

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

A JOURNAL OF POLITICS & CULTURE

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Proud Threads

Twenty years
after beating
J.P. Stevens, what
have textile
workers won?

ALSO

White Gold

Lulu's Story



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From the Editor

W

hen we redesigned *Southern Exposure* following our 20th anniversary last year, we wanted to make it easier for readers to find out more about the subjects discussed in the magazine. We also wanted to strengthen movements for social and economic justice by linking grassroots groups with useful resources.

So we decided to include three new resource listings in every issue: a directory of organizations and publications featured in our cover section, a "toolbox" of resources related to our "Blueprint" department, and a separate department listing a variety of new and exciting books, videos, and reports.

Within a week we started hearing from readers. David Grant, executive director of Rural Southern Voice for Peace, wrote to say that he was glad our article on "Repealing the Death Penalty" described the Listening Project in Virginia. Unfortunately, we neglected to mention that RSVP was responsible for planning and developing the project.

"We would like your readers to know that RSVP should be listed in your Toolbox," Grant wrote. "We'd love to help other groups use the Listening Project . . . on the death penalty issue or any other."

Letters from other organizations soon followed, taking us to task for failing to include them in our resource listings. More than one questioned our motives. "Is it because we are women of color that our contributions go unseen or forgotten?" wrote one.

"I do not have a clue why you chose not to at least contact us for information about your piece," wrote another. "At a minimum, we would appreciate if you would list us as a resource in your next issue — and perhaps address the fact that you did not research your story very well."

Such anger and suspicion from our friends suggests just how seldom understaffed and overworked grassroots groups get the attention they deserve. These folks are struggling hard, day in and day out, to make the South a better place to call home. When they don't see their work included in a movement-friendly journal like *Southern Exposure*, it hurts.

We're genuinely sorry we overlooked some important groups — and we'll keep on trying to include as many as possible in each issue. A few we neglected to mention in past issues are listed on page 63.

Still, no matter how hard we try, we'll never be able to include everyone; there are simply too many organizations deserving of credit and exposure. The best we can do, being an understaffed and overworked group ourselves, is to continue devoting space to highlight a few of the many — and to continue relying on readers like you to let us know when we miss someone.

Such anger and suspicion from our friends suggests just how seldom grassroots groups get the attention they deserve.

—Eric Bates

BECKWITH GUILTY OF KILLING EVERS

On a hot June night in 1963, Byron De La Beckwith waited in a honeysuckle thicket with a high-powered rifle outside the home of Medgar Evers in Jackson, Mississippi. Shortly after midnight, he shot the civil rights leader in the back from 200 feet away.

Beckwith bragged to others about killing Evers. He made loud and cruel remarks about blacks and Jews. His Enfield 30.06 rifle, identified as the murder weapon, carried his fingerprints.

Beckwith was arrested and tried twice in 1964. Both times, all-white juries deadlocked on the verdict. During his second trial, it was revealed later, state officials secretly aided his defense by giving his attorneys information about the racial and religious beliefs of prospective jurors.

Beckwith went free. The governor shook his hand and he returned home a hero, honored with a parade and given money by supporters.

Thirty years after the first trial — on the same day and in the same courtroom — Beckwith went on trial for the third time for the murder of Evers. This time, a jury of eight blacks and four whites heard the evidence. This time, after deliberating for seven hours on February 5, they found Beckwith guilty.

The court room resounded with wild cheers. "I'm happy! I'm so happy!" said Darrell Evers, who

HEAR YE, Y'ALL!

Judge Oliver Noble used to open his court in Hickory County, North Carolina each morning with a few introductory remarks about legal procedures.

The problem was: Nobody was listening.

"My remarks just seemed to create confusion," the judge told *The Charlotte Observer*. "And no matter how many times I gave that introduction, I would always forget to tell people about something."

No Noble, a former college disc jockey, decided to jazz up the judicial system. Now he opens his court with a 14-minute tape that mixes information about court procedures, fines, and schedules with show tunes and country music.

"Using the tape gets people to come into

the courtroom and listen rather than milling around out in the hallway, trying to find out what's going to happen from their co-defendants," said Noble.

Noble wrote a four-page script for the tape and picked music to liven it up, including the themes from the *National Geographic Explorer* series, *Masterpiece Theater*, and *Dances With Wolves*. At the end of the tape, country star Lee Greenwood belts out the national anthem, bringing everyone in the courtroom to their feet as Noble enters.

No one seems to consider the electronic introduction out of order. "The reaction I've seen is that people are more attentive and respectful than they have been in the past," said lawyer Ralph Yount. "People put their hands over their hearts during the anthem. You wouldn't necessarily expect that reaction in court."



was nine when his father was killed. "This man took away my father, and he bragged about it. I came back for the trial so he

could see the face of the man he shot. He saw his back; now, when he looks at me, he can see his face."

Hinds County Circuit Judge L. Breland Hilburn immediately sentenced Beckwith, now 73 years old, to life in prison. Minutes later, Beckwith emptied his pockets and entered the county jail.

Civil rights leaders hailed the verdict as an indication of how much things have changed since the days when Evers and others struggled to end segregation. "There is truly a new Mississippi on the horizon," said the Reverend Joseph Lowery of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. "In the previous trials there were no African Americans on the jury. This time the majority were black, and the whites agreed to let justice prevail. We can all take heart."

"I believe the verdict shows Mississippi has finally come to terms with itself," agreed Earl Shinhoster, Southeastern director of the NAACP, which employed Evers as a field secretary. "The conviction, though 30 years late, proves that, as the prophet Amos said, justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream."

Among those who pressed hardest for justice in the murder of Evers was his widow, Myrlie. She has the only surviving transcript of the original trial, which she bought from the court reporter at the time and has kept in a safe deposit box ever since.

"I had to jump in the air and shed some tears," she told reporters after Beckwith was convicted. "I had to raise my face and say, 'Medgar, I've gone the last mile of the way and this is the verdict.'"



"I'VE GONE THE LAST MILE OF THE WAY AND THIS IS THE VERDICT," SAID MYRLIE EVERS.

Photo by Associated Press

ALL-WHITE TOWN WANTS TO SECEDE

White flight is nothing new. For decades, white residents have been fleeing to the suburbs, blaming inner-city blacks for everything from high crime to lower property values.

But in Hemingway, South Carolina — population 2,500 — this time-honored tradition of racism has taken on a new twist. White residents want to flee not into the suburbs, but into another county. And they want to make the move not as individuals, but as an entire town.

Since 1985, white residents in Hemingway have been trying to secede from Williamsburg County, which is 65 percent black, and become part of neighboring Florence County, which is 63 percent white. They say the Williamsburg County government has failed to deliver adequate services, and insist that local schools are not providing a good education for their children.

A review of education statistics tells a different story. Despite having fewer resources, Williamsburg actually boasts a lower dropout rate than Florence and spends more per capita on education than its white neighbor.

But all that would change if Hemingway secedes. The town provides 10 cents of every

county tax dollar, over 500 factory jobs, and three schools that provide an education to nearly 1,000 black students who are bused into Hemingway each weekday.

Whites lost a bid to secede in 1985 when blacks, who then comprised 35 percent of the town, voted against the measure. Since then, Hemingway has rigged support for secession by quietly shifting city boundaries to annex white areas and exclude black neighborhoods. Today only 20 blacks reside in Hemingway.

When another vote was scheduled for January, the NAACP staged a protest march and filed a lawsuit in federal court to stop the move. The issue has been put on hold while the Justice Department investigates whether the move would illegally dilute the voting strength of black residents in Florence County.

"The real losers in all of this will be the black students who go to school in Hemingway," says Brenda Reddix-Smalls, an attorney representing black citizens opposed to secession. "Because of the way the annexation has occurred, black parents can't even vote on activities that will have a significant impact on their children. This is racial apartheid at its worst."

— Ron Nixon

Police Chief Johnnie Johnson said the marchers did not have a parade permit. "The sergeant in charge asked them to move over to the sidewalk," he said. "The officer has a right to disperse those persons involved in an illegal gathering. I understand Mace was sprayed in some people's eyes. That is normal procedure. Actually, we suggest that over a nightstick or guns."

The protesters — and a video shot by one of the marchers — told a different story. "We were marching peacefully," said Vincent Muzon of the Ujima Youth Organization, which marched with members of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement. "A white cop pulled in front of us and started moving his car like he was going to hit us. We were being respectful and he started assaulting us."

The fighting subsided after an hour, but was rekindled when police sprayed Mace in the eyes of a 12-year-old girl. "My cousin was being beat to the ground," said Maiyai Taal of Atlanta. "When I ran over to help, the police turned around and sprayed me in the eyes with the Mace."

More than 30 police cars from across the city converged on the scene. Some marchers responded by cursing officers, calling the whites "crackers" and "KKK."

Afterwards, marchers told re-

POLICE BEAT YOUTH ACTIVISTS

When 40 black teenagers marched through downtown Birmingham on Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday, the civil rights movement seemed alive and well. Youth activists wanted to protest racism and to hold an anti-violence rap concert at a housing project.

Instead, they ran into the kind of racism and violence that reminded many of the days when city police led by Eugene "Bull" Connor attacked peaceful protesters with dogs and firehoses.

As the marchers reached the steps of City Hall, Birmingham police ordered them to disperse. Officers then waded into the crowd, beating the youth with nightsticks and spraying them with Mace.

Fourteen protesters were detained; three adults and two teens were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct and assault-

ing police. Three officers suffered broken bones — apparently when they were accidentally struck by other officers.

"To my knowledge, this is the first time something like this has happened since the days of Bull Connor," the Reverend Abraham Woods told *The Atlanta Constitution*. "I just hate for King's birthday to be marred by this kind of police action — and in Birmingham, Alabama of all places."

Youth activists organized the march to protest the planned opening of a Browning Ferris Industry garbage facility in the mostly black neigh-

borhood of Titusville. Local leaders call the facility an example of environmental racism, and have asked the city to deny BFI a permit to operate.



BIRMINGHAM POLICE DETAINED 14 PROTESTERS AFTER ATTACKING TEENS WITH CLUBS AND MACE.

Photo by Hal Yeager/Birmingham News

porters they were stunned by the violence. "This is what happened back when my mother and father were growing up," Muzon said. "I thought the KKK was over with."

"How can you even think that?" shouted a sobbing teenage girl. "Ain't nothing changed."

Unlike the days when Bull Conner ruled Birmingham, the city has a black mayor, a black police chief, and a black majority on city council. After viewing a video of the march, Mayor Richard Arrington ordered an investigation into police conduct.

Organizers planned to stage another march on March 4 to demand that the city fire officers who used excessive force. The Youth Task Force of the Southern Organizing Committee for Social and Economic Justice issued a national call for support.

"The police were heavy-handed," said Judy Hand-Truitt, a SOC member who took part in the march. "It was a police riot."

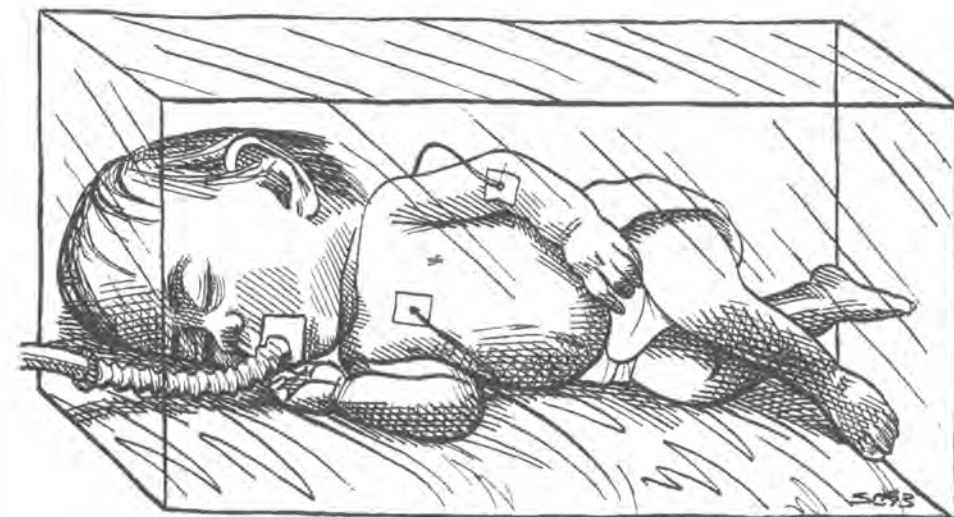
WORKERS BLOCKADE ARKANSAS BRIDGE

Sixty-one labor activists were arrested on December 11 after hundreds marched through Memphis and blocked the main interstate highway crossing the Mississippi River into Arkansas.

The blockade of the Hernando DeSoto Bridge was designed to protest the failure of the Clinton administration to protect the right of workers to organize. At a rally before the march, speaker after speaker blasted the growing anti-union backlash by business, and the failure of the federal government to stop it.

"Every year 10,000 workers are fired exercising their constitutional right to free association, trying to join a union," said Jack Sheinkman, president of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU).

Sheinkman singled out Earle Industries, an Arkansas manufacturer which has fired organizers and opposed efforts to negotiate a contract. Instead of supporting workers, a state court recently issued an injunction banning union



THE SPOILS OF WAR

VETS BLAME WAR FOR SICK KIDS

When soldiers returned from the Gulf War three years ago, they received a hero's welcome. Politicians hailed their four-day assault on Iraq as a stunning victory for democracy, and pundits proclaimed that their display of American might would ease the national distrust of war that has prevailed since Vietnam.

As the months passed, however, many veterans began feeling sick. Symptoms included swollen glands, chronic fatigue, aching joints, skin rashes, and memory loss. Baffled, doctors dubbed the mysterious illness "Gulf War Syndrome." Politicians and the media paid little attention to the health problems.

Now, health officials are reporting that many children born to veterans since the war are suffering from a variety of ailments. According to Dr. Russell Tarver of the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Jackson, 37 of 55 children born to Mississippi veterans have health problems.

The children of veterans are not eligible for care from the Department of Veterans Affairs. VA officials in Mississippi say they plan to study medical records to see whether there is a link between birth ailments and war service.

Ammie West gave birth to her first child in February 1992, a year after her husband Dennis

returned from the Gulf War. It was a girl, Reed, and she suffered from abnormal lungs. "At the time, I felt like it was something that just happened," said West, a resident of Waynesboro, Mississippi.

But then West learned that 12 of the 15 babies born to other veterans who served with her husband in the 624th Quartermaster Company of the Mississippi Army National Guard also have health problems.

Members of the 624th, a refueling unit, have testified before the House Veteran Affairs Committee that they were often soaked in diesel fuel for hours at a time during the war. Members of the committee blasted officials at the Pentagon and Veterans Affairs for ignoring the illness and allowing it to spread. "This officially opens a new chapter in the controversy over the Gulf War Syndrome, with the children being involved," said Representative Glen Browder of Alabama.

Representative Stephen Buyer of Indiana, who served in the gulf and suffers from the syndrome, said he and his wife decided not to have a third child because of the chemicals he was exposed to during the war. "This is almost like AIDS before AIDS was diagnosed and before it had a name," Buyer said.

protests.

Recalling that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated after coming to Memphis in 1968 to support a strike by sanitation workers, Sheinkman used the image of the Arkansas bridge to link the labor movement with the

struggle for civil rights.

"We're going to finish that bridge," he vowed. "We're going to finish his work, his call for economic and social justice."

The nonviolent demonstration heralded a renewed effort by the labor movement to draw on civil

rights lessons, especially when organizing Southern factories. The parade began at the Martin Luther King Labor Center and wound two miles through the city to Front Street along the river. Lively chants and songs rang out in the cold morning air. As the

march approached the entrance to Interstate 40, a solid column of union members stepped behind a banner that read, "Labor Rights = Civil Rights."

Suddenly, a core group trained in civil disobedience tried to walk up the interstate highway ramp. Blocked by city police, protesters sat down in lines across the entrance, arms linked. Hundreds of others quickly joined in, and rally marshals kept the sit-in solid with the singing of "We Shall Not Be Moved."

Separate groups in vans linked by two-way radios meanwhile drove to the center of the bridge and stopped, creating a three-mile backup in either direction. Protesters unfurled a banner that read, "Missing: Bill Clinton's Support for Workers" and draped it over the highway sign welcoming travelers to the President's home state.

At the entrance ramp the Reverend James Orange, a civil rights leader who is organizing coordinator for the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO, used a bullhorn to lead chants. "We cannot let Clinton and Gore forget from which they come," he said. "We're fed up. We're fired up, and we won't take it no more!"

The blockade continued for over an hour. Police huddled and regrouped, unprepared to either arrest so many protesters or negotiate with such a large group. The backup on the interstate continued while tow trucks were called to remove the vehicles blocking the bridge and several entrance ramps.

COMPUTE THIS

Williamson County, Texas entered the computer age last December — albeit reluctantly — when commissioners offered Apple Computer \$750,000 in tax incentives to bring 1,700 jobs to the area. A week earlier, commissioners had rejected similar tax breaks, citing Apple's policy of providing health benefits to unmarried partners of gay and lesbian employees. But polls showed that most residents in the affluent, Republican county favored economic growth. "Jobs prevailed over prejudice," said David Smith of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

After being arrested, protesters from five unions spent up to 12 hours in jail awaiting processing. The solidarity of the streets carried into the courtroom two days later; the entire group pled not guilty to blunt an attempt by prosecutors to single out one organizer for harsher punishment.

The rally and blockade follow a series of sit-ins last year at National Labor Relations Board offices around the country. The current wave of labor protests closely parallels the direct action used by the civil rights movement in the early 1960s. Just as it took freedom rides and lunch counter sit-ins to pressure President Kennedy to act against Southern conservatives, so union workers hope to force President Clinton to stand up to industry.

Joan Suarez, vice president of ACTWU, was one of those arrested. "Somewhere on the road from Hope, Arkansas to the Capitol," she said, "Clinton took a hell of a wrong turn."

— John Enagonio

WATCH OUT — HE'S GOT A JOB!

With all the get-tough talk about crime these days, it's worth noting that jobs kill more than twice as many Americans each year as guns.

Most occupational deaths are not as dramatic as a bullet in the back, but their victims are just as innocent. The vast majority involve long-term illnesses caused by the fumes, dust, and chemicals that employers inflict upon their workers, often illegally.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, just over 38,000 Americans died from firearms in 1991. Excluding suicides, the figure drops to 19,600 — a death rate of eight per 100,000 people.

By contrast, occupational diseases kill 75,000 Americans each year, many from breathing cotton or coal dust. Another 6,000 die from traumatic worksite inci-

GUNS AND JOBS

Whether it's fatalities from weapons or work, the death rate in almost every Southern state ranks above the national average.

