall 1995 issue of Ploughshares.

Reaching for Heaven in the Public Schools

The author learned about the real church in first grade.

By Mubarak S. Dahir

Miss Burns had the most beautiful blond hair I had ever seen. Most of the time she wore it high on the back of her head, spun into a tight bun. Sometimes she would wear it in a neat ponytail, pulled back taut in the front so no loose strands dangled in her face. In the back, it flowed silk-like in the groove created by her spine.

I was in love with Miss Burns. I was six years old. She was my first grade teacher.

It was 1970, the time of Vietnam protests and free love and hot pants and rock 'n' roll. And it was the year my family moved to Memphis, Tennessee, the home of Elvis, the crown of the Cotton Queen, and the heart of the Bible Belt.

Like all Americans, Miss Burns was worried about the future of the nation. She told us so. I know now that's why she was a teacher. She wanted to point young minds in the right direction, and with the help of God, she was determined to do it. The last thing that I, her fondest admirer, wanted was to confound her plan.

Miss Burns was a good teacher, too. She must have been, because I loved school almost as much as I loved her.

Except for Mondays. I hated the first day of each week. I couldn't bear the way I always let Miss Burns down.

On Monday morning, right after class attendance and the Pledge of Allegiance, Miss Burns would turn to us and ask the same question. Week after week, I was the only student who failed to give the answer she was looking for.

"Who went to Sunday school yesterday?" she would inquire. "Raise your hand if you went to church," she instructed. As every other child's hand reached for heaven but mine, Miss Burns would gaze at me with a mix of pity and disappointment. And a wave of shame washed over me as I drowned in the sea of up-stretched arms.

Finally, I just wouldn't go to school on Mondays. I couldn't bear Miss Burns' pain or my own self-consciousness as the other kids raised their hands in the Monday morning ritual to God while I sat motionless,

head bowed in embarrassment, not prayer.

If I prayed for anything then, it was to be like all the other kids. To be able to raise my hand with them, to finally make Miss Burns proud of me.

When Mom found out I had been skipping school on Mondays, she wanted to tie me down and whip me. When she found out why, she wanted to tie down and whip Miss Burns.

Dad took another approach. He was a Muslim raised in a Quaker school and now teaching at a Catholic university. He decided there was nothing wrong



It was Christianity first in Sharpe Elementary School, a Memphis public school, in 1970. Mubarak S. Dahir, a Muslim, is in the back row, fourth from left (in the bow tie).

with taking me to Mass. It would be a good idea to expose me to other religions, to broaden my world view, he argued.

The following Sunday Dad dressed me up in a blue suit and red bow tie. We went to the big church on campus, where a man in a black robe made us stand up then kneel, stand up then kneel. When we finally sat down, I fell asleep until Dad nudged me to drop my quarter into the silver bowl being passed down the aisle. Sunday school was more fun. There were lots of other boys and girls, and there was lemonade and cookies. A nice woman who reminded me of Miss Burns, except her hair wasn't as pretty, told us stories. Stories from the Bible, of course, and I knew that would make Miss Burns happy because she was always talking about the Bible.

I was never so eager to go to school as the Monday after church. I couldn't sit still through roll call, and when we said the Pledge of Allegiance, I could feel my heart pounding in my chest.

After the flag pledge, Miss Burns stood behind her desk and posed the faithful question. "Who went to Sunday School yesterday?" she asked. A look of surprise and delight danced across her face as my hand shot in the air with everyone else's.

"Why, Mubarak!" she exclaimed, pleased. "Where did you go?"

All grins, I announced I went to the big church on campus with my Dad, and I went to Sunday school, where they had lemonade and cookies and Bible stories.

I thought Miss Burns would be happy. I thought she'd be proud that I was finally like everyone else. But she was quiet when I finished my tale, and I could tell from the stillness that something was wrong. I wasn't going to heaven after all.

"Well, Mubarak, that doesn't really count." Miss Burns said slowly, trying to explain things to me.

I went home in tears that day, angry at Dad for screwing things up and taking me to a Catholic church instead of a real one, like the Baptist church

Miss Burns went to. On Tuesday morning, Mom went to school with me. Miss Burns was real pleasant and polite, as always. Mom was neither. I was mortified.

Mom made it loud and clear — mostly loud — that Miss Burns was not to ask me ever again if I had gone to Sunday school. We were Muslims, and we did not attend Sunday school, but, Mom reminded Miss Burns, we did attend a public school.

Miss Burns listened to mother's angry words and calmly responded it was her duty to save my soul. Miss

Photos courtesy of Mubarak S. Dahir



Mubarik S. Dahir

Burns was a Christian first, a teacher second.

Mom went to the principal's office, but he agreed with Miss Burns. It was their God-given duty to save my soul.

It took the threat of a lawsuit before the keepers of Sharpe Elementary School agreed that maybe Miss Burns shouldn't ask her class who went to church on Sundays.

Today, the newly elected Republican majority is talking about a Constitutional amendment to re-introduce prayer to the public schools. House speaker-to-be Newt Gingrich

says he wants Congressional passage of the bill before July 4. Bill Clinton has said he would consider such an amendment, that he's never been against prayer in schools, only coercion.

All we want as children is to be liked and to be like everyone else. The last thing we want is to be different.

I think back to my school days with Miss Burns, and I wonder how any school-sanctioned expression of religious belief could not be coercive. And I wonder what my mother could possibly have done or said to change the plight of her 6-year-old son if the legal separation of church and state had been muddied by a Constitutional amendment to prayer in schools.