	GUN DEATHS		JOB DEATHS	
	Rate	Rank	Rate	Rank
Alabama	12.3	4	9.2	20
Arkansas	10.7	7	12.0	10
Florida	7.8	18	9.1	21
Georgia	10.9	5	9.6	18
Kentucky	6.5	22	11.6	12
Louisiana	15.8	1	11.0	14
Mississippi	13.2	2	14.5	6
N. Carolina	9.8	10	7.0	30
S. Carolina	8.9	14	6.8	31
Tennessee	10.2	9	7.8	26
Texas	12.4	3	11.3	13
Virginia	6.9	19	9.4	19
W. Virginia	6.2	23	15.7	5

U.S. Average **7.9** **7.0**

Gun deaths excluding suicide per 100,000 people. Workplace fatalities excluding disease per 100,000 civilian workers.

Source: Centers for Disease Control

dents caused by faulty machines, electrocution, falls, homicides, vehicle accidents, fires, and suffocation. That's a combined rate of 32 work-related deaths per 100,000 people — four times the death rate from firearms.

Whether it's guns or jobs, the South has more than its share of violence. Eight of the 10 states with the highest rates of firearm deaths are in the South, led by Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, and Alabama. Largely because of their sizable mining, agribusiness, and construction industries, every Southern state except the Carolinas exceeds the national rate of workplace fatalities. The Carolinas, other textile states, and Appalachia's mining belt also surpass the national death rate for occupational diseases.

While gun-wielding killers get headlines and prison terms, employers routinely escape punishment. Since 1970, the federal government has imprisoned only one executive for violations of the Occupational Safety and Health Act that resulted in deaths.

States have been equally lenient, pursuing criminal charges

against only a handful of employers. Emmett Roe, owner of the North Carolina poultry plant where 25 workers died behind locked doors, got the toughest sentence — 19 years, 11 months. But last October, another poultry worker was killed in North Carolina, crushed in a turkey grinding machine that lacked proper safety guards. For that offense, the state fined Carolina Turkey \$7,000. The family of a poultry worker killed the same month in Florida is still waiting for OSHA to punish that employer.

In 1990, the national average for OSHA fines involving fatalities or life-threatening violations was only \$1,130. Once again,

the South looks dismal: Of the 13 states in the region, only Texas and West Virginia imposed above-average fines.

So when legislators scream about locking up the criminals, perhaps someone should ask them not to forget the killers that walk around with white collars.

—Bob Hall

MILL PAYS MILLIONS FOR FOG DEATHS

On the morning of December 11, 1990, a killer fog engulfed a busy highway in east Tennessee, causing one of the worst traffic accidents in U.S. history. Cars and trucks — 99 of them — slammed into each other on both sides of Interstate 75 about halfway between Chattanooga and Knoxville. When the fog lifted, 12 people were dead and 42 others injured.

Fingers were immediately pointed and lawsuits filed. Some charged tractor-trailer drivers with going too fast for the foggy conditions; others accused the state transportation department of failing to adequately warn motor-

ists of the dense fog.

But most of the accusations were directed at Bowater, Inc., a huge paper manufacturer that operates a mill within a few thousand feet of the interstate. Lawyers for the victims claimed that the paper plant had created a "super fog" that caused the crash — a notion that Bowater officials soundly rejected.

"There is no evidence that Bowater in any way contributed to the fog that caused the crashes in 1990," says spokeswoman Astrid Sheil. The company insists that the fog was created naturally by nearby rivers and creeks.

In the three years since the accident, however, evidence has surfaced that Bowater has known for 15 years that it was the source of fog in the area — and did nothing about it.

The 1990 crash was not the first on the same stretch of highway. In 1978, 46 people were hurt in a 61-car pile-up. A year

later, three people were killed and 14 others injured when 50 cars and trucks collided.

Shortly after the second crash, a University of Tennessee engineer conducted an independent study of the area and concluded

that "the Bowater plant was a significant source of the fog." The company hired its own experts to disprove the findings — but they also concluded that the mill was

responsible for up to 40 percent of the fog.

"Not only did Bowater keep their studies secret, they told state officials there was no evidence they were a contributor to the fog," says Doug Fees, a lawyer representing 30 of the crash victims. "They said this despite knowing all the while that it was simply untrue."

Tennessee transportation officials decided to do their own study, but shelved the idea after a meeting with Bowater executives. Lawyers note that the com-

pany is the largest private landowner in the state and employs 1,600 people. "The state was not about to do something that would insult one of its biggest corporations, so the study was killed," says lawyer J.D. Lee.

State officials quickly accepted part of the blame for the 1990 crash and paid the victims \$750,000. To better warn motorists, the state installed a \$4.5 million state-of-the-art fog detection system near the paper mill. Trucking companies also settled claims against them.

Only Bowater fought the lawsuit — until January. A week before the case was set to go to trial, the company settled its cases with all of the victims for more than \$10 million. In doing so, Bowater accepted no legal liability for creating the fog.

"It's the cost of doing business," Sheil told *The Atlanta Constitution*. "Lawsuits are less expensive to settle than to defend."

Even with the large cash settlement, some of the victims fear that Bowater has not learned its lesson and will not take appro-

priate steps to prevent another killer fog.

"My only fear is that Bowater will do nothing to correct the problem," says Mike Curtis, a crash victim from Athens, Tennessee who pulled eight people from the flames. "One year, or 10 years down the road, this same tragedy could be repeated again."

— Mark Curriden

NEW STUDY TRACKS CAMPAIGN MONEY

A new study of campaign finances in North Carolina provides an example for activists eager to identify the handful of wealthy contributors who dominate politics in other Southern states.

The most important tools for researching campaign money are lists of contributors to state candidates, parties, and political action committees (PACs). In most Southern states, these lists are filed with the secretary of state or board of election — and they're a hellish mess to wade through.

In North Carolina, the board of election entered campaign data from 1989 to 1992 on computer files, making the job much easier. Using the database, the Institute for Southern Studies grouped contributors by last name, by address, and — with lots more research — by employer.

The results, published in January in a report entitled "North Carolina's Plutocracy," were startling. One third of the \$30 million in campaign contributions given by named individuals came from only 350 families and business groups. That means 0.01 percent of all households in the state gave 33 percent of the money.

The top donors came from across the economic spectrum — agribusiness, textiles and other manufactur-

"The state was not about to insult one of its biggest corporations."

Photo by Nick Arroyo/Atlanta Constitution



TWELVE PEOPLE DIED AND 42 WERE INJURED IN A CHAIN-REACTION CRASH ON I-75 NEAR CALHOUN, TENNESSEE IN 1990. MANY BLAMED FOG FROM A NEARBY PAPER MILL.

ICY HOSPITALITY

When a February ice storm knocked out power to 200,000 homes and businesses in Mississippi for six weeks, local entrepreneurs saw a chance to extend some Southern hospitality. Police arrested Batesville motel owner Indu Vaghela for price gouging, saying he charged guests four times the normal \$40 rate for a room at his Days Inn. "What makes this case even worse," said state Attorney General Mike Moore, "is that Vaghela was charging utility crews there to help victims of the storm between \$68 and \$75 a night." Moore added he was preparing charges against other profiteers.



ers, utilities, banks and money brokers, developers, retailers and wholesalers, lawyers and lobbyists. On the whole, they differ very little from the "Progressive Plutocracy" that political scientist V.O. Key identified in the late 1940s.

And their contributions paid off. Nearly all of the top 350 do-

ners have had family members appointed to key policy or advisory commissions, including those overseeing highway spending, the university system, environmental regulations, tax policy, and health care.

Although state law restricts individual contributions to \$4,000, big donors get around the limit in

a myriad of ways. They get their wives and children to give, they bundle together gifts from business associates, and they give to PACs and parties which then give to the candidates.

It all adds up to a vicious cycle that undercuts the goal of "one person, one vote." Politicians need larger and larger amounts of

money — and wealthy donors obligingly give it in return for special access to the inner circle where policies get made.

In fact, many of the wealthy cover their bets by giving to candidates of both parties. "We really don't have strong views of whether it's Republican or Democrat, but we do care about the quality of people in politics," says the president of Federal Paperboard. Under a Republican governor, the company's giant paper mill gained special extensions to continue polluting the Cape Fear River. In 1992, company executives gave \$24,000 to the likely Republican successor, but as his chances faded, they quickly gave \$11,000 to the Democratic winner, Jim Hunt.

But money can't buy everything. The top two donors — one married an heir to the Cannon towel fortune, the other's family owns a chain of 500 variety stores — dumped over \$500,000 each into bids to become lieutenant governor. They both lost, proving the Ross Perot axiom: Being rich is no guarantee you can elect yourself.

Research for the report took months, but it has already paid off, focusing attention on the need for major reforms in campaign finance laws. The Institute is working with a legislative study commission and new statewide citizens coalition called the NC Alliance for Democracy to push for meaningful changes — more disclosure, stronger enforcement, lower limits on giving and spending, and a system of public money for qualifying candidates.

— Bob Hall

For a copy of "North Carolina's Plutocracy," send \$2 or six first-class stamps to the Institute for Southern Studies, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702. For additional information on researching the big donors in your state, call (919) 419-8311.

Illustrations by Steven Cragg.

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FLEET SETTLES FOR NEARLY \$1 BILLION

Activists fighting predatory lending in low-income and minority communities have won a major victory since *Southern Exposure* reported on credit scams in "Poverty, Inc." (Fall 1993).

Fleet Finance, a Georgia subsidiary of the largest bank in New England, agreed in January to pay \$115 million to stave off a state investigation into charges that it bilked poor homeowners with high-interest mortgages. The lender will give \$164 refunds to 18,000 borrowers, reduce interest rates for some, and provide \$70 million in fair-rate mortgages to the poor.

On February 10, Fleet Financial Group of Rhode Island went even further, announcing \$800 million in loans for disadvantaged borrowers in 37 states. Under the initiative, Fleet's most dogged critic — the Union Neighborhood Assistance Corporation (UNAC) — will administer \$140 million in mortgages that require no down payment or closing costs.

Fleet created the community-lending program after intense pressure from the news media, Congress, and Clinton-appointed regulators. But much of the credit for the victory goes to UNAC and other grassroots groups, such as Citizens Addressing Public Service in Augusta, Georgia. The groups helped Fleet victims come forward to tell their stories and supported their claims with in-depth research that exposed Fleet's ties to smaller, shady lenders.

"That's the way it always is," says Marty Leary, research director for the Boston-based group. "This was not Bhopal, where there was a big mushroom cloud. There was a paper trail that had to be followed." UNAC now plans to pressure other lenders, including North Carolina-based NationsBank, to establish similar funds to help revitalize disadvantaged communities.

The settlements by Fleet come as the consumer movement turns more attention to the problems of low-income consumers — and to the growing number of Wall Street corporations that control pawn shops, check-cashing outlets, rent-to-own stores, used-car dealers, and finance companies.

The president of the Consumer Federation of America used the *SE* investigation as the basis for her keynote speech at the organization's annual conference in December. Jean Ann Fox told consumer advocates that they need to do more to fight "Main Street financial institutions"

that prey on minorities and the poor. She also said regulators need to make "very, very sure we're not forcing consumers into poverty because of the lack of protections" in the marketplace.

Frances Smith, an industry spokeswoman with the American Financial Services Association, took issue with Fox's comments.

Addressing the room in a trembling voice, Smith accused critics of "putting together some egregious cases with some sweeping statements" to unfairly tar the entire finance industry.

"This was not Bhopal, where there was a big mushroom cloud. There was a paper trail that had to be followed."

She said finance companies "make a considerable profit" because they take the risks of lending to low-income and credit-damaged consumers.

Florence Rice, a consumer activist in Harlem for decades, could not let Smith's comments go unchallenged. "What you're saying is not true," she told Smith flatly. Rice said the poor know what it's like to pay loan-shark interest rates and face foreclosure and cruel collection tactics — and they know the abuses are widespread in minority, low-income, and working-class communities. "They owe these people all their lives," she said.

To help prevent such lending exploitation, activists are fighting for tougher consumer laws. In October, Representative Henry Gonzalez of Texas introduced a bill to limit interest rates on rent-to-own deals. The rent-to-own industry — which has succeeded in getting 36 states to pass laws exempting it from real regulation — is lobbying hard against the measure. Another proposed federal law, the Home Ownership and Equity Protection Act, would regulate predatory mortgage lending.

Advocates for the poor say these laws are needed — but they are only small steps toward true financial reform. To provide full protection to low-income borrowers, state lending laws must be toughened and Congress must create financial regulations that protect disadvantaged borrowers as well as affluent consumers.

—Mike Hudson

FEDS MONITOR TOXIC RACISM

Activists battling environmental racism have also won a key federal victory since *SE* explored the environmental justice movement in "Clean

Dream" (Winter 1993).

Responding to charges that poor and minority communities face a disproportionate risk of pollution, President Clinton signed an executive order on February 12 mandating that federal agencies identify and eliminate racial inequities from their environmental policies.

The order comes after more than a decade of environmental activism from grassroots organizations led by people of color. The movement first gained national attention following the 1982 protest of a hazardous waste dump by black residents in Warren County, North Carolina.

"All Americans have a right to be protected from pollution — not just those who can afford to live in the cleanest, safest communities," Clinton declared. "Today, we direct federal agencies to make environmental justice a part of all that they do."

The order directs federal agencies to:

- ▼ examine their programs for adverse health or environmental effects in low-income and minority communities.

- ▼ consider health hazards and environmental risks facing the poor and minorities when conducting research.

- ▼ ensure that disadvantaged communities have access to public information on health and the environment.

- ▼ conduct all environmental activities in a manner that does not discriminate against the poor or minorities.

"This order says that at the highest levels of government, environmental justice is being taken seriously," said Robert Bullard, author of *Dumping on Dixie*. "This makes federal agencies protect everyone equally. No longer will environmental protection be excluded from civil rights."

—Ron Nixon

WHITE

GOLD

**A CHALKY WHITE CLAY CALLED
KAOLIN IS USED TO COAT THE
COVER OF THIS MAGAZINE AND TO
MAKE HUNDREDS
OF OTHER
PRODUCTS. SO WHY ARE PEOPLE
IN KAOLIN-RICH COUNTIES IN
GEORGIA SO POOR?**

DEEPSTEP, GA. — Old Highway 85, the paved county road out of town, ends abruptly. Where the road used to be there is now a yawning pit more than 70 feet deep. Motorists must detour nearly half a mile on a badly rutted dirt road that leaves cars caked with mud when it rains.

In Washington County, where dirt roads are still common, local officials say their highest priority is to pave roads. But the county allowed ECC International to carve out a quarter-mile section of Old Highway 85 to mine kaolin, a crumbly white clay vital for making hundreds of products, from paper to china to toothpaste.

The company says its mineral lease gives it a right to mine the kaolin beneath the highway, even though the county owns the right-of-way. "We allowed the county to pave the road," said ECC executive Carl Forrester, "and we will put it back the way it was after we finish mining."

He gets no arguments from the county. Forrester, in fact, also speaks for the county. He is a county commissioner. Another of the five commissioners also works for the kaolin industry, and a third is retired from a mining firm.

In Washington and a half-dozen other counties in middle Georgia, kaolin is king — more than cotton ever was. Each working day, international mining concerns like ECC gouge thousands of tons of kaolin from the red, hilly soil of the region. Local folk call it chalk. The companies that mined more than \$1 billion worth of kaolin last year call it "white gold."

Nowhere else in the world is the quest

for the lucrative white clay more energetic. Seven Georgia counties — among the poorest in the state — harbor an estimated 60 percent of the world's purest kaolin reserves.

But the people of the kaolin counties see only a trickle of the mineral wealth dug from their soil. Family homes, barns, and corncribs have been moved or torn down to make way for mining operations. In return, landowners often get less than the cost of fill dirt — as little as a nickel a ton — for their kaolin. Many kaolin companies pay each other up to 100 times as much for the same raw clay.

Landowners who protest are reminded that the mineral leases they or their parents signed allow mining companies to remove any "improvements" that stand in the way of clay. When the kaolin is gone, what remains are swaths of eroded land, unsuitable for crops or timber for decades to come.

Taxpayers get even less than landowners. If Georgia taxed its minerals at rates similar to other Southern states, kaolin would generate an estimated \$65 million annually. In all, 35 states tax their mineral wealth. But Georgia asks for — and gets — nothing.

"I'm opposed to a severance tax of any kind," Governor Zell Miller said. "I believe it is anti-business and anti-jobs."

The official pro-industry stance has cost kaolin-rich communities a fortune. "These counties should be some of the wealthiest in Georgia because of the mineral wealth in the ground," said Guy Thompson, tax appraiser for Wilkinson County. "Yet we are some of the poorest: We have second-rate law enforcement, second-rate health care, and second-rate schools."

Spokesmen for kaolin companies say the industry operates on a very thin profit margin and cannot afford more taxes. But they will not say what that profit margin is, or how much is earned from the clay mined in Georgia, or what they pay to individuals for mining leases.

They do say the business is so competitive they must keep costs as low as possible. But the six major kaolin companies control so much of the world's kaolin production — through the next century, and perhaps for many centuries to come — that Justice Department officials visited Georgia in January to investigate the industry for alleged criminal anti-trust violations.

"When I was in the legislature, ev-

BY CHARLES SEABROOK

everybody seemed afraid of the kaolin industry except for only a few of us," said Georgia Revenue Commissioner Marcus Collins, who tried and failed to enact a mineral tax while in the state House. "The whole state of Georgia is being denied a rightful share of the wealth."

DOGS AND BILLY CLUBS

Kaolin was first deposited in middle Georgia roughly 70 million years ago, when the region marked the meeting place of land and ocean. Erosion washed the clay from the Appalachians down to what was then the coast of the Atlantic.

Today kaolin accounts for two-thirds of all the minerals produced in Georgia each year. It is an essential ingredient in paint, plastic, rubber, kitchen and floor tiles, and ceramics. It is a key component in many plaque-fighting toothpastes, cosmetic face creams, and over-the-counter stomach cures. It is also used to coat glossy paper; a copy of *Newsweek* is about 30 percent kaolin by weight.

Yet few people, even in kaolin country, know what the clay is really worth. Anyone who wants to know the price of silver, oil, uranium, or gold need look no further than a newspaper's daily commodities listings. Most valuable minerals are traded on an open market, but kaolin companies refuse to make public the prices at which the clay is bought and sold.

In spite of the secrecy, an examination of court depositions and internal industry documents reveals the companies pay each other up to \$5 a ton for unmined kaolin. The highest grade refined

kaolin for paper sells for up to \$460 a ton. The purest grades for medicinal purposes sell for up to \$717 a ton.

Most of the firms doing the buying and selling in Georgia are foreign. Four of the six largest kaolin companies are owned or controlled in part by corporations based in England, France, Finland, and South Africa. Two are connected to Anglo American Corp. of South Africa, the world's biggest mining conglomerate.

"It's a ruthless industry," said Wendell Dawson, now assistant state attorney general for Tennessee, whose family is from Washington County. He said sheriff's deputies unleashed dogs on his grandmother in 1950 and beat her with billy clubs to drive her from her home, which stood in the way of kaolin miners.

"She took her hurt with her to the grave," Dawson said. "My family still feels the pain."

Local residents, attorneys, and some public officials say the kaolin industry in Georgia is founded on forged deeds and questionable business dealings. Companies exploit the ignorance of local residents, they say, while cloaking their actions in commercial secrecy.

"The chalk companies beat just about everybody out of the clay," said Hilliard Veal, a retired Deepstep store owner who inherited valuable kaolin deposits from his father. "It didn't make any difference whether you were black or white. Most people were ignorant over the value of kaolin, and the companies kept everything so secret that the landowners could never find out what their clay was really worth."

OLD DEEDS AND SHADY DEALS

The power of the industry springs from lease contracts it began securing in the 1930s, when people first realized that fortunes could be made in Georgia's white clay. Mining companies and entrepreneurs started signing up the people who owned the "chalk land" to long-term mining leases. They

Photos by Joey Ivansco/Atlanta Constitution



COUNTY OFFICIALS LET KAOLIN MINERS RIP UP OLD HIGHWAY 85 IN DEEPSTEP, GEORGIA AND REROUTE TRAFFIC HALF A MILE AROUND THE PIT.

gained control of thousands of acres of kaolin land and millions of tons of mineral reserves, often without ever telling the owners what was on their land.

The contracts usually gave companies the right to mine the land for up to 99 years and pay the owner as little as a nickel a "crude ton" — 2,733 pounds. The now-defunct Department of Mines even handed out brochures advising landowners to sign the leases.

"Once the lease was signed," former kaolin executive Hadyn Murray acknowledged in a 1990 sworn deposition,

"the landowner effectively relinquished absolute control over his will to the conduct of mining and the development of his mineral interests."

Though now faded and yellow, hundreds of contracts are still valid — still shaping the economy of the entire region and exerting tremendous leverage over people's lives, livelihoods, and the laws they live by.

Many were led to believe that mining would start almost immediately. Yet 20 to 40 years after signing the contracts, many have yet to see the first ton of

dirt dug from their land.

Although courts in other states — including Florida and Texas — have declared similar contracts null and void if a company waits too long to start mining, the Georgia Supreme Court in 1983 declared the kaolin leases valid.

Land agents, most of whom represented Northern-based mining companies, say in court documents that the rush to get a signed contract was so frenzied that often they would not even take time to make sure the people they were signing up actually owned the land. Many

"NOT ONE RED CENT"

In 1980, a group of tax experts appointed by the governor and state legislature concluded that Georgia's largest mining companies were not paying their fair share of property taxes. They suggested state and local governments were losing a fortune.

Fourteen years later, not much has changed. Georgia still exports its mineral wealth largely tax-free. Middle Georgia counties where kaolin is mined still rank among the poorest in the state. And tax officials say the mining companies still are not paying their fair share.

"The average mine site is about as significant as a house across the road in terms of the taxes you're going to get off it," said Guy Thompson, tax assessor for Wilkinson County. "I'm not trying to say it's fair — that's just the way it is."

The tax inequities in kaolin counties are remarkable:

▼ In Wilkinson County, kaolin property that sold for more than \$5,000 an acre went on the tax books for \$250 an acre. Property owners in the county pay roughly \$700 in taxes on an \$80,000 home — while kaolin companies pay less than half that amount for mines in which they have invested millions of dollars.

▼ In McDuffie County, mineral owners report their reserves at pennies an acre for tax purposes. "That won't pay to send out the tax bill," said Chief Appraiser Wayne Smith, "so we put a minimum 50 cents per acre on them so the county wouldn't go in the hole sending out the bill."

▼ In Twiggs County, Dry Branch Kaolin Company paid \$3.21 an acre in taxes on 6,372 acres that yield clay worth millions of dollars — the same tax rate as farmland without kaolin.

The tax consequences of undervalued kaolin property are tremendous. "If the counties assessed mines properly, it might cut the mill rate in half," said Ronald Rowland, an independent tax appraiser with considerable experience in valuing kaolin properties. "The poor individual is the one who is paying."

Schools and local governments bear the brunt of the unfair tax decisions in kaolin counties, but taxpayers across the state pay part of the tab. Because of their anemic tax base, several kaolin counties require support from richer parts of the state to maintain essential services.

More than \$250 million worth of kaolin was mined in Twiggs County in 1991. That same year, the county needed an additional \$3.3 million in tax revenues from the state to pay for

its schools, roads, and social programs.

"Most of the tax burden is falling on individual property owners' backs, and we're tired of it," said Ray Tompkins, head of a 650-member homeowners' association in Wilkinson County trying to get kaolin companies to assume more of the tax load. "We often have to borrow money to keep the schools open."

The kaolin industry warns that trifling with the status quo threatens to make Georgia clay less competitive. "They could bring in people to assess and tax kaolin," says James Groome, executive director of the China Clay Producers Association, "but it would be killing the goose that laid the golden egg."

In the 1980s, the coal industry in Kentucky made a similar argument after a ragtag group of citizens began calling for coal reserves to be taxed. The companies won in the state legislature, but the courts ruled that the state constitution requires equity in property taxation — all taxpayers are supposed to be treated alike and all property is subject to taxes. Coal companies now pay property taxes on more than \$1 billion in coal reserves.

Georgia's constitution also requires tax equity, and state law says property taxes should reflect mineral values. But local tax officials are reluctant to take on big mining companies, and State Revenue Commissioner Marcus Collins admits his staff is also outgunned by the powerful multinational corporations.

"The kaolin companies are taking all these minerals from one of the poorest sections of Georgia, but they're not paying the counties or the state one red cent for them," he said. "The state and the counties are entitled to some money for their minerals."

The tax debate has started to heat up in recent months. This winter, the state legislature began considering a bill that would tax kaolin after it is mined. Industry officials have been mustering forces to shoot down the severance tax, but proponents say it could bring in as much as \$65 million a year — roughly 25 percent of what the lottery is expected to generate annually.

After years of supporting the industry, it now appears that some local leaders are ready to take on the kaolin companies. At a meeting of the Wilkinson County Commission last fall, Chairman J.M. Howell asked industry representatives who would be pushing the severance tax in the legislature.

Why did Howell want to know the names of tax supporters? "So they could come talk to us," he said.

— Charles Seabrook and Richard Whitt

landowners say forgery was so rampant that signatures on scores of old deeds and mining leases — still in effect — are believed to be illegal.

Several families are suing in U.S. District Court in Macon. In chalk country, however, justice takes time. While the average civil case takes 20 months in Macon, some lawsuits against kaolin companies have been pending for more than seven years. The court records are routinely sealed.

Today, scores of mining leases signed decades ago are coming up for renewal. Kaolin firms say they are offering landowners better deals, including more liberal royalty rates.

“Our relationship to the landowners is very important to us,” said Rob Morton, chairman of the China Clay Producers Association, the trade group that represents Georgia’s leading kaolin producers. “When we make a deal with them, we want to be fair, because we want to be well thought of by our neighbors.”

But an examination of several new leases negotiated in recent years shows that landowners are not getting much better deals than their parents or grandparents got. While the new royalty rates may be two to seven times higher than the old

leases, the prices of refined kaolin have increased by a factor of 10 to 16.

When negotiating new contracts, the companies often change the unit of measurement on which the royalty is based. An old lease, for example, may have given the landowner 25 cents per “refined ton” of kaolin, or 2,200 pounds. The new lease may pay 50 cents per “cubic yard,” which weighs only about 1.7 tons — giving the landowner only a few pennies more than the old lease.

“You might think you’re getting a

good deal, only to find that a ton ain’t a ton,” said Hilliard Veal, the retired storeowner.

BABIES AND BIBLES

If there were hundreds of landowners willing to sign the lease contracts, there were also hundreds of others reluctant to do so. Many owners were suspicious of

they tested for kaolin without ever telling the farmer.”

If they found that a piece of land harbored desirable deposits and the owner was reluctant to sign, the company waited until the owners died and approached heirs who might be more receptive.

Burl and Ellen Gibson, subsistence

farmers who owned 130 acres in Wilkinson County, were among those who wouldn’t sign. Mrs. Gibson inherited the farm in 1941 when her husband died. When she died in 1945, she left it to her son, Griffin Gibson, a daughter, and an adopted nephew.

Just six months after her death, a now-defunct kaolin company called Southern Clays persuaded Griffin Gibson and his sister to sign a 20-cents-a-ton lease. When the company drilled the land in the early 1960s, it discovered nearly two million tons of high-grade kaolin worth at least \$1.4 million.

Company officials urged Gibson to sell them the land. According to family members, a company “strawman” named John Scott courted the unsus-



RETIRED STOREOWNER HILLIARD VEAL SAYS KAOLIN COMPANIES DECEIVED FARMERS ABOUT ROYALTIES. “LANDOWNERS COULD NEVER FIND OUT WHAT THEIR CLAY WAS REALLY WORTH.”

the “chalk people” and refused to let them explore their land for kaolin; others said they didn’t want to relinquish control of homes that had been in the families for generations.

The kaolin companies, however, had other ways of getting at the chalk.

“Some men with a drilling rig would show up at a farm and offer to drill a well for free,” said Frank Fountain of Wilkinson County, who once owned a kaolin company. “The farmer got a well, but the drillers got core samples, which

pecting landowner, stopping by his house nearly every day. The two men squatted under a tree or sat on a porch and chatted about the weather or the cotton crop.

Gibson came to consider Scott one of his most trusted friends. When a baby was born in the family, Scott gave \$10 as a gift to the infant and asked if he could look up some of the family’s names in the family Bible.

The family now suspects that Scott really wanted to examine the family tree

written on the flyleaf to see how many heirs he would have to contact in order to secure rights to the kaolin.

In 1962, the company bought the Gibson farm for \$40,000. After the closing, Scott never visited the house again. Exactly a year later, Southern Clays sold the land to another clay company for \$1.4 million.

FESTIVALS AND FOOTRACES

White clay leaves little untouched in chalk country. People can fly into Kaolin Field airport, shop at the Kaolin Plaza, and buy flowers at Kaolin Florist in Sandersville, where sprawling kaolin processing plants punctuate the skyline.

Every October, townsfolk crown a Miss Kaolin during their annual kaolin festival. There is an annual 10-kilometer footrace called the Kaolin Canter.

Road signs are often covered with white, powdery chalk. The narrow highways are tinged with a snowy whiteness, and meandering streams run milky white with clay silt when it rains.

Twice a day from Deepstep — “the Kaolin Capital of the World” — a train pulling more than 100 cars brimming with kaolin pulls out on the 10-mile-long Sandersville Railroad. So lucrative is the kaolin traffic that the short trunk line is known as one of the world’s richest railroads.

The shorter line hooks up with the Norfolk & Southern railroad in nearby Tennille, where “kaolin expresses” haul clay to Atlanta and Savannah. So many freighters laden with kaolin steam from the Port of Savannah every year that the mineral is the single biggest product shipped by the state Ports Authority.

To slake the insatiable industrial thirst for water to process and ship the mineral, local kaolin plants consume 59 million gallons of private well water a day — more than the cities of Augusta or Macon use. It’s not uncommon for wells in the area to go dry, homeowners say, or

for the water they produce to be white with kaolin silt.

Industry officials say mining has brought a degree of prosperity to what is otherwise one of the most economically depressed regions in the state. Kaolin companies currently employ 4,500 people to mine and process the valuable mineral.

But “chalk mines” bring more than jobs to middle Georgia. Kaolin counties are a mosaic of eroding craters, acres of rusty-red and tannish-white clay pits

rescinded a permit against a kaolin company. It would be hard for state officials to even check compliance. Because of recent budget cuts, DNR has assigned only one field worker to inspect most of the southern half of the state, including the kaolin mines in middle Georgia.

Industry leaders say their companies have spent more than \$2.6 million a year to reclaim about 29,000 acres of mined-over lands since 1980. ECC International, the biggest kaolin producer in the state, created an award-winning park with fish-

ing ponds on reclaimed land in Deepstep.

But no one is under any legal obligation to reclaim the thousands of acres mined before the state’s land-reclamation law went into effect in 1969. In middle Georgia, there is up to 40,000 acres of so-called “orphan land.” As a consequence, broad swaths of land repeatedly sliced by gullies and rippled like a giant washboard can be seen throughout kaolin country.

It is sometimes difficult to tell land that has been re-

claimed from abandoned orphan land. Large tracts of reclaimed land also show serious erosion. Even after a decade of growth, pine trees on some tracts are stunted, averaging no taller than a living-room Christmas tree.

“We are proud of our reclamation efforts,” said Lee Lemke of the Georgia Mining Association. He shows visitors appealing pictures of mined land restored to rolling, grassy fields and farm ponds.

Residents see it differently. “We sure got the farm ponds, that’s for sure,” said Hilliard Veal, the retired Deepstep store owner. “That’s about the only thing you can do with these deep pits.” □

Charles Seabrook is a reporter with the Atlanta Journal and Constitution. His reporting on kaolin won second place in the annual Southern Journalism Awards sponsored by the Institute for Southern Studies.

RICH CLAY, POOR COUNTIES

Seven Georgia counties that yield \$1 billion in kaolin each year suffer higher poverty and lower education than the rest of the state.

COUNTY	MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	% LIVING IN POVERTY	% HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES
Glascocok	\$21,806	16.8	50.3
Jefferson	17,076	31.3	49.7
McDuffie	21,292	21.6	56.1
Twiggs	19,213	26.0	48.4
Warren	17,284	32.6	42.8
Washington	21,460	21.6	58.1
Wilkinson	25,166	15.3	62.0
Georgia	\$36,945	14.5	71.1

surrounded by gullies big enough to drive a Jeep through. Although many of the former mines have produced no kaolin in years, the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) continues to list them as “inactive” — allowing kaolin companies to delay reclaiming mined-out land almost indefinitely while the soil continues to wash away.

Georgia has one of the oldest and weakest surface-mining laws in the nation. Unlike federal rules applying to coal mines, the state requires no public notice before it issues a kaolin mining permit, and places no time limit on permits.

A check of the permits on file shows that DNR also routinely waives bonds for kaolin companies — the state’s only insurance that a kaolin mine will be reclaimed should a company not do so.

The state has never revoked a bond or

PROUD THREADS

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the landmark labor victory at J.P. Stevens. In 1974, after a decade of tough and courageous organizing, mill workers in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina beat the second-largest textile company in the world. On August 28 of that year, they voted to join a union.

Since then, the textile and apparel industries — once an economic mainstay in many Southern states — have undergone enormous change. Each day, it seems, the headlines bring more news of plant closings and mass layoffs. Some companies, like Stevens, have been sold off in a frenzy of Wall Street trading. Others, which originally came to the region in search of cheap labor, have moved further south in search of even lower wages.

For the people who weave cloth and assemble clothes, the result has been devastating. Since 1980 — the year Stevens finally negotiated a contract with its employees — more than half a million textile and apparel workers have lost their jobs.

Taking a suggestion from our friend Jim Overton, a former editor of *Southern Exposure*, we decided to return to Roanoke Rapids to see what has happened since Stevens workers joined the union. Two decades after one of the most heralded organizing campaigns in Southern history, what have textile workers won?

The answer, we discovered, is woven into the fabric of life in Southern mill towns. By organizing, textile workers have done more than improve wages and working conditions for themselves:

▼ They have strengthened their communities. As William Adler learned when he visited Roanoke Rapids after a 10-year absence, union members have helped improve race relations, reform schools, and get out the vote. The union has empowered workers — and that makes for better citizens.

▼ They have saved lives. Before sickened and injured Stevens workers joined the Brown Lung Association, thousands of workers were dying each year, their lungs destroyed by cotton dust. By putting political pressure on lawmakers, union members and their allies won tougher health standards and enforcement.

▼ They have shaken up Wall Street. Since Stevens workers pioneered the “corporate campaign” by taking their fight directly to investors, other union members have followed suit. As Barry Yeoman reports from Cone Mills, more Southern workers have stormed the halls of high finance to assert community values.

▼ They have defended jobs. As our report on corporate flight indicates, union members and their allies have fought to preserve the region’s industrial base — even as their bosses have used tax dollars to close factories and ship jobs overseas.

Nearly 10,000 workers joined the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union last year, including 6,500 whose employers used illegal election tactics to deny them representation for years. The Stevens victory did not translate into major reforms of federal labor laws, and as Lane Windham recounts in her “Diary of an Organizer,” employers still routinely win elections by firing union supporters and threatening to close plants.

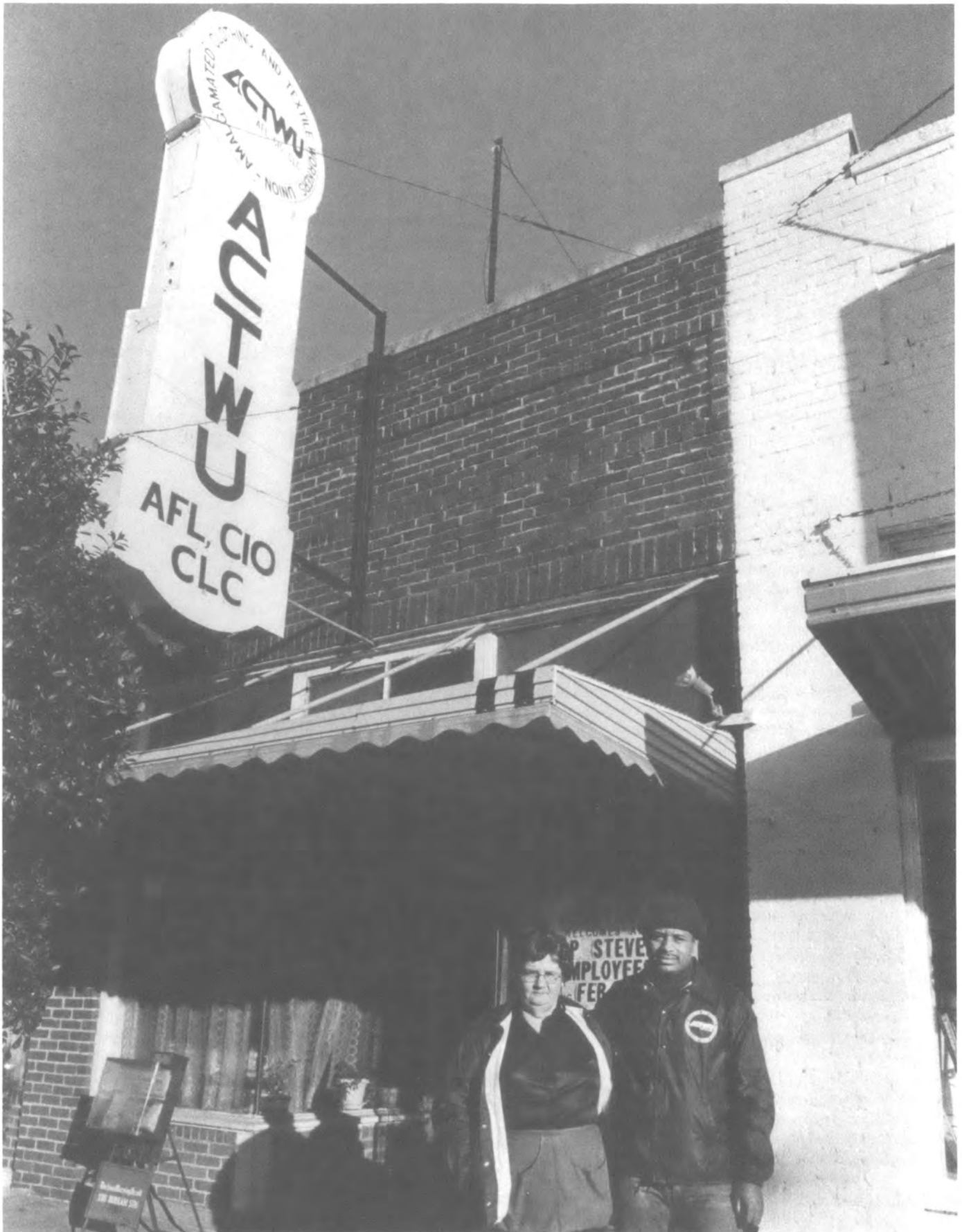
Fortunately, Southern textile workers have a long and proud history of organizing to draw on. A consortium of scholars and activists is currently preparing a documentary about the General Textile Strike of 1934, the historic uprising by hundreds of thousands of mill workers. Scheduled for release by Labor Day, the film is designed to serve as an organizing tool — using the past to inspire and educate a new generation of workers.