We already have absolute freedom of religious expression. Children can pray in school — or anywhere else — whenever they so please. What we do not have — and what we must not bring about — is school-led, school-sanctioned religious ceremony. To do so would not be religious freedom, but the worst kind of religious coercion imaginable. It's exactly the kind of thing that so many Americans, especially Christians, came to this country to escape. It would be unethical, unAmerican and unChristian to undermine that by promoting one religion over any other through prayer in the public schools.

We stayed only that one school year in Memphis. Dad found a teaching job in Pennsylvania, and we headed North.

When Mom came to pick me up the last day of school, Miss Burns was there with my report card and all my class projects. She gave me a big hug and a kiss, and started to cry, knowing she'd never see me again. She told Mom she would continue to pray for me.

I'm sure somewhere Miss Burns is still praying for me. I just hope it's not in her classroom.

S

Mubarak S. Dahir is the Philadelphia reporter for Time magazine and a columnist with the Philadelphia Daily News.

Notes from a Feminist Mom

Feminist kids don't travel lightly through the world.

By Sheridan Hill

I'm a flower child who grew up and had kids. A former vegetarian (way before you kids became vegans), I read subversive newsletters put out by the Students for a Democratic Society and the Black Panthers (my cousin in California put me on the mailing list), went to India on a spiritual quest, protested the Vietnam war at the Washington Monument, experimented with drugs, tie-dyed my shirts, and Cloroxed my jeans.

Halfway through the process of raising three children, I see that I have raised young feminists. Listening to them describe their interactions with the world, I continue to be surprised at the way gender consciousness manifests itself in their lives.

My 11-year-old daughter provided more than one moment of introspection for her fifth-grade teacher last year. When the teacher began to explain a concept, she might innocently have said something like, "When a scientist performs an experiment, he documents each step . . ." My Corey would inevitably pipe up, "It could be a *she*."

"What's that, Corey?"

"The scientist. It could be a woman."

When the teacher divided the class for an academic game by giving them cards of different colors, Corey's feminist antennae were raised.

"Why do the boys get blue and the girls get pink?" she demanded. By the end of the school year, the teacher had adjusted her style to circumvent Corey's persistent challenges. A science lesson went like this: "So, class, when this molecule comes in proximity with that molecule, it takes on the properties of the other, the same as when a man and a woman marry — Corey, just let me finish here — the woman sometimes — not always — takes on the man's name."

Corey is winsome, with silky blonde

them became good friends.

I have good reason for imparting feminism to my daughters. A recent study by the American Association of University Women showed that girls out-perform boys in school until age 11 or 12. After that, they fall behind and never catch up. With the onset of puberty, they often forget that their ideas are important and worth expressing, that their dreams matter.

I deliberately exposed my son to feminist viewpoints, figuring I would do the world a favor by turning out a

man who could take care of himself, who had done his own laundry since he was 12, who enjoyed cooking and wasn't ashamed to stop and admire the scent of a wildflower.

Hence, I have raised a son who tirelessly points out my own gender discrimination, particularly in the delegation of chores.

"Why am I the only one you make carry out the trash?" he asked me recently.

We stood eye-to-eye as I studied the question. Didn't I ask the girls to take out the trash as well? No. I reevaluated my

household job delegation, much to the girls' disgust.

Two years ago, when he announced he wanted to get his ear pierced, I knew he had me. I had promoted equality between the sexes for too long to give him an answer different from the one I

Photo by Sheridan Hill



Sheridan Hill's feminist kids (left to right): Sean, Julie, Corey Considine

hair and vivid blue eyes, and remains entirely uninterested in the boys in her class, many of whom try in vain to get her attention. Last year, only one boy succeeded, after writing an essay on why the next president of the United States should be a woman. The two of

had long ago given his two sisters. I took a deep breath and smiled. "Sure. Why not?" I am grateful he hasn't succumbed to the recent boyish fad to

"Why do the boys get blue and the girls get pink?" she demanded.

wear a skirt.

While I am convinced that raising their gender consciousness was the right thing to do, I ache for the feeling of separateness that it sometimes creates between them and their peers.



Sheridan Hill in 1969

My children frequently find themselves in complete disagreement with the common sentiments of their friends and their teachers, which leaves them with two uncomfortable choices: to speak their minds (and risk ostracism and mockery), or to remain silent (and risk losing self-esteem).

Still, I take heart that my children question systems relentlessly, be they social, religious, or political, and that they refuse to accept the notion that males must do this and females must do that. I am particularly proud that they put energy into their ideas and stand behind them. As children, they feel empowered. I pray this is always true. S
E

Sheridan Hill writes and raises children in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

J U N E B U G

Too Heavy to Heist

Storyteller and philosopher Junebug Jabbo Jones tells how he learned about singing saws, melting wood, and getting big.

By Junebug Jabbo Jones

You so little, a strong wind would blow you all the way to west Memphis! You better get up under the wagon and wait till those clouds built up yonder in the western sky pass over." My cousin Ed tried to imitate the way the older men would lean back to wipe the sweat from under their old, battered-up straw hats.

Ed was a tall, strong 14. I was a skinny 10 at the time and felt like everybody else was bigger than I was and that they were always trying to make fun of me. Well, almost everybody. Po Tatum was *the skinniest* somebody I ever knew before or since. Po was so skinny he could hide behind a telephone with his

overcoat on and have room left over.