Maurine Hedgepeth, the textile worker pictured on the cover of this issue, was two years old when the uprising emptied mills across the South. She learned about unions from her father, and years later she remembered what he taught her when she was fired by J.P. Stevens for exercising her right to organize.

“Money is important and we need it to live,” she told *SE* back in 1976. “But it’s not as important as my self-respect — to have a little dignity.” □

—Eric Bates

Eric Bates is editor of Southern Exposure. Support for this section was provided by the Rieve-Pollock Foundation, W. H. and Carol Ferry, and the Southern Labor Fund of the Institute for Southern Studies.



MAURINE HEDGEPETH AND JAMES BOONE STAND OUTSIDE THE UNION OFFICE IN ROANOKE RAPIDS SHORTLY AFTER IT OPENED IN 1978.

“A NEW DAY IN DIXIE”

Twenty years after their historic victory at J.P. Stevens, mill workers in Roanoke Rapids have reformed schools, improved race relations, and reshaped the entire community.

*Story by William M. Adler
Photos by Earl Dotter*

One morning in the summer of 1985, Edith Jenkins and 15 or 20 other African-American women were on the picket line, breaking off one rollicking version after another of “We Shall Overcome” and “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Us Around.” Jenkins worked in a J.P. Stevens & Company cotton mill in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, the site of a landmark union victory some years earlier, but on this morning the women were marching not on their workplace but outside the office of the school superintendent.

Edith Jenkins knew it took direct action to change the system. She had worked at J.P. Stevens since the days when blacks, if hired at all, were relegated to the dirtiest, most hazardous jobs and passed over for promotions. She

had supported the union during the organizing drive of 1973 and 1974, and saw what a difference worker solidarity and a union contract meant.

“The union taught me to stand up and exercise my rights,” says Jenkins, a handsome, heavyset woman with gold-tinted curls and a gold-capped front tooth. “And it’s something I teach everybody around me. Too many people want to just say forget it, but nobody hears you if you don’t make some noise.”

Edith Jenkins hadn’t always been so vocal. She was “raised up the hard way,” picking and chopping cotton on a farm in a black settlement outside Roanoke Rapids. She married in 1967, the year she graduated from an all-black high school. “Being around white people frightened some people, but it never bothered me,” she says. “You just learned when to keep

your mouth shut.” Her husband worked for a white man whose friend was a J.P. Stevens supervisor. The man recommended Jenkins for a job. In those days, she says, “a black person had to know somebody who knew a white somebody to get on” at the mill. She started on third shift (midnight to 8 a.m.) as a ring spinner at the River Mill, one of seven Stevens plants in Roanoke Rapids.

Thanks to her union contract, Jenkins has worked for the past 10 years as a winder attender on first shift at the New Mill, the Roanoke No. 2 Plant. And thanks to the lessons she learned as a union member, she has spent nearly as many years as a watchdog in the school system in Weldon, a town of 2,500 that lies just east of Roanoke Rapids on the Roanoke River.

Jenkins became involved in the

schools when the youngest of her three children was a student at Weldon Elementary. She served as PTA president and founded a fundraising group called the Athletic Booster Club. "We're a poor town and a lot of parents couldn't afford to send their kids to camp or to pay for team supplies." In the mid-1980s, she became a member of the superintendent's advisory board. The superintendent was a white man in a district where 90 percent of the students were black. "Our school system was at a standstill," Jenkins re-

Today, sitting at the kitchen table in her comfortable mobile home, Jenkins reflects on her improbable entry into politics. "I'm a survivor," she says. "You got to fight just to survive around here. That's how we won the union, that's how I won my school board seat. I didn't get in just for the sake of being in politics; Lord knows I've got enough to do. I've always been concerned that so many parents just don't take time for their children. They've got one strike against them being black and I kept running

Carolina, and it earned more than \$1 billion a year from sales of sheets, blankets, towels, carpets, hosiery, and tablecloths. All told, Stevens employed 44,000 people, not one of whom were protected by a union contract.

From the time workers held their first union election at Stevens in the late 1950s, the company epitomized the worst of American business; as often as not attached to its name was the phrase, "the nation's number-one labor-law violator." The appendage followed the company everywhere, like a storm cloud. A dozen times the National Labor Relations Board ordered Stevens to "cease and desist" from unfair labor practices. Three times the company carried its resistance to the Supreme Court, only to lose each time. The tactics cost Stevens \$1.3 million in back pay awarded to workers whom the company had discriminated against because of union activities.

The story of the union making its stand in Roanoke Rapids — of its sheer tenacity and unexpected triumph — became a celebrated parable of the American labor movement. The struggles of Crystal Lee Sutton, one of the Stevens workers fired for union activity, became the basis for *Norma Rae*, the 1979 film for which Sally Field won an Oscar for Best Actress. The movie ended with a union organizer driving into the

sunset, accompanied by swelling music, having guided his troops to victory.

Nor was Hollywood alone in its optimism. Labor leaders hailed the victory as a giant step toward unionization of the textile industry, many of whose companies, Stevens included, had fled the North over the previous three decades to escape organized labor. The late Wilbur Hobby, the colorful president of the North Carolina AFL-CIO who stood sentry during the vote count at Stevens, proclaimed that the win



"YOU GOT TO FIGHT TO SURVIVE AROUND HERE," SAYS EDITH JENKINS. "THAT'S HOW WE WON THE UNION, THAT'S HOW I WON MY SCHOOL BOARD SEAT."

calls, "and a lot of us felt it was time for him to move on."

The breaking point came when the superintendent fired three black administrators for reasons Jenkins considered suspect. That was when she told herself: "Edith, you got to take a stand."

First she organized the picket line outside the superintendent's office — "grown black women voicing their opinion" — and then she ran for the school board. She lost. And ran again. And lost. In 1992, on her third try, she won.

because I was determined to see they get a good education — at that age they don't need a second strike."

THE MOVIE

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the election victory won by Edith Jenkins and her fellow workers at J.P. Stevens. Back then, Stevens was an industrial giant, the second-largest textile company in the world. It operated 85 plants, all but 22 in North and South

meant "a new day in Dixie."

"J.P. first," he announced, "the textile industry second, and then the whole South."

That prophecy never came to pass. Though the union also won representation at several other Stevens plants, the reverberations from Roanoke Rapids were felt only as tremors in textile strongholds across the South. The industry was changing rapidly, and workers soon faced widespread plant closings. Even in Roanoke Rapids, the invigorating air of victory evaporated quickly. For six years after the election, Stevens refused to negotiate a contract. By 1988, the year Stevens was swallowed in a leveraged buyout, only 10 percent of its workers were organized. Textile workers in North Carolina remained the least unionized in the country, and Southern industry as a whole was less than 15 percent unionized — no more than it was eight years earlier.

Despite such gloomy realities, the shop-floor victory at J.P. Stevens did have a profound if little-noticed impact. When cotton mill workers in Roanoke Rapids, black and white together, mobilized successfully against the town's largest employer, they also triumphed over wider social and political forces a century in the making. Their victory broke the stifling paternalism that was as much a part of the mill town as cotton and peanuts and the sulfurous stench of the paper mill.

In those days, textiles dominated the region's economy; in five Southern states, the industry employed more than a quarter of the labor force. Many of the mills were in isolated, insulated towns — "90-miles-from-anywhere" towns, as the people in Roanoke Rapids say of their own. In towns like this, there were few alternatives to working in the mills save starvation. The town, in effect, was a modern-day fiefdom. Many white workers were born in the company hospital, grew up in a company house, shopped at

the company store. They called themselves "Stevens People." They defined their lives as Stevens.

With their victory over Stevens, mill workers learned that they have influence — and that they can bring their influence to bear on the bossman. Perhaps no one appreciates this more than Maurine Hedgepeth, a weaver in the Rosemary Plant whom Stevens illegally fired for union activities in 1965. An engagingly blunt woman, Hedgepeth was out of work for four years, until the U.S. Su-

couldn't do anything on your own, but if you got together and stuck together you could make a better life."

THE POTATO HOUSE

To understand how far Stevens workers have come, it helps to know where they started from. It helps to visit the Potato House.

Heading down the flat ribbon of Interstate 95, a dozen miles or so beyond the Virginia border into northeastern



UNION MEMBERS DO MORE THAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE LOCAL ECONOMY — THEY HELP MAKE ROANOKE RAPIDS A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE.

preme Court reinstated her with full back pay. "Just like the company tells you what they want for their products," she says, "we learned we can tell them what we want for our labor."

Equally important, union members have brought their organizing skills to bear on the community outside the plant gates. In Roanoke Rapids and in the surrounding towns of Halifax and Northampton counties, workers emboldened by their union victory have fought to reshape local politics, reform schools, protect the environment, and improve race relations. Organizing a union made them better citizens, and better citizens make for a better community.

"People learned by example," says Edith Jenkins. "You learned you

North Carolina, you cross the Roanoke River. If you exit there, negotiate your way west past the motels and factory outlets and golden arches that bring traffic to a crawl, turn north toward town, past still more purveyors of chicken-and-biscuits and auto parts and barbecue joints ("We Serve No Swine Before Its Time"), you enter the heart of Roanoke Rapids, a city of 15,000.

The Potato House is a ramshackle, wooden building three blocks west of the intersection of 10th Street and Roanoke Avenue, the city's main commercial thoroughfares. The whitewashed structure stands amid an open field in the red-brick shadow of the Rosemary Plant. Decades ago, when the mill company owned the houses, millworker families

brought their potatoes to the little building for storage. Today it is home to the Boy Scouts, but older residents still call it the Potato House.

On a summer evening 20 years ago — August 28, 1974 — the Potato House was packed with officials from J.P. Stevens and the Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA). They were waiting for ballots to be tabulated to see if 3,500 Stevens employees in Roanoke Rapids had voted to be represented by the union.

Workers trying to join the union had

formally apologize to its employees.

During the long delay the demographics of the mills changed dramatically, and for the union, favorably. In 1965 almost all the workers were white. By 1973, 40 percent of the Stevens workforce in Roanoke Rapids was black. They came largely from outside the city limits: from the rural areas of Halifax and Northampton counties. Blacks were not indoctrinated in mill culture the way whites were, had not grown up under the company's paternalistic wing. Many saw

head of curly rust-colored hair turning to gray. His native New England accent clings to his speech despite having lived in Roanoke Rapids for 35 years. Coyne understood the need for organized labor. As a young man, he witnessed the shoe and textile industries desert his home state of Massachusetts, and then, in his adopted hometown, could see with an outsider's clarity the power and powerlessness inherent in a company town.

The TWUA man told Coyne the union would gauge interest in an organizing drive by simultaneously distributing leaflets and return cards outside seven Stevens plants in Roanoke Rapids and a dozen or so in Greenville, South Carolina. "Whichever we get more cards back from, we'll run the campaign at," the organizer told Coyne.

The response from Roanoke Rapids was heartening. Some 350 Stevens employees — 10 percent of the local workforce — returned cards. Coyne heard again promptly from the TWUA man, who said, "We're sending an organizer to town named Eli Zivkovich. He's an ex-coal miner." Coyne introduced Zivkovich around town, accompanied him on his first house calls, and provided him with a key to the paperworkers' hall. It was there, in April of 1973, that the textile

workers held their first meeting in Roanoke Rapids in eight years.

In June of the following year, Coyne was in Washington on paperworkers' union business when he ran into George Meany, the fabled AFL-CIO president.

"We're gonna win that Stevens election," Coyne promised.

"Good," Meany replied. "Then we can organize the South and you can send us some good politicians."

Two months later, on the Wednesday before Labor Day of 1974, as the government oversaw the balloting, the Potato House and the surrounding field was thick with anxious onlookers: union and company lawyers and officials, workers,



THE POTATO HOUSE STANDS IN THE SHADOW OF THE ROSEMARY PLANT, A REMINDER OF HOW MILLWORKERS BROKE WITH THE PATERNALISTIC PAST.

been fighting illegal company tactics for 15 years. The TWUA lost two elections badly in Roanoke Rapids, in 1959 and 1965. The union challenged the latter election, charging that the company violated pre-election labor laws. The National Labor Relations Board agreed and called for a new election. Rather than begin a new campaign directly, though, the union waited while charges of unfair labor practices wound their way through the federal appellate system. Finally, in 1973, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit reinstated fired workers, directed the company to grant the union access to plant bulletin boards, and required Stevens to

the union as their best hope for equal opportunity.

"I'd been there seven or eight years," recalls Bennett Taylor, a black man who would become a union leader, "and I was tired of seeing people come in off the street and getting promoted and I wasn't moving anywhere. I figured this was my chance."

The new union drive began in the spring of 1973 when a TWUA organizer telephoned Joe Coyne, a paperworker in Roanoke Rapids and the president of United Paperworkers International Local 425. "The organizer asked me to help leaflet the Stevens plants," recalls Coyne, who is 59 years old and has a full

THE COMPANY FRONT

After the union launched its nationwide boycott of J.P. Stevens products in 1976, a handful of workers in Roanoke Rapids formed an anti-union group called the J.P. Stevens Employees Educational Committee. In an effort to mobilize support to decertify the union, the group held rallies, picketed union meetings, and distributed T-shirts and bumper stickers urging fellow workers to "STAND UP FOR J.P. STEVENS."

The Educational Committee's ties to a vast and wealthy network of union-busting law firms and right-to-work outfits in North Carolina and beyond have been well documented. Now, for the first time, one of the committee founders has come forward to confirm what has long been suspected: that the impetus to form the group came directly from management, not from workers.

Royce Still is a tall, gravelly-voiced 55-year-old with thinning red hair and an ever-present cigarette. He grew up in New Mexico and arrived in Roanoke Rapids in the late 1950s as a teenage serviceman stationed at the Army radar base outside of town. He began working full-time for J.P. Stevens, as a weaver in the No. 2 weave room at Rosemary, in 1964.

When he started in the mills, Still knew nothing of unions. "Well, I knew one thing," he says, reconsidering. "I knew that if you were for the union, and it was plainly known, your ass was gone."

When a union election was held at the plant the following March, Still voted no. He later was promoted to supervisor, and eventually took a position as a loom fixer, the highest paying hourly job in the mill.

One day in late 1976, after the union-led boycott of Stevens products had picked up steam, Still's department manager pulled him aside. The two were good friends, Still says. "We used to socialize together." The manager, Jim Simmons, ran the No. 1 weave room at Rosemary, where Still worked at the time. "He told me this local lawyer would tell us how we could get rid of the union," Still recalls. Simmons directed him and two other Rosemary fixers to Tom Benton, an attorney whose firm represented J.P. Stevens locally.

Benton could not legally advise Stevens employees on how to fight the union; it was against the law for the company or its representatives to promote anti-union activity. Instead, Still says, Benton referred him to an attorney in Raleigh named Robert Valois. Valois practiced with the firm

of Maupin, Taylor and Ellis, one of whose partners was chief political strategist for Senator Jesse Helms and head of the ultra-right-wing National Congressional Club.

Valois took over from there. He organized the Stevens Employee Educational Committee, advised the group on strategy and legal implications, hired a professional union-buster as its administrator, and inserted Still and two fellow loom fixers, Gene Patterson and Wilson Lambert, as the committee's officers.

Stevens disavowed any connection to the committee. "We had nothing to do with organizing this movement," a Stevens spokesman told *The New York Times*. "It popped up like a mushroom on its own."



STEVENS HELPED ROYCE STILL — ALONG WITH LEONARD WILSON AND GENE PATTERSON — FORM AN "EMPLOYEE" FRONT GROUP TO OPPOSE THE UNION.

Although Still says he had no particular grievance against the union, he went along with the committee because his boss asked him to. "If nothing else," he says, "I figured it was pretty damn good job security."

In recruiting some of its top-paid employees to serve as a pro-company front, Stevens tapped a genuine strain of anti-union sentiment in the mills. Gene Patterson, a genial, barrel-chested man who grew up in the mill village and whose entire family worked in the mills, embodies the strain. "My mama

was a boss lady at Fabricating and she was always against the union," he says. "I guess I learned something from her."