Po acted as if he didn't mind being skinny, but I minded. What I lacked in size and weight, I tried to make up in energy and quickness. I was quick with a quip, but it didn't take too much for me to go to war either. I guess I took that part from my grandmother. So when Ed hit me with that West Memphis line, I was ready to go up side his head. But considering he was so much bigger than me, I thought it might be better to hit him with a quip than to give him an excuse to bust my lip. All I could think of to say to Ed was, "If it's a wind strong enough to blow me to Memphis, then I'll be there when I get there, and you'll still be here .

. . . in this cotton patch . . . without no cotton to pick . . . 'cause the wind will blow it away . . ."

"Is that all you got to say?" I knew it was weak, but at that time I did not even know where or what West Memphis was. Ed and them laughed at me about that for years.

It wasn't that I wouldn't eat. It was nothing for me to stop by my grandma's house on the way home from school and drink a quart of milk, eat half a fried chicken, two big scoops of potato salad, cole slaw, and sweet potato pie, and then to have a full supper when I'd get home an hour or two later. I'd eat a full plate and go back for seconds. My mother

would tell me, "Boy, don't let your eyes be bigger than your stomach." Whenever she said that I knew I had to clean my plate, no matter how full I felt. But regardless of how much I'd eat, I stayed skinny. I was 30 years old before I started to gain any weight. At first I was glad to be putting on a little size. "They won't be able to call me skinny any more," I thought, so I kept right on eating everything I could get in my mouth. By the time I was 35, I'd gotten so big that I would've had to fight Muhammad Ali if I were a boxer. By the time I was 37, I was so big that when I'd lie down, my belly would stay up. At 40, I couldn't even bend down to tie my shoes. That's when I knew I was in trouble.

The weight problem slipped up on me. Being so much smaller than most everybody else when I was young, I went out of my way to try to prove that I was just as strong as anyone else. If my cousin Ed grabbed a bale of hay and tossed it up on the wagon, I was going to grab a bale of hay, too. Regardless of the fact that Ed had eight inches and seventy-five pounds on me, I'd try it.

Whenever my granddaddy caught me trying to do something like that he would stop whatever he was doing and help me out. When we'd finish, PopPaw would give me something to do that I could handle. "Remember, son, if it's too heavy to heist, it's too heavy to carry."

I took it as an insult. It sounded like he was telling me that I was too small and weak to do a certain thing. I was bound and determined to do anything that anybody else could do. . . . It didn't seem foolish at the time.

PopPaw was always saying things like that when he thought I was getting in over my head. One time I was helping him build a new hen house. I kept on begging him to let me cut a plank with the crosscut saw. I guess he got tired of

my begging him cause he finally let me try.

First thing he did was make me get the tape measure and make some measurements. Then he made me check them three or four times. That got me upset, too. I was anxious to swing into action with my crosscut stroke. But no, I had to get me a tape measure and big L-shaped framing square and go back and forth from the wall we were putting up to the board I was supposed to be cutting, making notes and marks.

Despite my frustration I did what he told me to do. When I was a child, the idea of being rude to a grown person didn't even come up in your mind. There were lots of stories about how our grandmother had backhanded many a child for no greater sin than "*looking like they might have had*" a rude idea run across

their minds. PopPaw was as mellow as MomMaw was hot, but still, the idea of challenging his instruction never crossed my mind.

Finally, my measurements made and checked over and over again, I was ready to lop off the end of that two-by-four and a dozen more like it . . . or so I thought. That devilish piece of wood just would not cooperate. It did not want to be cut. The harder I pushed the saw, the harder it got to get a good clean bite on the wood.

Finally, PopPaw said, "Here, son. Watch." He set the small, sharp teeth at the handle end of the saw near the cut mark I'd made on the wood. He let

the saw make three or four little feather-like bites to get into the meat of the lumber. After a few long, soft, singing strokes, the pungent pine wood bent down from the saw horse like it was kneeling to pray.

I tried to *make* the saw sing its way through the wood like PopPaw did. But it was the next summer that I finally began to get the knack of it. We were patching some holes in the front porch with some tongue and groove flooring boards when

the saw started to sing. "That's it, son," PopPaw coached from the side, "let the saw do the work."

After we got enough wood measured and cut, we were ready to fit the tongues into the grooves to finish our repair job. I set my jaw and struggled to lift the hammer with one hand. Making ready to attack the nails with it, I held it by its skinny neck. "Now wait a minute son," PopPaw said. "See if this hammer here don't make a better fit in your hand. Grip it by the handle, tap the nail a couple of times to get it started, then all you have to do is lift it up and guide it so it falls on the head of the nail. Let the hammer do the work."

I did as he said to do. It was like the nail melted into the wood. Later on that evening after another one of MomMaw's meals, we sat on our newly finished porch rocking to the sound of crickets and katydids. I asked PopPaw why he didn't tell me about letting the hammer and saw do the work last summer while we were working on the hen house. PopPaw thought about my question for a while.

"Well, Junebug," he said, "when I was your age and used to hang out with my grandpa the way you're doing now, he told me that you have to chop up a certain number of boards before you can get a clean cut and bend a certain number of nails before your hammer will drive straight.

"Last summer, it didn't seem like to me that you was of a mind to hear what I was trying to say. I figured it wasn't no point in me wearing my knuckles out knocking, cause it didn't seem to be nobody at home. I couldn't find a fit so I didn't try to force it. You can't solve a problem till you know you're doing something wrong."