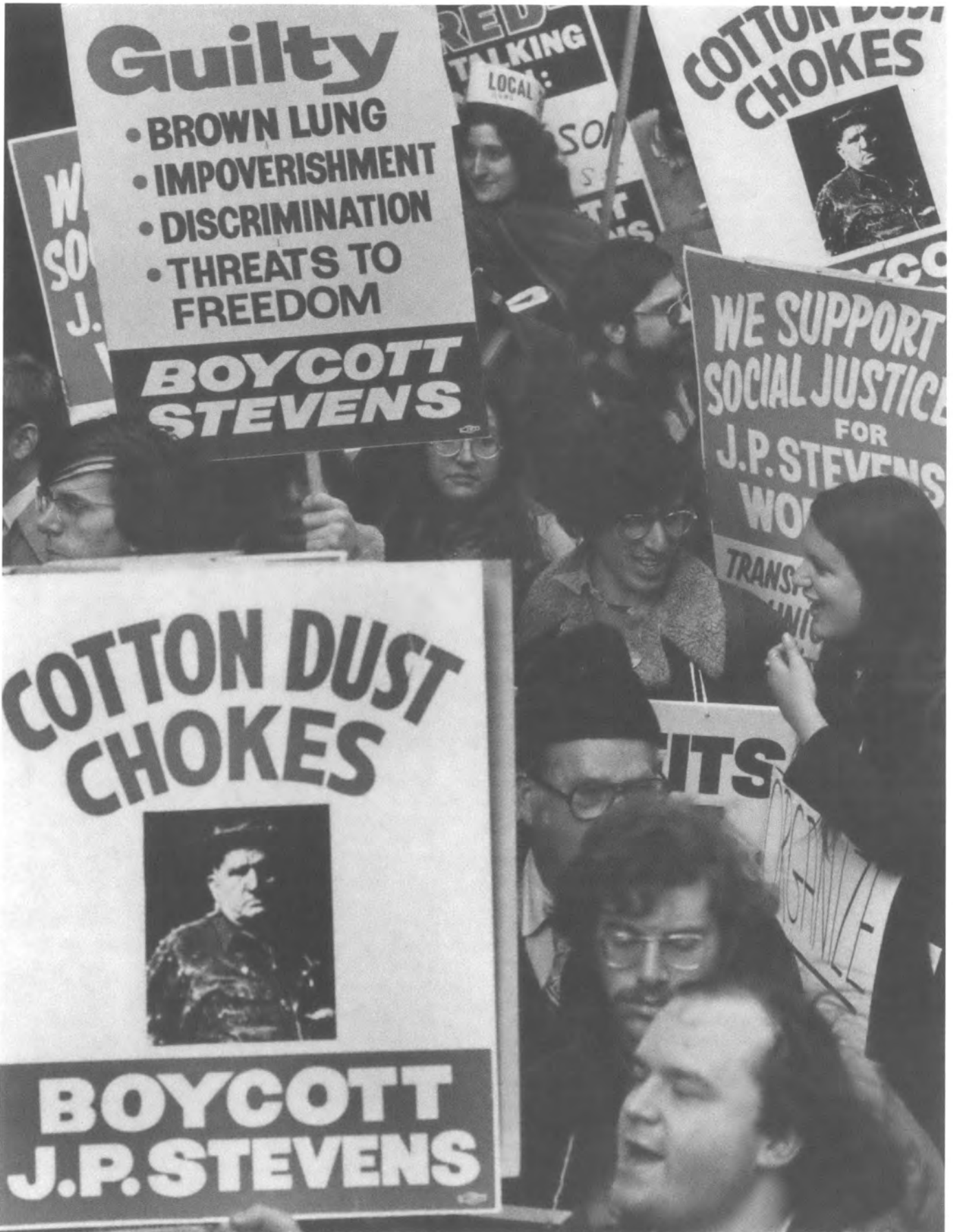
Patterson, 46, recalls watching a union demonstration in 1977 outside the Stevens Tower headquarters in New York City. "I was listening to some Catholic bishops make speeches supporting the boycott. And afterwards I told them that boycotting Stevens means boycotting our jobs. I said you need to be in church teaching people right from wrong, instead of trying to cause me to lose my job."

By 1979, Patterson concedes, the Educational Committee had dwindled to a few true believers. "I was the chief and one day I looked back and there weren't no injuns behind me," he says.

Royce Still was no longer among the faithful. He quit the committee the day he learned Stevens planned to withhold annual raises in Roanoke Rapids while awarding raises in its nonunion plants. "That kind of pissed me off a little," Still allows. The following Sunday, he attended his first union meeting. "When I walked in, I saw I knew a helluva lot of people in there and not one of them gave me a hard time."

Still signed a union card that day. He started dropping by the union hall regularly on the way to work. After the contract was ratified, his fellow workers elected him second-shift shop steward in the Rosemary No. 1 weave room. Today he is president of the Rosemary Plant local.

— W.A.



WORKERS MARCHED ON WALL STREET DURING THE PIONEERING "CORPORATE CAMPAIGN," ATTACKING STEVENS ON ITS OWN TURF AND TURNING IT INTO A CORPORATE PARIAH.

reporters. And elsewhere, in corporate boardrooms and union halls throughout the country, corporate executives and rank-and-filers alike awaited word of the results. Joe Coyne proved himself a fine oracle. Stevens workers voted 1,685 to 1,448 in favor of the TWUA.

THE CORPORATE CAMPAIGN

But the fight for a union contract had just begun. TWUA membership in the North had been declining for years, and by the time of the upset win in Roanoke Rapids, the union was on its last legs financially. To make matters worse, Stevens stonewalled contract negotiations, refusing to even discuss such basics as grievance arbitration and automatic payroll deductions for union dues.

To avoid bankruptcy, the TWUA merged with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. At its founding convention in June of 1976, the new 500,000-member Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union came out swinging. ACTWU authorized a nationwide consumer boycott of J.P. Stevens products, earmarking millions for new organizers, new court challenges, and a sophisticated public relations campaign.

Celebrities lent their star power. Jane Fonda came calling on the outspoken Maurine Hedgepeth. Gloria Steinem dropped in, and Mike Wallace and crew filmed a *60 Minutes* segment. Boycott support committees, studded with academic, political, and religious luminaries, sprouted around the nation. Retirees, crippled by brown lung and denied a pension despite a lifetime in the mills, demonstrated outside Stevens Tower, the company's 43-story headquarters in New York City.

Yet Stevens still refused to bargain in good faith. In 1977, an administrative law judge found that the company negotiated "with all the tractability and openmindedness of Sherman at the outskirts of Atlanta."

The blow that finally felled Stevens was the pioneering "corporate campaign" organized by the union. The campaign attacked the company on its own turf, in the board room and on Wall Street; it made Stevens a corporate pariah. The campaign successfully pushed two other corporations to oust Stevens's chief executive, James Finley, from their boards, and forced two of Stevens's outside directors to resign for fear their own companies' reputations would be tarnished.

Stevens ultimately buckled under

pressure from its financial houses. The union threatened to withdraw pension funds from banks allied with Stevens. And it vowed to run a dissident slate of directors for the board of Stevens's largest lender, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. The proxy fight would have cost Met Life \$7 million; the insurer told Whitney Stevens, president of J.P. Stevens, that it was time to settle with the union.

A truce was soon declared. On October 19, 1980, 2,800 union members, meeting in the Roanoke Rapids High School auditorium, unanimously ratified the agreement with a stirring voice vote. In an adjacent science classroom, converted for the occasion to a press briefing center, Scott Hoyman, executive vice president for ACTWU, struck the same optimistic notes as had Wilbur Hobby six years earlier.

"For too many years," Hoyman told reporters, "hundreds of thousands of textile workers have been treated to unlawful and repressive retaliation for daring to join a union, or in fact even showing sympathy for the idea of organizing a union. We are convinced that the Stevens agreements mark the beginning of the end of that unattractive chapter in America's industrial history."

The 30-month contract certainly meant new protections on the job, chief among them a grievance procedure with access to binding arbitration. "Used to be," says Clyde Bush, the union's longstanding manager in Roanoke Rapids, "if you had a gripe, hell, you told somebody, but there was never nothing done about it. If the boss wanted to fire you, he fired you."

Under the contract, union members also elected shop stewards for all departments and all shifts. Maurine Hedgepeth was elected first-shift steward in the Rosemary No. 1 weave room. "People used to go in the bossman's office one on one, and whatever the bossman said — or didn't say, but said he said — went," she recalls. "But now you've got protection: You can say what you want to and you don't have to go in there alone. I

think that's what people like the best."

The contract provided for a full plant-wide seniority system, union representation on health and safety committees, and regular renegotiation of wages and benefits. It also raised average hourly wages from \$4.30 to \$5.50 and provided for back pay denied workers during negotiations.

But the settlement had its price. It required the union to drop a \$12 million lawsuit accusing Stevens of conspiring with police to spy on union organizers. The union also called off the boycott and

corporate campaign, and agreed to no longer single out Stevens as its "primary organizational target." The company, in turn, made no such promises. In announcing the settlement, president Whitney Stevens vowed to continue opposing the union.

Clyde Bush of ACTWU was unsurprised. "This company has been at war with the union for nearly 20 years," he said at the time. "I don't expect that to change overnight."

Black and white workers had fought side-by-side during the union campaign; for most, it was their first experience with bi-racial cooperation.

THE BALLOT BOX

But some things had already begun to change. Black and white workers had fought side-by-side during the union campaign; for most, it was their first experience with bi-racial cooperation. Before long, their new-found solidarity began to make itself felt outside the mills, permanently altering the racial landscape in the Roanoke Valley.

James Boone went to work for Stevens as a stockman and checker at the Delta Four Plant in 1971, the year after graduating from Gumberry High School in Northampton County. In 1973, when Eli Zivkovich leafleted the plant gates and invited workers to the first union meeting, Boone was there. "I looked at it this way," he says. "It couldn't hurt."

Boone had had little contact with whites until he started at Stevens. But he understood that the union needed to reach out to white workers, especially the younger ones, if the fledgling movement was to succeed. "We built a coali-

tion, because we knew we needed everyone to pull this off," says Boone as he relaxes between meetings in the union office. He speaks in a slow and thoughtful manner, and has a goatee and mustache. Except for wearing his hair close cropped instead of in an Afro, his appearance has changed remarkably little in 20 years.

"You bring a group of blacks and whites together, with the same agenda, and it's hard to break them up," says Boone. "Our generation was more receptive to one another, and I think that surprised the company, because they were trying to divide us. But we had a foundation that couldn't be shook. I used to tell people we all have families we're trying to support, and if we're gonna get anywhere we got to walk down the road together."

Boone became a leader of the organizing drive, served on the union's first negotiating committee, and in 1980 was elected the first president of the Roanoke Valley Joint Board, the congress of locals from the seven plants. He left the shop floor in 1988 to work full-time for ACTWU, and now serves as the union's business agent in the Roanoke Valley.

Boone and other workers soon put their coalition-building skills to work in other arenas. They began their political activism by registering their neighbors to vote. "I didn't know what politics was till I joined the union," Boone laughs. Between 1974 and 1984, voter registration in Halifax and Northampton counties increased by more than 25 percent, while registration among minority residents jumped by nearly 60 percent.

In 1975 the union formed a committee to screen candidates for local and state offices. But because most politicians were beholden to the mill company, they were reluctant at first to court

and, in some cases, grudgingly, accepted that the union was in town to stay. Joe Coyne, then-president of the paperworkers union and chair of the Roanoke Valley Central Labor Union, says the

Stevens contract gave labor a prominent voice. "Now if some issue or a bill or a candidate comes up we oppose, I can say, 'I'll show you 3,000 people who don't like it — and that ain't counting their families.'"

In 1982, a young lawyer named David Beard announced his candidacy for district attorney. Beard was challenging the incumbent, Willis (Doc) Murphrey III, a Roanoke Rapids resident known less for his legal savvy than for his inheritance and his house: It was the largest in town. Murphrey was also known for cronyism; he was reputed to grant dispensations for favored defense lawyers, who in turn rewarded him at election time with generous contributions.

So David Beard worked the grassroots. He sought the support of community organizations, black and white churches, the Central Labor Union. He promised to "play fair," to rid the judicial system of the old-boy network, to hire qualified minorities as assistant district attorneys. And people responded. With the help of the textile workers, Beard won 60 percent of the vote. After Beard's victory, Joe Coyne says, "the politicians came



"I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT POLITICS WAS TILL I JOINED THE UNION," LAUGHS JAMES BOONE, WHO WITH OTHER MEMBERS HAS HELPED ELECT PROGRESSIVE OFFICIALS LIKE DISTRICT ATTORNEY DAVID BEARD.

organized labor's vote. "We'd send them a letter inviting them to a screening, and we'd get a letter back saying they were committed somewhere else and couldn't come," recalls Clyde Bush, the manager of the ACTWU local. "That happened all the time."

With the contract came credibility. Politicians and business people gradually

looking for us."

THE INCINERATOR

Progressive coalitions, spearheaded by union members, have also helped elect their own to local offices. Linwood Ivey, an ACTWU stalwart who served on the union's first negotiating team and

was vice-president of the Fabricating Plant local, served two terms as mayor of the Northampton County town of Garysburg. When he died in 1991, he was succeeded by Roy Bell, a former shop steward and vice-president of the Delta Four Plant local.

Bell says that his union activism, particularly his work as a steward representing grievants against Stevens, helped prepare him for public life. "I learned how to sit across the table from people and talk confidently, and I learned how to really read a contract. As a public official, you have to talk to people all the time, have the confidence to sell your town to industry."

Union members have also fought for groundbreaking laws. In 1983, the Central Labor Union introduced a "Right-to-Know" ordinance for Roanoke Rapids. The ordinance would have required industries to warn workers and the community of health risks related to toxic and hazardous substances. There were similar ordinances in effect in larger cities in other regions, but this would have been the first anywhere in the South. A mayoral study committee approved the ordinance in early 1984, but the city council, whose most influential member was a retired Stevens executive, voted it down.

A year later, union members joined other activists to push the region's first Right-to-Know law through the North Carolina legislature. Joe Coyne, who also chaired the N.C. Occupational Safety and Health Project, was a "major mover" behind the legislation, says Susan Lupton, an NCOSH staffer at the time.

A decade later, millworkers teamed up with local citizens to ward off another environmental threat. A company called ThermalKEM had announced plans to locate a hazardous-waste incinerator in Northampton County. The company had apparently cut a land deal with the county commissioners behind closed doors. When a public hearing was finally called, so many residents showed up to protest the plan that the commissioners canceled the meeting.

Out of the protest grew NCAP — Northampton Citizens Against Pollution. The group's power sprang from its diversity. Among those on the NCAP board was James Boone, the ACTWU leader who learned about coalition-building from the union drive; the first proposed incinerator site was a half-mile from his home. Many other members of the textile

and paperworkers unions belonged, as did black and white professionals, young people and grandparents. The county NAACP chapter, headed by ACTWU president Bennett Taylor, played a pivotal fundraising role. And District Attorney David Beard called for a state criminal investigation of the company. "We're like a patchwork quilt," an NCAP member told *The Independent* newsweekly. "We've got one seam holding us all together, and it's the incinerator."

The fight lasted three years. Millworkers and other voters used their power at the polls to oust town and county officials who supported the project, and in the fall of 1993, ThermalKEM withdrew its plans. NCAP had successfully drawn on the legacy of the Stevens campaign to defeat another industrial giant. "Just like when we started the union," says James Boone, "we knew it had to be black and white together to keep the environment safe and clean."

THE BUYOUT

The political progress by union people has been matched by economic gains. Local merchants no longer shy away from labor — they are only too glad for the extra dollars the union puts in workers' pockets. Hourly wages have increased substantially since the original contract, from \$5.50 to \$9.60 today. And retailers seem equally pleased with the credit union ACTWU initiated to help workers save money or make big-ticket purchases.

Even though the entire community has benefited from the presence of the union, the most powerful forces that shape life in Roanoke Rapids remain beyond the control of union members. The local economy, like that of much of eastern North Carolina, and indeed much of rural America, is largely controlled by outsiders. Much of the land is owned by absentee timber and paper interests, and most jobs are driven by Wall Street investors. The sober fact is that no matter how well working people organize, no matter how many voters register and elect progressive candidates, their economic life is still shaped

by distant, often invisible, hands.

In the 1980s, as the takeover boom swept corporate America and financiers traded stock certificates in the mad pursuit of short-term profits, the consequences hit hardest in towns like Roanoke Rapids. Today, J.P. Stevens & Company no longer owns the mills; in fact, there no longer is a J.P. Stevens. The company, which began as a small wool flannel mill in 1813 in Massachusetts, fell victim to a corporate takeover fight in 1988. When a group of senior executives tried to stage a leveraged

buyout of Stevens, they were outbid by one of their biggest competitors, West Point-Pepperell Inc.

To avoid antitrust problems in the \$1.2 billion deal, the new owner split up Stevens's 59 plants among itself and two partners, a Wall Street investment firm called Odyssey Partners and the Bibb Company of Macon, Georgia. Bibb's share of the prize included the Roanoke Rapids division. Bibb itself is owned by a Wall Street leveraged buyout firm, NTC Group. NTC, says chairman Thomas Foley, is basically "a corporate staff struc-

ture to be able to execute acquisitions."

If union activists don't mourn the loss of their one-time corporate nemesis from a labor-relations standpoint, they do miss the company in other ways. "You can say anything in the world you want to about the Stevens company," says Maurine Hedgepeth, "and their relations with the employees were the worst. But you've got to give it to them that they were good businessmen. They sold the cloth we made. Bibb is not doing that. I don't think Foley knows what he's doing. He's a wheeler-dealer on Wall Street — that's his business, not textiles."

Because Bibb has no brand names of its own, the company is finding it hard to hold its market share. Last year, between Thanksgiving and Christmas, Bibb laid off 120 employees. Tom Gardner, the company's chief executive in Roanoke Rapids, attributes the layoffs to "a seasonal decline in orders." But Clyde

The most powerful forces that shape life in Roanoke Rapids remain beyond the control of union members.

Bush, the local ACTWU manager, connects the layoffs to Bibb's lack of experience in textiles. "I think it was a pretty good shock to everybody, because it's a terrycloth business, and those are usually running full-time this time of year."

The layoffs were the latest jolt to a wretched economy. The unemployment rate of 6.5 percent around Roanoke Rapids is more than 60 percent above the statewide rate. And though the local rate is nearly half that of a decade ago, most of the jobs created in the last 10 years require no skills and offer no future. The names of Roanoke Valley residents who scrub toilets or cook fast food or sew piecework or bag groceries might not show up on unemployment rolls, but that doesn't mean they are earning a living wage: More than 30 percent of persons working full-time in the area live below the poverty line.

More than a quarter of the households in Halifax County and 30 percent of those in Northampton earn less than \$10,000 a year. African Americans fare even worse: Fully 40 percent of black families in the two counties earn less than \$10,000 annually.

The crushing poverty affects everything from life expectancy to education. Babies in Halifax County are nearly twice as likely as other North Carolina newborns to die in infancy. And although students in Roanoke Rapids schools perform well on standardized tests, the area is also home to three of the statistically worst school districts in the state: Northampton County, Weldon City, and Halifax County.

THE NON-FACTOR

None of this hardship is reflected in the glowing portraits of the area painted by the Roanoke Valley Chamber of Commerce. "It has often been said that education is the key to a brighter, more successful future," the

chamber boasts in one of its slick booklets, "and the Roanoke Valley boasts one of the best school systems in North Carolina."

Nor does the business community reflect much of the progress in race relations fostered by the union. Another chamber brochure touts the county's "many antebellum plantation homes, several of which have been restored to

cestors," says Gary Grant, a community organizer in rural Tillery who helped defeat the ThermalKEM incinerator. "And while tax dollars go to restore those houses, low-income housing funds are unavailable and many African Americans are still using outhouses."

While promoting the "tranquil lakeside atmosphere" and "friendly people" of the area, the chamber and other industrial boosters prefer to ignore the community benefits of organized labor. A pamphlet put out by the Halifax Development Commission, for example, reminds prospective employers that "North Carolina is a right-to-work state" and boasts of the Roanoke Valley's "business climate."

According to L.C. (Rocky) Lane Jr., executive director of the commission, most industrial scouts inquire about local "union activity." "It's a standard economic development question," he says, "not unlike the availability of natural gas or water." Lane recalls one company representative who "flew in here, checked the Yellow Pages, found unions, and boogied right on out."

Not every official cringes at the specter of unions. Lloyd Andrews, who stepped down last year after a decade as mayor of Roanoke Rapids, considers ACTWU a "non-factor." Andrews is 65. He has white hair, a creased, open face, and a politician's ready smile. He grew up in a mill house near the Patterson Plant, where his father was a supervisor. "The union

has had no effect on this community," Andrews says flatly. "It was the news media that came in from somewhere else, took a little something, and blew it out of proportion."



NORTHAMPTON RESIDENTS AUDREY GARNER AND CLAYTON AND BETTIE COLLIER HELPED DEFEAT A PROPOSED HAZARDOUS WASTE INCINERATOR.

their original splendor. These gracious old homes are adorned with . . . hand-carved features, most made by local black artisans."

"Those 'artisans' were our slave an-

Andrews blithely dismisses further questions about the impact of the union, preferring to address the beneficence of the mills. When Bibb purchased the Stevens softball fields near the Fabricating Plant, he says, the company donated them to the city. "One year we were having financial problems and we asked Stevens to pre-pay their taxes, and they did it without hesitation," he adds. "I consider both Stevens and Bibb good corporate citizens."

Asked about the biggest problem facing the city, Andrews pauses, gazing out the window for a moment. "Absolutely number one," he says firmly, "we've got to raise the money to build a new city hall."

Andrews seems untroubled by the city's uneven economic development during his tenure as mayor. On the almost all-white east side is the Becker Farms subdivision. There, spacious homes on wooded lots line new roads and cul de sacs. Nearby are a private health club, condominiums, and Becker Village Mall. In the black neighborhoods on the west side, meanwhile, are unpaved streets and shacks with rusted, sagging roofs, some without indoor plumbing. Many homes have chronic flooding problems, rotting floors, and faulty wiring. Asked about the reasons for the disparity, Andrews replies: "I don't know why."

THE LINT-HEADS

Twenty years after the union election, the Potato House is quiet, save for the occasional raucousness of Boy Scout meetings. The union and company agreed early this year on a new 30-month contract, the fourth since the 1980 settlement. The relatively peaceful negotiations were held in a conference room at the Holiday Inn.

These days there is little contentious-

ness — too little, say some. Several activists complain privately that the union has grown complacent, that it has become too cozy with the company and is too quick to settle grievances. The union is an established and generally welcome part of the community. It endorses political candidates, sponsors community events — even enters a float in the city's Christmas parade.

"Prosperity has been our downfall," says a union officer who asked for ano-

we don't have 20 people — sometimes the officers don't show."

Even the staunchest critics, however, acknowledge that the union dramatically shifted the balance of power in the community. That Stevens workers managed to exercise the most basic right of labor — the right to organize — in the most hostile of environments has imbued them with a dignity and confidence lacking in earlier times.

Maurine Hedgepeth remembers those earlier times. Her parents worked in the mills, and during 1934, the year of the General Textile Strike, when Hedgepeth was two years old, they invited the first textile organizer in Roanoke Rapids to live with the family. Her parents took Maurine to her first union meeting when she was 16. Three months after her second child was born, when she was 23, Hedgepeth went to work in the mills as a magazine filler. The following year, 1956, Stevens bought the plants.

"People who worked in the mill used to be looked down on," says Hedgepeth, who at 62 and nearing retirement remains a firebrand. "I've always felt like I was somebody, but there are a lot of people who didn't. They used to call us lint-heads, lint-dodgers. We made less money than anyone else. Organizing changed all that. Organizing is taking a person who thinks they're nobody and giving them the courage to stand up and fight. That's organizing. That's what the union here did." □



MAURINE HEDGEPETH JOINS JOE COYNE AT THE NEW UNION HALL FOR PAPERWORKERS, WHO PROVIDED A MEETING PLACE FOR STEVENS ORGANIZERS IN 1973.

nymity. "People make more money now and they've got a good grievance procedure and that's all they care about. They forget about what it took to get here. Sometimes at meetings for all five locals

William M. Adler is a freelance writer from Texas and a member of the National Writers Union. He lived in Halifax County from 1980 to 1984.

Earl Dotter, who documented the brown lung movement in Rise Gonna Rise, is a freelance photographer in Silver Springs, Maryland.

TAKING STOCK

Workers thought the days of paternalism at Cone Mills were long past — until the company promised to make them part-owners.

By Barry Yeoman

An hour before dawn on a dewy May morning, Cindy Chattin left her home on the edge of the old mill village and drove the few blocks to the Cone Mills textile plant in Salisbury, North Carolina. But instead of reporting to her post at the colormatic machine on that chilly day, she met 100 of her co-workers outside the plant gate. For the next 12 hours they marched, carrying placards with messages like “Cut us in, Cone.” And they sang:

*We are the union,
The mighty, mighty union . . .*

“People were just ecstatic,” says Chattin, a 15-year Cone veteran. “We were just down there marching and singing, and our plant manager was going crazy. He was going *crazy*. He had the police out there, and he tried to have people arrested.”

The cops did issue six citations for picketing without a permit. And throughout the day, the plant continued churning out denim and flannel. But neither police nor production could dampen the mood outside.

“Morale just shot through the roof,” Chattin says. “People were really hyped up.” Perhaps most exhilarating were the reactions of some non-union workers: They got out of their cars, talked to their co-workers, and then refused to cross the picket line.

Although the one-day strike in 1992 resembled a typical union demonstration, the walkout involved none of the ordinary bread-and-butter issues of organized labor — wages, health benefits, safety, or job security. Instead, it focused on the Wall Street wheeling and dealing that typified the 1980s — and its impact on blue-collar textile workers like Chattin.

Ten years ago, to fend off a hostile takeover by a New York company, Cone Mills created an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) as part of a \$465 million buyout scheme. Cone promised the plan would make workers part-owners of the world’s largest denim manufacturer — and tie their fortunes directly to their own hard work.

Instead, union members now claim, the ESOP cheated the very employees it was supposed to empower. At the same

time, top Cone executives earned millions from the deal.

Outrage over the ESOP sparked a shop-floor revolt among the mill-workers. “They were furious about it, and it wasn’t a fury that the union put into place,” says Michael Zucker, director of corporate and financial affairs for the Amalgamated Clothing & Textile Workers Union (ACTWU). “It was an anger we recognized.”

Even though the Cone Mills struggle revolved around a newfangled issue, it served as a reminder that the tried-and-true methods of union organizing work. The workers emerged victorious, and the ESOP campaign helped resuscitate the union at Cone Mills factories in Salisbury, Greensboro, and Haw River. Before the strike, union membership at the plants had fallen below one-third of the hourly workforce. By last year, membership had doubled.

“While this particular issue and the feeling the workers had were particular to the situation at Cone Mills,” says Zucker, “the notion that workers can be mobilized to a historic extent on the right issue is true in every instance.” But it

takes good research, good planning, and a union that's willing to listen to its members.

CHRISTMAS HAMS

The White Oak denim plant dominates the sprawling Cone Mills complex north of downtown Greensboro. Three smokestacks tower over the jagged roof, their steam casting shadows on the factory's brick walls. A two-mile-long chain-link fence, topped with six strands of barbed wire, surrounds the mill. Gulls circle the parking lot. From the sidewalk, smokestacks from other Cone plants nearly blot out the downtown skyline.

The mills have loomed over the cityscape — and over the lives of their workers — for the past century. When Moses and Ceasar Cone, German Jews who ran a New York export business, moved to Greensboro in 1893, they created a mill village with three textile plants and enough housing for 15,000 people. It was decent shelter — far better than the “packing boxes on stilts” that workers elsewhere endured.

“Often the Cones ambled through their industrial hamlets, greeting workers and family members by their first names, exchanging pleasantries, and chatting with them on their front porches,” writes labor historian Bryant Simon. “They appeared at church meetings, presented children with Christmas gifts, offered advice on gardening, and addressed the annual father-son banquet.”

The cozy relationship was part of an industry-wide strategy known as paternalism: a system of convincing millworkers to identify wholly with the company. The Cones even held an Independence Day picnic with string bands, three-legged races, and enough fried chicken to feed 10,000. They bought shoes for needy children, gave away Christmas hams, and sponsored cooking seminars, hygiene classes, and beet-growing contests.

But they didn't tolerate labor organiz-

ers. In 1900, when 150 Cone workers secretly joined the National Union of Textile Workers, Cone slammed the mill gate and locked the company store. Finally, according to Simon, they broke the union by evicting scores of families from their homes.

But it wasn't until the “stretch-out” of



Photo by Robert Fox/Impact Visuals

WORKERS FROM NORTH CAROLINA INVADDED THE WALL STREET OFFICES OF PRUDENTIAL SECURITIES, PUTTING CORPORATE PRESSURE ON CONE MILLS.

1925, when the Cones laid off hundreds of workers and sped up production, that employees saw the real limits of their bosses' benevolence. Even before the union arrived, 2,000 mill hands and their relatives gathered at the plant gate to sing hymns of discontent. “We work for a song, an' do all the singing,” declared one striker. In May 1930, despite company pressure, 1,500 workers gathered at an empty potato patch for their first union rally.

The union did not take firm hold until after World War II, when Cone sold off the mill houses and cut benefits, breaking the paternalistic bond. Throughout the post-war years, union membership rose and fell, often in response to specific initiatives by the company or the union. North Carolina's “right to work” law, which allows workers to enjoy the benefits of a union contract without paying dues, made recruiting and holding on to members even more difficult.

During the 1960s and '70s, a group of young firebrands got involved in the union, and members experimented with new tactics to secure their position in the mills and gain a stronger voice when

contract re-negotiations rolled around. “People began to stand up,” says Marie Darr, a former Cone worker and now an ACTWU organizer. “A lot of black workers got involved — feeling like the union was a fighting organization.”

ACTWU made some gains in the early '80s, winning automatic payroll deductions

for dues and improving wages and benefits. But even long-time members say the union was unprepared for what happened in 1983.

That was when the crisis hit.

THE NEW PATERNALISM

The crisis was an attempted takeover of Cone Mills by Western Pacific Industries, a little-known New York holding company. Western Pacific, formed in 1970 to buy a railroad, had quietly accumulated some \$16.5 million worth of Cone Mills stock. In November 1983 it announced its plans to

purchase \$30 million more from Ceasar Cone II, the founder's son, and take control of the firm.

Both management and workers agreed the takeover needed to be stopped. “This is like the old home place,” James Watts, a fixer in yarn preparation, told a reporter. “If you tear it down and put something else up here, it's not going to be the same. We are family in there.”

The company scrambled for solutions — and decided to plunge \$465 million into debt. Cone borrowed \$420 million from 10 banks and issued \$45 million in new stock to its top executives. With this cash, the management completed a “leveraged buyout,” taking the company off the stock market and making it private. Western Pacific dropped its takeover bid, selling its stock for a \$23 million profit.

Dewey Trogdon, chair of Cone Mills, called the buyout a gamble. If it succeeded, he predicted, “I'll have some rich grandchildren.”

The firm also found another source of money. “Cone's pension plan was overfunded,” says Carolyn Hines, employee-communications manager for the company. The fund contained \$69 million

more than Cone needed to pay retirement benefits, so Cone skimmed off the cushion to pay some of its massive debt. In exchange, it promised to put an equivalent amount of stock into an Employee Stock Ownership Plan, which would fund future retirement benefits.

ESOP-linked leveraged buyouts were a creation of the Reagan era, with its promotion of high-stakes financial deals. The schemes allowed company executives to divert pension funds to other uses — often to stave off hostile takeovers. According to *Fortune*, the tax advantages were “dazzling.” The magazine also noted that many ESOP plans “left employees . . . holding nothing but the bag.”

Trogon promised that wouldn't happen at Cone Mills. In fact, he assured workers the ESOP would elevate their status. “Since the [ESOP] will become an important source of your future financial security, you will have a personal stake in the Company's future,” he wrote in 1983. “As a Company stockholder, your performance will directly influence the value of the stock in your personal ESOP account — forming a real bond between your efforts, the Company's success and your financial security.”

This new kind of paternalism, which encouraged employees to invest themselves fully in the company, appealed to workers. Many feared Western Pacific would shut down factories as soon as it bought Cone Mills.

“I was concerned about maintaining my place of occupation,” says James Graves, a part-time minister and a forklift operator at the Haw River plant. “At the time it sounded like a good idea.”

So Graves, like other union representatives, agreed to the plan. ACTWU checked for irregularities and illegal provisions. Finding none, it okayed the deal.

One reason workers deferred so readily was that Cone placed 25 percent of each worker's annual wage — far more than needed to fund the pension — into the ESOP account during the first year. This extra money was called a “surplus,” and workers say the company told those who didn't want to wait until retirement that they could withdraw their windfalls in 1990 — to buy houses, cope with medical emergencies, or send their

children to college.

“They took us in the office, told us we were part owners, and in 1990 we would get the money,” recalls Margo Russell, an imposing, gray-haired woman who spins loose cotton into yarn at the White Oak mill.

SHRINKING SURPLUSES

When 1990 rolled around, workers tried to get their money. Cone told them it wasn't available, that there'd been no pledge of early withdrawals. “They were never told that,” insists Cone Mills spokesman Frank Fary. “In all of the descriptions and meetings with employees, the plan was described as a retirement plan.” He says Cone told workers



SHIRLEY THACKER, MARGO RUSSELL, CRYSTAL PRESSLEY, AND MARY SWANN HELPED FORCE CONE MILLS TO MAKE GOOD ON ITS PROMISES.

some benefits wouldn't be paid until 1990, to protect Cone's cash flow. “That's where people got confused,” he says.

Workers tried to discuss the pension money, but Cone refused to budge. “We went to wage negotiations and tried to bring up the subject,” says Cindy Chattin. “The company didn't want to hear it.”

Being a “part-owner” in the company apparently didn't give Chattin or her fellow workers much say. In many ways, things hadn't changed. Decades earlier, Chattin recalled, in a nearby mill town called Coolee, her grandfather had joined the union — only to receive an immediate promotion to supervisor. When the union called a strike, her grandmother and other supervisors' wives were ordered to scab while their friends walked the picket line.

Chattin chose to break with family tradition. She and other millworkers turned to the union.

ACTWU did some research and made some sobering discoveries. Cone had put only \$54.8 million into the ESOP — \$14.2 million less than it had taken from the pension fund. By depositing “surplus” money into each worker's account, the company had also pocketed a \$17 million tax break for itself. But workers and their families could not collect their money until they retired, quit, died, or became disabled. They had no control of their own finances.

Worse, their surpluses were shrinking. After the first two years, the company had cut its annual contribution to one percent of wages, which was not enough to fund

retirement benefits. So the company began chipping away at the surpluses to keep the pensions funded. The longer workers stayed, the less windfall they could expect at retirement.

ACTWU called a series of meetings at local union halls to break the news to its members. At one meeting, Michael Zucker asked how many people had been told they would be able to get money from the ESOP in 1990.

“Everybody's hand went up,” Zucker recalls. “When we said, ‘No, you're not,’ everyone went bananas.”

Like the “stretch out” of 1925, the about-face on the stock plan reminded workers that paternalism has its limits. “People were upset because they felt the company had actually betrayed them,” recalls Margo Russell, who has worked at Cone Mills for nearly 19 years. “A lot of the people in that plant, they felt like anything the company said, it was just like the truth to them.”

So the union launched a campaign to give workers access to their ESOP money. Jesse Jackson came to Greensboro to kick off the crusade. Workers picketed outside the banks that financed the leveraged buyout. The union filed a lawsuit, and more than 2,000 employees filed a complaint with the U.S. Labor Department. ACTWU held a short strike during contract negotiations.

In October 1990, the union chartered four buses and two vans to bring 267 workers to a non-union Cone plant in Cliffside, North Carolina. "We were out in the boonies — the *serious* boonies," recalls Cindy Chattin. "They didn't know *anything*. They didn't hardly know what the ESOP was, and they certainly didn't know what the surplus was." The non-union workers also seemed wary, and gave union members "a very cold reception."

But later that evening, the union members stopped for dinner on the local burger strip and fanned out to two fast-food restaurants. Cliffside workers, getting off their shifts, joined them and suddenly seemed more receptive. "People were coming in: 'What is this ESOP? What is this surplus?' People were telling us about the job loads they had. It was incredible the difference between their job loads and our job loads," Chattin recalls.

Cone Mills fought back. "In visiting some of Cone's non-union plants this week, the union is attempting to make the ESOP an issue with you, by their continuing misrepresentations of the facts about the ESOP to benefit their own selfish purposes," wrote plant manager Larry Barnes to his workers.

In another letter, Cone president J. Patrick Danahy reminded his employees, "If the union believes there is something wrong with the Company's contribution to the ESOP, why did they agree to it in 1984?" Danahy charged the union's statements "are intended only to sign up new members."

CONTEMPT OF COURT

Then, in 1992, Cone announced plans to go public again. The ESOP stock, valued at \$100 a share, would remain at exactly \$100. But stock held by 47 top executives would increase 12-fold in value, from \$8.3 million to \$107 million. Later it soared even higher; shares bought for \$1 each now sell for more than \$16, a 1,500-percent jump. "There were a lot of millionaires made," says Zucker.

Frank Fary, the Cone Mills spokesman, says mill executives bought their stock with their own money and were "subject to great risk," while ESOP stock was relatively stable and funded by the

company. "We the management were unwilling to put employees' retirement funds at risk," he says. "The same decision would be made today."

Anyway, Fary says, the ESOP stock paid respectable dividends to workers' accounts. As of March 1992, a \$100 share paid \$114 in dividends — "competitive" with other investments, he says.

Fary maintains "the real issue in connection with the ESOP was, 'Give me some money. I want it now.' I guess that's human nature."

Marie Darr, the ACTWU organizer, sees it differently. While management profited, workers weren't sharing in

Cone's success. "They felt like they had been cheated," she says. "They felt like they had been misled. They felt like they had been betrayed."

ACTWU stepped up its campaign. On the shop floor, workers wore badges and ribbons proclaiming their allegiance to the union. They held pre-dawn prayer meetings outside the plant gate. "We had the superintendent coming out of the building," recalls yarn handler Mary Swann, a 25-year employee. "They thought we were getting ready to strike."

Workers packed the canteen and sang "Solidarity Forever." They circulated petitions throughout the plant. They filed repeated grievances. "We *ran* that place," says Crystal Pressley, a White Oak worker. "We let them know — we're not scared."

As the rage grew, the tactics got more dramatic. More than 200 workers marched up the hill to Cone headquarters in Greensboro, carrying signs saying "Share the wealth!" and "A deal's a deal!" Millworker Jimmy Seymore donned a judge's robe and white wig, and pounded a gavel for order. After a mock trial, Seymore pronounced his verdict: "They're in contempt of my court," he shouted. "Cone Mills has no defense!" The crowd went wild.

Two weeks later, a group of Cone workers took their boldest step: They brought their complaints directly to Wall Street. About 50 hourly employees went to the offices of J.P. Morgan Securities and Prudential Securities, the lead underwriters of the 1992 stock offering. They met with bank officials and passed out leaflets to employees.

Cone officials dismiss the New York trip as a publicity stunt. But workers say they made an impact. "A lot of people passed us by and they said, 'You keep fighting,'" says 18-year veteran Shirley Thacker, a spinner in the White Oak plant. As for the bank officials, "They told us, 'You all go back to Greensboro and talk to Cone Mills — but we'll call them.'"

Next day, the union members reported to work wearing New York T-shirts. "They was real quiet, the company management was," laughs Thacker.