PopPaw didn't say anything else. After we'd listened to the creaking of our rocking chairs for a while, I said, "I think I get the idea, PopPaw. If it's too heavy to heist, it's too heavy to carry."

"It seems so to me, son. That's the way it seems to me."

S

Junebug Jabbo Jones sends along stories from his home in New Orleans through his good friend John O'Neal.

By the time I was 37, I was so big that when I'd lie down, my belly would stay up. At 40, I couldn't even bend down to tie my shoes. That's when I knew I was in trouble.

Lending a Helping Hand

The Center for Women's Economic Alternatives keeps helping poultry workers fight for better conditions.

Several years ago, poultry surpassed beef as the meat of choice for Americans, and its popularity just keeps growing. According to recent Census Bureau data, poultry and poultry products sales were \$15.4 billion in 1992, up from \$2.7 billion in 1987. And according to a recent *Wall Street Journal*, the poultry industry has emerged as one of the fastest growing occupations in the country.

In 1989 *Southern Exposure* investigated the rise of the poultry industry and the rough working conditions endured by its workers. At that time the magazine reported on how the Center for Women's Economic Alternatives was helping women in the plants fight for better conditions and for compensation from injuries.

Today, workers need help more than ever. Poultry workers, most of whom are poor black and Hispanic women in the rural South, are expected to process chickens faster than ever, causing more repetitive motion injuries. Other working conditions continue to be difficult. At plants such as Perdue and Tyson, employees work on a high-speed line processing 91 chickens per minute. They stand eight to 10 hours a day in water, chicken fat, and ice.

The most common problems workers develop are repetitive motion illnesses, injuries to the wrists, hands, and back caused by the high speeds of the processing lines. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 693.4 per

10,000 workers in the poultry slaughtering and processing industry suffer from repetitive-stress injuries like carpal tunnel syndrome. Only the meat packing and auto industries have higher rates of injury.

To add insult to injury, nurses and doctors paid by the plants often misdiagnose or fail to tell workers the seriousness of their illnesses. Furthermore, workers say they are fired if they are unable to perform and are not compen-

change for less work or time off. If they refuse, they are given additional work or subjected to further harassment.

The Center for Women's Economic Alternatives in Ahoskie, North Carolina, continues to serve as a resource to workers mistreated and discarded by the poultry industry. Founded in 1984 to combat mistreatment of women in a hosiery mill in Scotland Neck, North Carolina, the center's major thrust is now the poultry industry. Its staff of

four educates, organizes, and supports low-income women's efforts to identify and develop leadership among workers in order to change inhumane working conditions.

The mission of the center is to create a workplace environment free of oppression where women can earn a decent wage without being exploited. Being former poultry workers, CWEA's staff have contacts at the plants and can identify and assist workers who have problems. The center does conduct outreach, and contact workers in their homes, but most workers hear about the center through word of mouth.

The center can help workers in several ways:

WORKPLACE ADVOCACY — We educate and organize workers about unsafe and unhealthy conditions in the workplace. This component of our program enables workers to take the necessary steps to curtail on-the-job hazards and to learn:



Courtesy of CWEA

Annie Hassell, CWEA volunteer, conducts leadership training for former poultry and hosiery workers, Franklinton Center, Enfield, North Carolina, 1994.

sated for doctor visits or medical bills. "They treat us like dogs or worn out shoes," says Shirley Tripp, a former Perdue worker.

In addition to the physical mistreatment, many women at the plants say they are harassed by supervisors and shift foremen for sexual favors in ex-

- Who is eligible for workers compensation?
- What are your rights as a worker?
- What can be done about wage and hour violations (when workers are forced to work "off the clock")?
- Who qualifies for company and government disability?
- What's the difference between sick pay and leave of absence? When do you receive benefits?
- Can I choose my own doctor or do I have to go to the company's?

Since answers to these relatively simple questions are rarely given to workers on the job, the center helps to fill this void.

PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY — The center helps communities and injured workers push for legislation that addresses health and safety of poultry workers. For instance in 1989, a staff member of the center testified at a Congressional hearing on the Whistleblowers Protection Act. As a response to her testimony, North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health division and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health conducted inspections and found violations at a number of Perdue plants.

Thanks to a recent organizing effort by the center and other workplace safety advocates, Perdue has entered into an agreement with the North Carolina Department of Labor to provide ergonomics training to decrease the number of workers with carpal tunnel syndrome. Although the training doesn't address the most pressing problem — line speeds — it is an important beginning.

NATIONAL POULTRY PROJECT — This project brings attention to the injustices inflicted upon all workers, especially in the poultry industry. We assist in educating workers and the public locally, regionally, and nationally. We build support for reducing line speed at poultry plants and for correcting the health

hazards and life-threatening situations faced daily by poultry workers.

In June of this year we hosted a National Poultry Worker's Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. Approximately 100 poultry workers, community activists, and consumers began planning strategies for change in national workplace safety



For more information on poultry workers' conditions contact:

The Center for Women's Economic Alternatives

212 North Maple Street
Ahoskie, NC 27910
Phone# (919) 332-4179
Contact: Liz Sessoms

Helping Hands Center

107 E. Second Street
Siler City, NC 27344
Phone# (919) 742-6100
Contact: Carol Brooke

Workers Fairness Coalition

P.O. Box 1244
Fremont, NC 27830
Phone# (919) 242-3126
Contact: Doris Hall

legislation and conditions. Representatives from several poultry-producing states attended. A National Poultry Workers Network was developed to address needs for information and advocacy in a more organized manner.

LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE — Through a series of training sessions, the Leadership Initiative shows how people may realize their capabilities and use them for improvements in home, school, workplace, and community.

Skill-building sessions enhance self-esteem, expose workers to various types of leaders, and offer an outlet for implementing what they have learned. As a re-

sult of participating in CWEA's leadership programs, three workers have joined the center's board of directors and three now serve as leadership facilitators.

Injured workers serve as a valuable resource in CWEA's work with youth. They encourage children to pursue an education so they will not have to work in the plants. Children of injured workers also lend perspective. They describe taking on responsibilities in addition to their homework, getting by on limited income when one parent isn't working, and the stress of losing their childhood.

The religious community also plays a key role in CWEA's work. Most of the workers are affiliated with churches in the area and need the financial assistance, emotional healing, and one-on-one counseling that their religious community can provide. Through the churches, the center has raised the awareness of people who are not familiar with carpal tunnel syndrome and the devastating effect it has on the community.

Sometimes the center's building is simply a place where people can go to feel that they aren't alone in their struggles. "CWEA is a home away from home," says Linda Hawkins, a former Perdue worker. Adds Annie Burden, a former poultry worker, "CWEA is there when you need someone who cares."

CWEA understands that its work isn't going to change the conditions of workers overnight. But the center is confident that it plays an important role in helping workers to develop a sense of power and control in their communities and lives.

CWEA isn't trying to close the poultry plants because workers need the jobs. But the center wants to make sure that workers receive a decent wage and compensation when they are injured. CWEA works to see that the next generation of workers doesn't have the same troubles and injustices found in the plants today.



Appalachia Revisited

New works about the region uncover possibilities in the roads not taken.

By John Alexander Williams

APPALACHIA'S PATH TO DEPENDENCY: RETHINKING A REGION'S ECONOMIC HISTORY, 1730-1940

By Paul Salstrom.

University Press of Kentucky, 1994. 204 pages; bibliography, index. \$30 (hardback)

READY FOR HARVEST: CLEARCUTTING IN SOUTHERN APPALACHIA

A videotape directed by Anne Lewis Johnson. Appalshop Film and Video, Whitesburg, Kentucky, 1993. Color, 29 minutes. \$165 (including shipping)

As much as any book published on Appalachia during the last few years, *Appalachia's Path to Dependency* commends itself to both scholars and activists. Paul Salstrom tackles the question that has bedeviled all of us for years. How did Appalachia come to be so bad off? He sets up the historical problem in the first words of his introduction: "As of 1840, southern Appalachia figured as one of the most self-sufficient regions of the United States. By 1940, it had become one of the country's least self-sufficient regions." What went wrong?

To appreciate the importance of the question, it is useful to review thinking on this point over the past 30 years. Appalachia attracted policy makers' attention around 1960 because of the challenge that its economy posed to the sector theory of economic growth. This theory, which then prevailed in both do-

mestic and foreign policy, held that an "export base" of extractive industry was a necessary prelude to mature economic development. The earnings from exports generated the investment capital required for the growth of manufacturing and service industries, which in turn would yield the social and cultural dividends we associate with a fully developed modern society.

But Appalachia was still stuck in the export phase, a contradiction that lodged in the craw of the world's most developed economy. The region still shipped its raw materials to other parts of the country. Meanwhile the regional infrastructure, especially roads, schools, and health care, remained shockingly inferior to the rest of the nation.

The revival of national attention on the region in the 1960s set off a new debate about the underlying cause of the region's dependency. One was the "culture of poverty" thesis applied most influentially to Appalachia in Jack Weller's *Yesterday's People* (1965) and in the writings of Harry Caudill. Proponents of this theory held that Appalachian people themselves bore part of the blame for their plight by virtue of cultural preferences that (it was variously argued) were brought from Europe or derived from the mountaineers' struggle against their rugged environment. These preferences were in any case dysfunctional for people now forced to adapt to modernity.

A second theory drew an analogy to the post-colonial Third World and was articulated largely in response to the first. This held that Appalachia and its people were the victims of a "colonial

economy," their labor and resources exploited by outside capital. In this view, Appalachian culture was not dysfunctional but represented a rational response to the realities of life under industrial capitalism.

A third, somewhat "greenish" variant, to which this reviewer contributed, held that Appalachia's marginalization represented the typical fate of mountain regions trapped inside continental economic systems. Remedies could only be successful that took into account the inherent environmental limitations of mountain life.

Salstrom's contribution is a complex and highly original weave of many of these ideas buttressed by theoretical borrowings from Third World economists such as West Indian W. Arthur Lewis and Argentine Raul Prebisch. Appalachia flourished in the early and mid-19th century, Salstrom argues, because its settlers created an economy well-suited to their environment. They produced an easy self-sufficiency in foodstuffs and used the Appalachian forest as open range for an export product—livestock—that could walk itself to markets over indifferent mountain roads. Profits from the export sector were reinvested in the region's industrial beginnings and also in its early resort industry, all of which at mid-century remained under local control.

Two subsequent developments sent the region into an accelerating decline. One was its expansion into the further recesses of the Appalachian plateau, whose steep hillsides and narrow valleys were uncongenial to subsistence farm-

ing. Continued high population growth and the subdivision of arable land among large families into smaller and smaller units made mountain farming ever more intensive, destructive, and impoverished. In this regard, Salstrom argues, Appalachia's decline was self-induced.

But its acceleration owed as much to national policy, specifically to the banking legislation enacted during the Civil War, which dried up the principal locally controlled sources of investment capital and forced local entrepreneurs into minority partnerships with metropolitan capitalists. Farmers in the competing Midwest, meanwhile, benefited from homestead and land grant laws that showered them with free land and subsidized transportation. Thus Appalachia became an "energy colony" of the Northeast and Midwest. Absentee owners with privileged access to capital developed its timber and mineral resources. Its people — no longer self-sufficient — were obliged to seek "public work" (as industrial employment was called). At the same time, they were willing to work for lower wages than Yankees would accept. They invested their labor in mines, sawmills, and textile factories, becoming a rural proletariat.

During the 20th century, Salstrom argues, the region's industrial work force outgrew its ability to subsidize itself from the gleanings of mountain farms. The result was a florescence of labor radicalism during the 1910s and '20s among textile workers and coal miners. It also resulted in the beginnings of mass migration, which was obscured by high birth rates.

The New Deal and the triumph of industrial unionism during the 1930s finished off the region, making it permanently dependent on the export of people to lowland cities and on transfer payments to a large proportion of those who remained. To some readers this will be a startling conclusion, since New Deal programs mitigated real hardship during the Depression. These programs also stimulated a militant union movement and played an important role in halting the environmental degradation caused by the multiplication of mountain farms. Salstrom concedes as much, but he emphasizes the negative side of New Deal programs. They stimulated cycles of mechanization that eventually led to mass layoffs and migration.

In agriculture, Washington subsidized the field crops and dairy products of commercial farmers in the Northeast, Midwest, and lowland South while ignoring solutions that might have promoted the revival of a sustainable mountain agriculture. Government transfer payments "monetized" the "borrow and barter" systems that had sustained people during earlier hard times. "The results left many full-time farm families genuinely dependent on regular money income by the time nine years of government aid had ended. Many . . . then followed the trail of government money in

The New Deal and the triumph of industrial unionism during the 1930s finished off Appalachia.

the 1940s and took defense-related jobs outside Appalachia."

The overall thrust of the book is to prove that Appalachia's dependency was not foreordained by humans or by nature, that alternatives existed and that some alternatives are still viable. In his concluding chapter, Salstrom argues for the revival of "non-monetized" economic relationships and for policies that support the sustainable agriculture that was rejected in favor of capital-intensive farming by the experts of the New Deal. Salstrom's conclusions reinforce the notion that Appalachia, rather than being the great national exception it was thought to be during the 1960s, may in fact be the trial ground of the entire nation's fate as it drifts toward dependency within the global economy.

The relevance of this book to present-day Appalachia is demonstrated by a new Appalshop video by Anne Lewis Johnson. *Ready for Harvest: Clearcutting in Southern Appalachia* shows the efforts by environmentalists and community activists to halt

clearcutting in western North Carolina's national forests. The video touches upon the role of the forest in traditional Cherokee and Appalachian culture, but the most telling passages indict the government-business partnership in the Appalachian forest industry. In the Forest Service's relations with the forest products industry, we see the melding of federal subsidies and private profits that the New Deal called forth in commercial agriculture. And as Salstrom shows, it was New Deal government agriculture programs that were in part responsible for the unraveling of the Appalachian economy of the 1930s.

The Forest Service was not itself a New Deal program. It originated in the conservation era of the early 20th century with its ideals of efficiency and expertise. But New Deal policies contributed to the current crisis by greatly expanding national forest acreage. The New Deal also endowed the forests with recreational facilities that called into existence another constituency, one that would eventually challenge the experts' prevailing wisdom about what uses are appropriate to the "mix" of uses for the forests.

The video documents the experts' resentful response to the environmentalists' challenge, reflecting the hardening of bureaucratic arteries that can afflict old agencies once dedicated to higher public service ideals. Forest Service personnel were unwilling to accede to opponents' claims that clearcutting was an unsound practice. "Traditionally, most of the people in the Forest Service are professional foresters like us," a spokesman for Champion International Corporation states, ". . . and we serve in the same professional societies and work on a lot of the same projects, and I think indeed you'd find that the forest products companies and the Forest Service together have done a lot of joint projects that have been very beneficial for both."

Which is precisely Johnson's point. It might be added that both groups went to the same forestry schools, whose professors move comfortably through revolving doors into leadership positions in the professional associations and compete with one another for government and corporate grants and contracts. The ties that bind these groups into a community of interest are transparent to any disinterested viewer of the video.



So harmful is clearcutting to the environment that even the Bush administration was appalled by the Asheville Forest Service headquarters' official devotion to subsidized industrial forestry.

That such a community of interest also exists among community spokespeople and environmentalists and allied “outsiders” is implied but by no means demonstrated by the video. In one poignant scene, Betty Ballew of Black Mountain, North Carolina, stands in a graveyard, reminiscing about an uncle who made his living from the forest for decades without owning any part of it. This traditional form of mixed use — treating the forest as a “commons” from which game, plants, and timber could be harvested as needed and animals grazed without regard to questions of land ownership — has all but disappeared. It is doubtful that many of those who oppose clearcutting on environmental or aesthetic grounds actually want to bring back the forest commons in this sense. For the most part, the video’s portrayal of traditional mixed use is an exercise in nostalgia.