THE VICTORY

A month after the New York trip, Cone Mills gave in and agreed to negotiate reform of the ESOP. In February 1993, ACTWU and Cone finally reached an agreement affecting 2,800 workers.

Under the settlement, Cone agreed to release \$15.4 million in ESOP funds. Workers could withdraw the money, roll it into other retirement plans, or keep it in their ESOP accounts. The union claimed victory.

Cone says it's comfortable with the outcome. "I think it was a very positive move on behalf of the company," says Frank Fary. "There are people who took out \$8,000, \$10,000, \$12,000. That's kind of exciting. That's a pretty good deal. I feel good about it."

The agreement hardly represented a balancing of the scales. In a case still under appeal, a federal court ruled last fall that Cone didn't break the law when it shortchanged the ESOP by \$14.2 million. What's more, the settlement didn't rectify the fact that Cone executives earned millions off a deal that only marginally benefited workers.

Still, union members at Cone Mills consider the agreement a big victory. After the plan was signed, Greensboro workers filled the nearby union hall to celebrate. The union gospel choir, Voices in Harmony, sang "Victory is Mine." The mood was electric.

"The struggles, the fights, Jesse Jackson, all that was good," says Margo Russell, the spinner at the White Oak mill who also directs the union choir. "But to see people come out — even people who weren't in the union — that was great. That was big." □

Barry Yeoman is associate editor of The Independent newsweekly in Durham, North Carolina.

"They're in contempt of my court," he shouted. "Cone Mills has no defense!"

LOSING OUR SHIRTS

Nearly 500,000 textile and apparel workers have lost their jobs since 1980. Here's how your tax dollars helped throw them out of work.

By Eric Bates

Like much of the textile and apparel industries, Kellwood Company was doing well a decade ago. In 1981, the St. Louis-based firm — which manufactures blue jeans, sportswear, and women's lingerie for leading labels like Hanes, Nike, Adidas, and Sears — employed 16,000 people in 62 plants across the country.

Ten years changed everything. By 1992, Kellwood employed only 6,500 people in 12 plants nationwide. Southern workers were hardest hit. Kellwood closed factories in Fletcher and Cashiers, North Carolina, in Dresden and Alamo, Tennessee, in Ackerman and Liberty, Mississippi, in Lonoke and Little Rock, Arkansas.

In Asheville, North Carolina, 300 workers lost their jobs. Most had worked

at Kellwood for more than 20 years. "It was like a family splitting up," said Dot Early, a 48-year-old seamstress.

Despite the mass layoffs and plant closings, Kellwood is prospering. In 1992, the company enjoyed annual sales of \$900 million, and its chief executive officer, William McKenna, pocketed \$2,234,831 in salary, bonuses, and stock options.

How can a company shut down 80 percent of its factories and still post record profits? Simple, says Kellwood in its 1988 annual report. The firm "brought about the closing of marginal and surplus domestic operations, with selected production being moved to low-cost Caribbean plants."

Translation: Goodbye, Dixie. Hello, Haiti. And Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and the Dominican

Republic. During the past decade, while Kellwood eliminated 9,600 jobs in the United States, it created 8,900 jobs outside the country. Most of the work went to the low-wage, anti-union nations of Central America and the Caribbean Basin, where Kellwood can pay workers as little as 33 cents an hour.

What's more, Kellwood and other American companies have been exporting jobs with the help of U.S. tax dollars. According to a series of reports by a national coalition of 23 labor unions, the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) has spent \$1.3 billion since 1980 to actively encourage American companies to ship jobs to foreign "free trade" zones. Most of the exported jobs have come from textile, clothing, and shoe factories in the South.

"This jobs export program was

started by the Reagan and Bush administrations, but it has continued under President Clinton," says Charles Kernaghan, executive director of the National Labor Committee Education Fund for Worker and Human Rights in Central America (NLC). "Our government continues to use tax dollars to export jobs and promote misery — at home and overseas."

NEW PRESIDENT, OLD POLICY

The NLC first documented how tax dollars are used to close factories in a 1992 report entitled "Paying to Lose Our Jobs." Drawing on internal government and company records, the report detailed how AID and the Commerce Department worked to promote offshore production in the impoverished Caribbean Basin region.

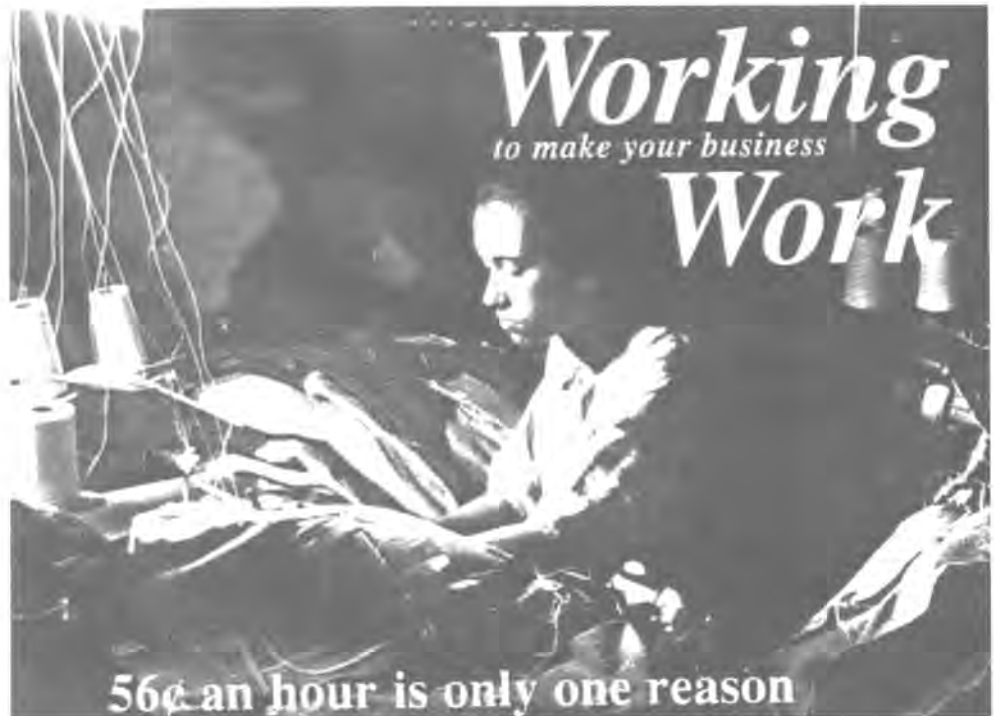
For the government, the goal of the "Caribbean Basin Initiative" was to encourage private-sector development in poor nations — to ward off socialism by spreading prosperity through capitalism. For business, the goal was to train cheap, non-union workers to make products for the American market — to ward off their competitors and spread prosperity among themselves.

To develop the initiative, the Commerce Department formed the Caribbean Basin Business Promotion Council, a group of 20 U.S. business representatives who met with top-ranking government officials on a regular basis. Kellwood sat on the Council, along with Sears, Westinghouse, and MacGregor Sportswear. According to a 1988 memo, the Council would "provide incentives for U.S. firms to invest in or import products" from free-trade zones.

Many of those "incentives" came out of taxpayers' pockets. Working closely with the Council, the government paid Caribbean countries to set up factories, train workers, and provide technical assistance and low-interest loans to American firms that relocated. The government also spent tax dollars on magazine ads designed to lure U.S. firms offshore. "Rosa Martinez produces apparel

for U.S. markets on her sewing machine in El Salvador," read one 1991 ad in the trade journal *Bobbin*. "You can hire her

tively working to persuade American businesses to move abroad." Within six days, Congress passed a law prohibiting



TAX MONEY PAID FOR ADS LIKE THIS ONE DESIGNED TO LURE U.S. COMPANIES TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC.

for 33 cents an hour."

That same year, the Commerce Department sent a letter to 1,000 U.S. businesses. "Over the past 10 years, many of your colleagues and competitors have expanded into the Caribbean," it read. "With labor rates that range from just \$1.00 to \$3.00 per hour, you can imagine the types of margins which these firms are enjoying. For the reasons cited, you owe it to your company to consider expanding in the Caribbean."

To confirm that the government was urging American firms to move overseas, the NLC decided to go undercover. Staff members set up a dummy company, went to a Miami trade show, and listened in disbelief as an AID official promised them federal funds and anti-union blacklists if they set up shop in Central America (see sidebar, page 34).

The NLC report was picked up by *Nightline* and *60 Minutes*, both of which independently confirmed the findings. Candidate Bill Clinton immediately used the news to blast George Bush for "ac-

AID from funding offshore zones that lure American companies.

Once Clinton won the election, however, it was business as usual at the White House. According to a new report by the NLC entitled "Free Trade's Hidden Secrets," the Business Promotion Council still exists, and both AID and the Commerce Department want to continue its operation. In fact, federal spending to promote the private sector in the Caribbean Basin has actually *increased* under Clinton, from \$96.4 million in 1992 to \$105 million last year.

"This was all supposed to stop in 1992, when Congress forbade AID from funding the export-processing zones," says Kernaghan. "But the taxpayer money kept flowing during the first year of the new administration. AID found a loophole — they just converted tax money into foreign currencies, and then used it to attract U.S. companies to their export zones."

HURTING AT HOME

While the government has teamed up with industry to promote cheap labor overseas, factory work at home has plummeted. Since 1980, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports, the U.S. has lost three million manufacturing jobs — more than 497,000 in the apparel and textiles industries alone.

The Caribbean Basin, by contrast, has gained 320,000 workers who make apparel for the American market. The U.S. now imports \$28.6 billion more in clothing than it exports each year — a three-fold increase in the trade deficit from a decade earlier.

According to the latest NLC report, the flow of jobs to the Dominican Republic has been particularly rapid. The country has been the number-one beneficiary of U.S. investments in the Caribbean Basin, receiving \$840 million in American aid since 1982 — almost all of it to create jobs in the private sector.

In 1980, the Dominican Republic had only 16,000 assembly jobs producing for the American market. By last year, the number had soared to 170,000.

The same U.S. companies setting up operations in the Dominican Republic were meanwhile closing plants and ordering mass layoffs at home. Over the past few years, NLC research indicates, companies with production in the Dominican Republic have eliminated 41,571 jobs in the U.S.

A closer look at the numbers shows that clothing workers in the South have suffered the most.

All told, 29 companies have eliminated 25,345 jobs in the region — nearly two-thirds of the total. Tennessee heads the job-loss roster with 4,960, followed by Texas, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina.

Kellwood Company led the corporate flight, eliminating 4,766 jobs in the

South while creating 7,161 overseas. “We were all really mad,” said Linda Stiffler, who lost her job in 1990 when Kellwood closed its underwear plant in Altus, Oklahoma. “Our work was being shipped abroad to workers who were getting less than a dollar an hour.”

Other big-name clothes manufacturers who have exported Southern jobs include Gerber Products, Hagggar, Jordache, Lee, Oshkosh B’Gosh, Sara

Princeton, West Virginia. The brassiere manufacturer now has plants in Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic.

Patty Davis was one of those who lost her job. “My life insurance was canceled the day I left, and I can’t afford to buy medical insurance,” she told *Nightline*. “What we’ll do after my unemployment expires, I don’t have any idea.”

While the government has spent

nearly \$200 million to prop up the apparel industry in the Caribbean over the past two years, it provided only \$100 million to retrain American workers like Davis who have lost their jobs. Unfortunately, the program isn’t working very well. Last October, the Labor Department admitted that only one in five retrained workers finds a job that pays at least 80 percent of what their former job paid.

“They say they’re going to retrain workers. But for what?” said Bobby Joe Adkins. A storeowner in Clarksville, Tennessee, Adkins has watched business decline since the Acme Boot Company closed its factory and moved to Puerto Rico, idling 750 workers. “What are you going to retrain a 50- or 60-year-old to do?”

Last May, angry Clarksville workers torched hundreds of Acme boots and launched a nationwide boycott of the Dan Post line to protest the shutdown. “They just want to get away from

unions,” said Marshall Tucker. “You won’t see us wearing their boots anymore,” added Kenneth Griffy, whose wife and daughter also lost their jobs.

But Acme knows the industry is heading further south. The company is a subsidiary of Farley Industries, which

LABOR UNDER COVER

The National Labor Committee wanted to investigate first hand what federal officials were offering American businesses to move offshore. Unfortunately, the group only had a staff of three and a bank balance of \$200. So they decided to form their own textile firm and go undercover at industry trade shows.

But what should their “company” make? Charles Kernaghan, the executive director, thought they should manufacture handkerchiefs — until Donna Smith, the administrative assistant in the New York office the group shares with the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, started laughing.

“You look like a bunch of environmentalists,” Smith told Kernaghan and staffers Barbara Briggs and Jack McKay. “Say you make recyclable canvas bags to replace the paper and plastic ones retailers use.”

And so New Age Textiles was born. An ACTWU shop sewed 100 bags for the firm featuring a green logo with the motto, “Save the Trees.” Armed with the samples and some phony business cards, the eager company executives set off for Miami to attend the *Bobbin* “Apparel Show of the Americas” in April 1992.

Promoters funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development immediately began wooing the young firm on the advantages of moving offshore. “Labor costs are real light” in Jamaica, AID official Stuart Anderson told them. “There are no taxes in the free trade zones” and “we’re not union.”

At the invitation of promoters, they also visited Honduras and El Salvador, where AID officials offered them millions for factory space, worker training, and start-up costs. “We are your tax dollars at work,” laughed one Honduran promoter. Officials also offered them a computerized — and illegal — blacklist to screen out potential union organizers. Feigning concern that moving overseas would idle their “150 employees” in Miami, the execs were advised to lie and say they had declared bankruptcy.

Shedding their briefcases and returning home, Kernaghan and company combined their eyewitness accounts with in-depth research to expose the jobs-export program. “The officials who spoke with us made a big mistake,” he says. “They didn’t know that New Age Textiles had been established by the National Labor Committee, and that we would soon be reporting back to the American public on how our tax dollars are being misused.”

—E.B.

Lee, and Wrangler. Levi Strauss threw 3,275 people out of work in Arkansas, Texas, and Tennessee while hiring 10,002 in the Caribbean.

In 1992, Maidenform closed its last sewing plant in the continental United States, laying off 115 employees in

also owns Fruit of the Loom. Ron Sorini, a senior vice president at Fruit of the Loom, negotiated the apparel and textile provisions of NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, which is designed to open Mexico to more U.S. jobs and products.

American workers whose jobs move south of the border may not receive adequate retraining, but the NLC discovered that they are sometimes used to train their own replacements. In 1990, Perry Manufacturing opened a factory in El Salvador to make women's clothing for national chains like J.C. Penney, WalMart, and K-Mart. The following year, the company closed six plants in the U.S., including a sportswear plant in Decaturville, Tennessee that employed 306 people. For six months prior to the shutdown, the company secretly taped workers repairing seconds from the Salvadoran plant — and then used the videos to train employees in El Salvador.

HURTING OVERSEAS

Even companies that brag about their domestic production have moved Southern jobs to the Caribbean Basin. The Dallas-based Hagggar Company, which trumpeted its "Made in the USA" labels during the 1980s, began setting up shop overseas in 1983. "Many of our products can be made offshore without hurting our domestic production," board chair Ed Hagggar Sr. assured workers at the time. "They're a new and growing business for us."

In the past five years, Hagggar has laid off 1,534 Texans. Over the same period, the company has hired 1,561 workers in the Dominican Republic.

Like other proponents of the Caribbean Basin Initiative, Hagggar insisted that it had a duty to help poorer nations. "From a moral point, as well as good business, it just makes sense to help developing countries make a living," Ed Hagggar announced. "We cannot sit on this globe, in America, with a population of 230 million, compared with the world population of 4.5 billion, with a great disproportionate share of the world's wealth, and not help our fellow nations."

But the influx of U.S. tax dollars and jobs has brought neither prosperity nor democracy to "our fellow nations." As manufacturing employment in the region has soared, real wages have been slashed by as much as 60 percent. In 1990, the Commerce Department reported that the

initiative has made "no dramatic difference yet in living standards in the Caribbean Basin."

In 1991, the United States International Trade Commission concluded that the initiative "has not fueled economic growth and development in the region." The study added that "almost all people interviewed stated that it has not lived up to its original billing as a regional economic development program."

According to Americas Watch and other human rights groups, many Caribbean Basin factories are nothing more than sweatshops. In Honduras, employees at one of the largest apparel factories exporting to the U.S. market have been kicked and beaten for violating plant rules. Women who become pregnant are immediately fired; 15-hour shifts and forced overtime without pay are common.

The Dominican Republic, often held up by AID as its model of development, now exports \$1.2 billion in apparel to the United States each year. Yet the country ranks in the bottom 10 worldwide for spending on health care and education. Workers in the "free-trade zones" there have watched real wages plunge by 46 percent since 1980. Hourly pay averages 52 cents.

Companies that move to the Caribbean Basin get more than cheap labor — they get an environment hostile to organized labor. As early as 1984, AID reported that "labor problems in the Dominican Republic industrial free zones are non-existent, primarily because the government prohibits unions in the zones."

According to the National Labor Committee, Dominican workers who have tried to organize have been immediately fired, their names placed on a blacklist which is circulated openly among companies. "Today," the NLC reports, "there is still not one single union in any of the free zones in the Dominican Republic."

The rulers of the Dominican Republic have no worries that the United States will intervene to safeguard worker rights. The vice president of the Dominican Republic has close ties to businessman Alfonso Fanjul, who gave the Bush campaign \$100,000 in 1988. Fanjul also owns 160,000 acres of sugar fields in Florida, where he boasts one of the worst labor-rights records in the state.

"OUR FUTURES ARE LINKED"

Fortunately for workers at home and overseas, the National Labor Committee has forced the Clinton administration to make good on its campaign promises. On January 12, AID issued new guidelines prohibiting the use of any funds — including money already converted to foreign currencies — to finance projects that could result in the loss of U.S. jobs. The guidelines also require AID to cut off funds to any project that violates worker rights.

"It's a huge policy change," said Charles Kernaghan, the NLC director. "Every single penny of money that AID spends anywhere in the world is now conditioned on respect for worker rights."

The new rules come too late to help many textile and apparel workers in the South. "The damage is already done," Kernaghan said. "The plants are closed up and the unions have been busted."

Kernaghan also harbors no hopes that AID will voluntarily enforce the new guidelines. "They are virtually impossible to monitor," he conceded. "You can have all these laws, but the laws don't mean shit unless you put the pressure on."

So the labor committee is doing just that. In February, the group prepared a seven-minute video and took out newspaper ads in Honduras to inform workers there of their federally protected right to organize. "The best way to enforce the guidelines is to reach the people," Kernaghan said. "The people themselves will monitor them."

In the video, Kernaghan makes an extraordinary appeal to the workers of Honduras. "Let me be very clear," he says. "The U.S. labor movement is not opposed to foreign aid. We want more aid, not less.... What we object to is U.S. companies fleeing the United States, relocating offshore to get their hands on young women forced to work under sweatshop conditions in dead-end jobs for starvation wages. No one gains under a system like this — except the companies and retailers.