The viability of selective tree cutting is well argued in the film, however, and

the Forest Service’s scientific arguments for clearcutting are effectively undermined by the counter-arguments of retired forester, Walton Smith of Franklin, North Carolina. Clearcutting is advantageous only from the standpoint of industrial foresters, who can now produce commercial wood products that can be made (with generous use of chemical bonding agents) from what was formerly regarded as trash trees or waste by-products, he points out.

So harmful is clearcutting to the environment that even the Bush administration was appalled by the Asheville Forest Service headquarters’ official devotion to subsidized industrial forestry. As a result, the officials shown in the film now embrace — with great reluctance — the concepts of selective harvesting and biodiversity. This spectacle occurred too late to be captured in the video. Another hopeful development not conveyed in the video is the emergence of a sustainable forestry underground within the

Forest Service, which in turn reflects a similar insurgency among the students and younger faculty of the forestry schools.

The Appalachian forest, still unmatched in its diversity despite depletions of the past hundred years and now approaching its second growth maturity, promises to be the frontier of both scholarship and activism during the next several years.

Appalachia’s Path to Dependency provides a useful guide to wrong turns and to paths not taken in the past. *Ready for Harvest*, though it misses the late-breaking news, shows clearly the values at stake. Anyone seriously interested in the mountains will have to look seriously at both of these works.

§

John Alexander Williams has published three books on West Virginia history and directs the Center for Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina.

Mountain Memoirs

Two books of personal experiences of life in Appalachia illuminate new facets of common experiences.

COLORED PEOPLE: A MEMOIR

By Henry Louis Gates Jr.
Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1994
\$22 (hardback)

"I am not Everynegro. I am not native to the great black metropolises: New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles, say. Nor can I claim to be a 'citizen of the world.' I am from and of a time and a place — Piedmont, West Virginia — and that's a world apart, a world of difference. So this is not a story of a race but a story of a village, a family, and its friends."

So writes Harvard professor and noted author Henry Louis Gates Jr. in the preface to his story of growing up as part of a tiny minority, the "colored people," of Mineral County in the 1950s and 60s.

In Piedmont, Gates learned about the civil rights movement, not firsthand, but on television. Tumultuous events were "no more than a spectator sport in Piedmont. It was almost like a war being fought overseas."

Civil rights seemed far away indeed: "... white and colored Piedmont got along pretty well in those years, the fifties and early sixties. At least as long as colored people didn't try to sit down in the Cut-Rate ... or move into the white neighborhoods, or dance with, date, or dilate upon white people. Not to mention try to get a job in the craft unions at the paper mill. ..."

Attending the newly integrated school, Gates became a star pupil. Good humoredly he shares the awkwardness and longings of his childhood and of his spiritual awakening.

As a teenager he loved the emerging black consciousness, "the summer of 1966, the summer when Stokely Carmichael announced something he called 'Black Power' and many of the Negroes became black people and grew big Afros and started wearing dashikis and beads."

He soon left his small mountain community for the wider world. Today Gates remembers Piedmont mostly as a "sepia time." Gates is a fine storyteller, painting vivid portraits of family and friends and of his own coming of age. He has composed an intimate story of his memories, bitter and sweet.

MY OWN COUNTRY: A DOCTOR'S STORY OF A TOWN AND ITS PEOPLE IN THE AGE OF AIDS

By Abraham Verghese
Simon & Schuster, New York 1994
\$23 (hardback)

A foreign doctor comes to a small Appalachian city in east Tennessee in the early 1980s. He becomes the local expert on the new disease of AIDS, and a small but steadily increasing stream of patients journeys from Virginia, Kentucky, and rural Tennessee communities to see him.

Raised in Ethiopia of Indian background, Abraham Verghese has come to Johnson City to find a home. The outsider feels a kinship with the gay community; they are also outsiders.

Many of his patients had moved back to homes they had once left for the more accepting cities. "It was the story of the hard and sometimes lonely journeys they took far from home into a world more complicated than they imagined and far more dangerous than anyone could have known." They had returned home to die.

Verghese describes Johnson City and the gay scene there with great understanding. The feelings of the place and time if not all the details are correct. Some details and generalizations do cause concern, however. "In the little hollows one could see the trailer with no underpinning and dogs all around it and children playing under it." This descrip-

tion is extreme. The stories of the elderly veterans he treats lack dimension; they seem slightly ridiculous. Verghese's credibility is also damaged by complaining that he was underpaid. In most professions, his internist's salary would be considered substantial.

Finally, when Verghese leaves Johnson City, he says it is for a "cooling-off period" in an outpatient clinic in Iowa. He doesn't mention that he has been accepted at the Iowa Writer's Workshop. It's a nonfiction book but such omissions make one wonder how much of this volume is life, and how much is art? Ultimately, this kind of distortion may be justifiable. Precisely because the book is so artfully composed, a portrait emerges of AIDS coming to this town, real and powerful.

—Pat Arnow

APPALACHIA INSIDE OUT

Edited by Robert J. Higgs, Ambrose N. Manning, and Jim Wayne Miller
University of Tennessee Press
Vol. 1, 376 pages
\$35 (hardback) \$17 (paper)
Vol. 2, 432 pages
\$35 (hardback) \$17 (paper)

For anyone who wants to know what has been going on in Appalachian literature and scholarship for the past two decades, *Appalachia Inside Out* is the place to look. This two-volume sequel to the mainstay Appalachian anthology, *Voices from the Hills*, is a comprehensive collection by more than 200 contributors. They represent a veritable Who's Who of the region's scholars, fiction writers, and poets. This anthology gives weight to the editors' suggestion that the region has witnessed a renaissance in the production of imaginative and critical writing.

Forthcoming in June.

Women in Politics

**Women are not well represented in Southern legislatures —
“God didn’t want women running things,” is one explanation.**

By Mary Lee Kerr

Although women have wielded political influence in the South for centuries, they still are not as successful as their sisters elsewhere in breaking through the glass ceilings of Southern legislatures. “Part of it is lack of experience in playing politics in the South,” says Natalie Davis, a political scientist at Birmingham Southern College in Alabama. “Women are not on boards of directors nor have they penetrated the business community.”

From colonial times, Women have found creative ways to express their political wishes. In Edenton, North Carolina, 51 women staged their own version of the Boston Tea Party in 1774, signing a set of resolutions to boycott British goods until “acts which tend to enslave this our Native country should be repealed.”

In the 19th century, the antislavery work of Southern women such as Angelina and Sarah Grimke, Ida Wells-Barnett and Jessie Daniel Ames

paved the way for the battle ... the battle for their own freedom to vote. But only four Southern states adopted women’s suffrage before the Constitutional amendment in 1920 made it national law.

While many of the first women in office replaced their deceased husbands, it wasn’t until in the 1960s and ’70s that more women became involved in electoral politics. Fannie Lou Hamer, the daughter of sharecroppers, helped form the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in 1964, providing representatives to the Democratic National Convention as an alternative to the all-white delegation. Barbara Jordan of Texas and Marilyn Lloyd of Tennessee were early Congresswomen.

But getting into office has been and continues to be harder for Southern women than for women in other parts of the country. In 1975, there were three Southern women in the U.S. House of Representatives and none in the Senate. In 1995, just one of the eight women in the Senate is Southern, and 11 of the 48 women in the House.

Southern state legislatures are also poorly represented by women, according to figures from the Center for the American Woman and Politics in New Brunswick, New Jersey. In

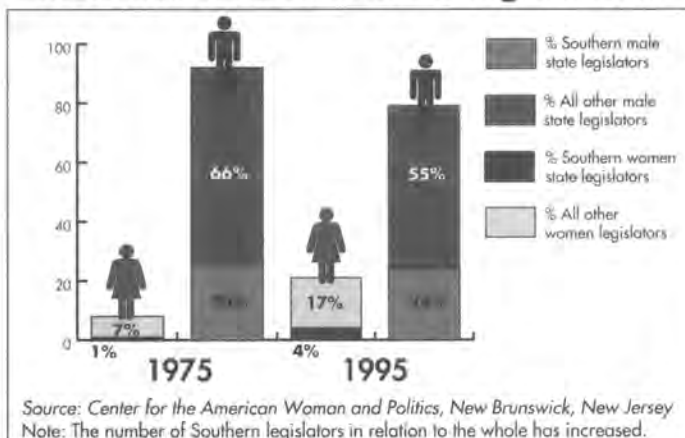
1975, there were just 90 women in all Southern state legislatures, four percent of all members. In 1995, the number has increased to 14 percent, with 278 women elected among 2,054 legislators. Florida does best in the South with 31 woman lawmakers. Alabama ranks worst nationwide with only six women in its 140-member legislature.

“The first year I was in there it was rough. A lot of them were really ugly,” says Ann Bedsole, a veteran of the Ala-

bama legislature. “One of them said, ‘we just didn’t want any women in here.’ After that they treated me like one of them.” After serving four years in the Alabama House and 12 in the Senate, Bedsole ran for governor in 1994. She made it through the primary but lost in the Republican run-off.

While Bedsole attributes her defeat mainly to her late entrance in the race and her strong position on education reform, she says being a woman was also a factor. “It was a

Men and women in state legislatures



shock to me that I couldn’t raise money. Where men would give me \$100, they would give someone else [a man] \$1,000.” Bedsole adds that her male opponent used her gender against her in the campaign. He echoed the view of the religious right that “God didn’t want a woman running things.”

Bedsole and other Alabama women created a political action committee (PAC) called the Alabama Solution in an effort to encourage women to enter political races and help them raise money. Over the two years of its existence, the PAC has raised \$140,000 from 400 contributors and supported 30 woman candidates.

“We’ve made a lot of headway,” says Cameron Vowell, an Alabama Solution board member. “Men have to run three times to be elected. So we tell women if they give money to a woman who runs for the legislature, and she loses, it’s not a wasted investment — if she signs up again.”

While it’s a slow process getting women in the legislature, Vowell is not discouraged. “I know that with more women there, the performance of the legislature will improve.” she says.

S

Mary Lee Kerr is research director of the Institute for Southern Studies.

Photo by Rob Amberg



Cut burley tobacco cures in the field before it is moved to the barn, Madison County, North Carolina. It may be the end of an era for tobacco farmers. "A New Leaf," page 40.

There are difficult and ambiguous, but crucial and unexamined links between the specific geography of a region, the kind of people attracted to it, the quality of life carved out of a region, and the influence of a region and its people upon a national consciousness ..."

—John Opie, *Appalachia/America*

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Cover photo of Charles Barkley courtesy of the Phoenix Suns, inset photos by Kenneth Murray and Frances Benjamin Johnston