"Our goal is that wages in Honduras gradually rise to the level of wages and benefits in the United States," he concludes. "The opposite would be that the boss pits us against each other in a race to the bottom. We in the U.S. won't be pitted against our sisters and brothers in Honduras. Rather, our futures are linked, and we'll struggle together to win our rights." □

Eric Bates is editor of Southern Exposure.

DIARY OF AN ORGANIZER

When it comes to joining a union, the majority doesn't always rule.

By Lane Windham

For textile workers, 1993 proved to be a landmark year for organizing in the South. In a wave of elections at a dozen plants from Miami to Nashville, more than 3,500 workers voted to join the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union — the most new members for ACTWU in a decade.

"Momentum is building," explains Bruce Raynor, the Southern regional director for the union. "Employees have grown tired of the way companies treat them. Workers are fed up with employers who have no respect for loyalty, provide no job security, and offer skimpy wages and benefits at best."

Raynor attributes the success to what he calls "a culture of organizing" at ACTWU. The union prides itself on the diversity of its organizing efforts; every-

one from the rank and file to top regional leaders takes an active part in campaigns.

To further increase its diversity, the union has also drawn on a new generation of young activists from the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute in Washington, D.C. The Institute recruits labor organizers from colleges and community groups as well as from the shop floor.

Although Institute graduates helped organize more than half of all new ACTWU members last year, they encountered old-style union-busting tactics throughout the South. Enforcement of labor laws remains weak, and companies facing union elections routinely break the rules — forcing employees to attend "captive audience" meetings, threatening to close up shop if the union

wins, firing workers who support the union.

To understand the tactics faced by textile workers who want to join the union, we asked Lane Windham, an Organizing Institute graduate and a contributor to Southern Exposure, to keep a diary of the organizing struggle at Macclenny Products, Inc. (MPI) in Macclenny, Florida. Workers there voted to join ACTWU in December — but as this diary of an organizer shows, the majority doesn't always rule. (The names of some workers have been changed to protect their identities.)

NOVEMBER 29

They put an American flag in front of the plant today.

This flag fascinates me. In the nine

ZER

weeks since I've been here. MPI has done all they can to prevent their employees from unionizing. They've led workers to believe the plant will close if the union gets in. They've fired union supporters. On the company list of eligible voters that I received today, they've included plant supervisors, technicians — even the boss's secretary. We'll have to go to court to prove that all this violates the National Labor Relations Act.

This doesn't look like liberty and justice for all from where I stand.

MPI is owned by Target, a low-price suit manufacturer which moved part of its cutting operation south to Macclenny in 1987. The people who work for MPI want to join Target employees in Pennsylvania who have been represented by ACTWU for 30 years. Macclenny is

midway between Jacksonville and the Okefenokee Swamp. MPI is the largest employer in town.

Workers at MPI cut the parts for suits which are then sewn together in the Dominican Republic and returned to Macclenny for shipping. MPI is one of thousands of "807" cutting operations, named after Section 807 of a U.S. tariff law which permits companies to evade duties on foreign-made products if some part of the manufacturing is first done in the States.

The people at MPI who cut, label, count, and spread suit after suit each day didn't know much about "807" before they called the union. They did know that they were tired of getting disciplinary "points" if they left work to care for a sick child or go to the doctor. (One woman even got points for having a heart attack in the plant.) They knew that \$5 an hour doesn't pay the bills. And they knew that somewhere in Pennsylvania, people who did the same work had a union — and a contract that paid \$2 an hour more.

The workers at MPI knew about Pennsylvania from an earlier organizing attempt at Macclenny in 1988. Almost all of the 125 employees knew about that union drive, even though only 15 of them were here at the time. History like this is kept alive, whispered on break and in the bathroom.

NOVEMBER 30

It's Tuesday. That's meeting day.

We have our meetings in an oversized Day's Inn room. We remove the beds and pilfer chairs from all over the motel. Twenty to 30 people usually attend meetings, so it's a tight squeeze.

For the past few weeks, the workers have been telling Monica Russo, Chris Hines, and me — the ACTWU organizers — that the company has convinced many of their co-workers that if the union comes in, the plant will close.

We made this the theme of today's meeting. We explained that ACTWU has won 11 elections in the Southeast so far this year, and not one of those places has closed. We told people how much their company is profiting. We armed them with facts.

For the most part, the 25 people who attended today's meeting already have their minds made up. They're the die-hard union supporters who will educate the people who work next to them about the union. We make up leaflets for them

to hand out, but the most effective tool by far is word of mouth.

This committee of union supporters is the core of the organizing campaign. Many have put their lives and families on hold in order to win the union.

Today they are buzzing about their first union newsletter. Many had written articles, and they took a lot of abuse from anti-union co-workers about their personal statements. They gain strength by being packed in a room together. They're ready for Monica's rousing speech about exactly how much money they are making for the company. After being made to feel like hoodlums all day, they're ready to hear that they have a right to stand up for themselves. They're ready to hear that they can win.

Eight weeks ago, they had an excellent chance of winning. Now, with the help of Jackson and Lewis, one of the country's most notorious union-busting law firms, the company has turned the campaign into a neck-and-neck battle.

Jackson and Lewis teaches companies like MPI how to defeat pro-union workers. They hold seminars with supervisors and tell them their job is to stop the union. "Weed 'em out," a J&L consultant once told a group of employers. "Get rid of anyone who's not going to be a team player. I'd like to have a dollar for every time there's union organizing and the employer says, 'I should have gotten rid of that bastard three months ago.'"

After the union drive started, MPI completely revised the employee handbook, wiping out everyone's dreaded absentee "points." Since then, the company has worked to get workers thinking about everything but why they called the union in the first place.

DECEMBER 1

I visited Mandy Taylor tonight.

Mandy has only been working at MPI for less than a month. When she was hired, she seemed like a solid yes vote. Her husband works at the railroad, which is union.

But when I stopped by Mandy's trailer this evening with Sharen McDuffie, the sole voice of the union on the shipping side, we weren't exactly greeted by a cheerleading squad.

Mandy was convinced that if the union came in, people could no longer get their raises and vacations. She told us that we would all have to go on strike. Of course, she let us in on the big secret that the plant would close if the union came in.

Sharen took it from there, puffing on one of her long cigarillos. "That manager with the perfect hair has been talking to you, hasn't he?" she demanded. "Did he tell you that 99 percent of the time there isn't a strike, and that we would have to vote to strike." Sharen also explained that a legally binding union contract is the only way to make changes for good at MPI.

Mandy wasn't convinced. Her only other job had been as a check-out clerk at Wal-Mart. The only benefit that job offered was 25-cent Cokes in the employee break room. Wal-Mart paid minimum wage, whereas Mandy makes \$5 an hour at MPI.

Finally, Mandy confided to us, "You know, I've just never been one to show myself. In school, I was always the good girl. I just don't think I'll tell anyone how I'm going to vote."

She was telling us she was voting no. She knew what the union could do for her. Yet for Mandy, admitting that the man in the suit was flat-out lying about the risk of unionization felt like defying her fourth-grade teacher.

It was easier to stay quiet — especially when the company had convinced her that losing her very first battle against authority would mean returning to Wal-Mart.

DECEMBER 2

UPS messed up and delivered our union stickers to the plant's front office yesterday! That gave the company a free shot, but we got the stickers back. UPS is union.

I took a stack of the stickers over to the McDonald's where everyone meets for lunch. I only caught two people, but when the workers showed up this afternoon, they were covered from head to toe. That told me that the union network was active inside the plant.

Delores put stickers on her white sneakers. One foot read "RESPECT," and the other read "UNION YES!" Geneva had a "NO MORE POINTS" sticker plastered on her very pregnant belly.

The latest company leaflet featured a reproduction of a Florida unemployment form. It read, "This is filled out by people who lose their jobs." It ended with, "At

Macclenny, our employees are working. Compared to many in the apparel industry, we are very *fortunate*."

"Fortunate!!" scowled Delores.

"They haven't seen *my* paycheck."

She took the "\$\$\$" sticker for her feet tomorrow.

DECEMBER 3

Workers were ordered to attend another anti-union meeting today, and they told me later that the chair of Target's board of directors made his intentions very clear. "There is no magic. This isn't a fairy tale. We're talking about reality. We don't want a union here."

Photo by Lara Cerri



THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD TOLD EMPLOYEES THAT HIS FAMILY ALSO GETS ITS "BREAD AND BUTTER" FROM THE COMPANY. "TRY TO FEED YOUR FAMILY ON MY PAYCHECK!" RESPONDED ONE WORKER.

Workers who attended said he went on to tell them that Target signs their paycheck, and they should be grateful to have a job.

Christy Wilkerson called out, "If you weren't making no money, y'all wouldn't be here. Y'all ain't bankrupt."

"English is my native tongue," the board chair snapped. "Please use it with precision."

Christy said he refused to answer any questions regarding the reasons the workers want a union. He wanted them to forget about absentee points and low wages. Instead, he told them to ask themselves, "What benefits do I currently have that could be thrown on the table? What could my family and I afford to lose?"

He told them that the company's profit was none of their business. He showed slide after slide of newspaper articles about strikes and plant closings. He highlighted places where the union had lost campaigns. He ended with, "My family and I get our bread and butter from Target, too, you know."

When Christy called out, "Try to feed your family on my paycheck!" he ordered her to be quiet or leave the room.

"Remember," he added, "the company makes all hiring and firing decisions. The union has no say in that."

Delores looked at him as workers filed out of the room. "If the union can't do anything for us," she asked, "then why are you fighting it so hard?"

I don't know of a group of people who deserve a union more.

DECEMBER 4

I met Wendy Hodges at the beginning of the campaign — even before the first union card was signed. I was visiting her best friend, Sarah Caldwell. One of my contacts thought Sarah could be a potential union leader. The same contact thought Wendy would be too afraid to fight.

When Wendy walked in unannounced and found out I was from the union, she looked at me with a combination of shock and terror. It was as though she saw Fidel Castro himself sitting in her friend's Lazy Boy recliner.

I thought to myself, "This one's gonna be the one that runs back to tell the boss the union is in town."

Sarah continued discussing the union with me with an easy calm. She both agreed with everything I said and defended the company in the same breath. Always a very bad sign.

Wendy, meanwhile, was willing to argue with me, although she didn't trust me. Her first words were the inevitable, "I need my job, you know." Then she questioned me about what the union could do

for her. That's perhaps the best sign.

Since then, Wendy has attended every union meeting. She stood and smoked by the door for the first meeting, but now usually sits on the front row.

Last week, a supervisor asked her, "Have you ever eaten green beans out of your garden for breakfast? You will if the union gets in." She told him she was once so poor that she'd eaten *someone else's* green beans for breakfast.

She's fighting, and she's hungry to win.

That's why my heart jumped when she walked in this morning and wouldn't sit down. She told me she had some questions, and then told the kids to wait in the car.

She told me the chair of Target's board had cornered her after the captive-audience meeting yesterday. "He made it sound like he was looking out for me. You know, I don't believe him. But he told me how the union caused a plant to out-and-out close in Pennsylvania. He made it sound like those people didn't really vote to strike."

She had been staring nervously at a spot on the wall, but now she looked at me. "I don't know who to trust any more. How can I be sure?"

I tried to point out some of the things her boss *didn't* mention. He didn't discuss her recent pay cut. He didn't bring up the time her supervisor told her to beg harder for overtime. He didn't tell her Target had moved the union shop in Pennsylvania to the Dominican Republic so it could pay workers \$10 a day.

I spoke evenly, but I was as nervous as Wendy. "My God," I thought, "this woman is stronger than the rest because she's had to come so far. How will the others react?"

So when Monica, another organizer, finally got Wendy to sit down and put things in perspective, she calmed more than one person in that room. When

Wendy left, she took union stickers for the kids in the car.

Tonight, I am very, very tired.

DECEMBER 5

When the ACTWU members from Levi-Strauss in nearby Valdosta came to one of our union meetings in Macclenny, they refused to stay very long. "You don't want to be caught here after dark," they told me. "Not if you're black."

While some of the violent white backlash against the civil rights movement has reached Macclenny, there is little evidence of the movement's victories. None of the clerks at the Winn Dixie nor waitresses at the local restaurants is black. All the town officials I saw show-



FEW VICTORIES OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT HAVE REACHED MACCLENLY. "YOU DON'T WANT TO BE CAUGHT HERE AFTER DARK," SAID A UNION MEMBER FROM NEARBY VALDOSTA. "NOT IF YOU'RE BLACK."

cased in the local Christmas parade were white. So were all the parade's various beauty queens. Twenty of MPI's 125 employees are black. There are no blacks in management.

So I can't say that I blame Tina Jacobs, an African-American woman, for turning me down when I first urged her to sign a card. Her look said, "So, what can this little white girl tell me that I don't already know?"

But she didn't get away that easy. When I went back to visit Tina today, I went with Archie Mae Richardson, one

of several African-American women who have supported the union from the beginning.

There was a telling contrast between this housecall and the one with Mandy, who is white. Mandy didn't want to believe that the company was lying to her. She wanted to trust the company, because she wanted to believe that the company values her work.

Tina is far past wrestling with whether or not to trust the company.

She reminded us that she had been with the company for several years — far longer than most black workers manage to stick around. She told us about how younger white women were called back from a layoff before she was. She's scared that if the union loses and she has

supported it publicly, her supervisors will give her twice as hard a time. In their eyes, she'll not only be black, but union black.

She was for the union all along, she told Archie. She just didn't want the company to find out. She signed a card before we left and promised to attend next week's meeting.

DECEMBER 6

I went to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) office today in Jacksonville. They're the people who are supposed to safeguard the democracy of this whole process.

The Jacksonville office is more wel-

coming than other Board offices I've visited. Here, you don't have to walk through a metal detector when you enter the building.

I'm filing charges on behalf of one of the workers the company fired just before Thanksgiving. A week before he was fired, Arnold Clayton wore a sign that read, "Stop slavery at Macclenny Products. Vote Yes December 10th." When his supervisor made him take the sign off, he stuck it on the wall. MPI claims they fired him for "refusal to follow company policy."

Photo by Lara Cerri

Even if we win Arnold's case, it will be at least a year before he sees a paycheck. MPI fired a woman during the 1988 campaign, and it took months of litigation to win back her job and thousands of dollars in back pay.

In the midst of heated campaigns, companies often consider the prospect of such legal bills a small price to pay to keep the union out.

I'm also filing charges against the company for saying that the plant will close and for making other illegal threats. Many of the supervisors haven't even been attempting to cover their tracks. MPI knows they won't have to pay any fines if we prove they've broken the law. The big, bad punishment for their offenses will be to post a sign that essentially says, "We've broken the law."

That's it. They have to hang a blue-and-white sign.

Perhaps we could just persuade them to put Arnold's sign back up on the wall.

DECEMBER 7

Only seven of the workers at MPI have any previous union experience. Most have never seen a union in action. We've had to really work to give them a vision of just how different MPI could be with a union.

"Yes, it can happen," Becky Hess urged, "but only if you make it happen, like we have." Becky used to work at Target in Pennsylvania, and now she's an ACTWU organizer. She came to Macclenny today with Lea Patterson, a current Target worker. They told us that the union shops in Pennsylvania do the same work as Macclenny, but for a couple bucks an hour more, and with a lot less grief.

For many people at the meeting, it was a convincing glimpse into the Promised Land.

First, Becky ripped the scary Halloween masks off Target management. She talked about the chair of the board who shouted down the workers last week. "He brings me coffee during contract negotia-

tions," she smiled. "With sugar." She described the wage increases and elevated benefits Pennsylvania workers have won. "Pennsylvania doesn't have absentee points," she reminded them, "and we've got the power to keep points out."

She described how Target tried to make sure that Macclenny workers wouldn't know what they are missing. They'd even warned the Pennsylvania truck drivers not to talk about the union when they delivered goods to Macclenny.

Becky emphasized that the workers in Macclenny must make their union their own. "You're going to still be fighting Target when you've got that contract in

your hand. You'll just be fighting on equal ground for the first time."

The message she gave workers to carry back to the shop floor tomorrow is simple in its power — "Target can be beaten. We're proof. You have a right to win."

My heart soared as the meeting ended. After all, we'd already beaten Target's efforts to keep workers apart. Over 40 people attended the meeting. That's the most yet.

We're gonna win. We've just got to. What more could it take?

DECEMBER 8

When Christy Wilkerson came to my hotel room sobbing this morning, my first thought was, "My God, they've fired her, too."

For many workers, the union and Christy are one and the same. If the company was going to pick a scapegoat two days before the election, she could very well have been it.

But they hadn't gone that far, probably fearing a backlash. Instead, Christy said, they cut her hourly pay by a dollar. It was a dollar that would reach deep into her pocketbook. She already receives food stamps, even though she works 40 hours a week.

But losing that dollar also slices into

her pride. Christy is known for not taking anything off anyone. Her father is a labor leader with the Communications Workers of America, and she's "daddy's girl." Now she will have to walk into the plant, day after day, and accept doing the same work for less money. If they'd fired her, at least she could claim the moral high ground. Now, if she quit over the money, she couldn't even collect unemployment.

We're filing charges for her. She didn't stop crying when I told her that, though.

A couple hours after Christy left, Brenda called from the break room phone. They needed 13 more union T-shirts. She had the names ready. We'd already given out about 40 yesterday.

She told me the cutting floor looked like a union rally because so many people wore T-shirt and hats. Supervisors were going around with notepads, writing down the names of people wearing shirts, but their scare tactic wasn't working.

The shirts read, "Proud to be American, Proud to be Union," and featured a huge American flag. Run that up the pole, MPI.

DECEMBER 9

Rumors had been circulating for weeks that the president of the corporation would visit Macclenny the day before the vote. Bob Bayer made his heralded appearance today, right on schedule.

Every employee was ordered to attend the meeting. Some of them told me later that he all but said the plant would close if they voted for the union. "We need the flexibility to compete — that's why we set up Macclenny as a non-union facility. If that flexibility ceases to exist, Macclenny will cease to exist. Period. That's all there is to it. I fear that ACTWU would put the economic reasons for our existence into jeopardy."

Bernice Crawford, a label sewer, put it best — "You'd have to be a crazy person not to read between the lines."

Then Bayer told them he had fired the plant manager. That's the guy everyone hated and who was a chief impetus for the union organizing drive.

Target was scared, and they were taking no prisoners.

DECEMBER 10

We went into the pre-election conference at 12:30. That's when the company and union representatives meet with



"I HAVE SEEN PEOPLE PUT DOWN AND RUN OVER," SAYS VERNON DAVIS. "WE NEED A UNION SO WE WILL BE TREATED WITH RESPECT."

the Labor Board agent to discuss the list of eligible voters and other election arrangements.

The meeting was in the break room, and it gave me and my fellow organizers our first opportunity to enter the plant. The break room is actually a platform that overlooks the floor, and we could see everyone as they worked. Union T-shirts were all over the place. Many workers waved at us, proud that their union reps were in their plant and that the company had to take it.

After the conference, some of the spreaders told us the company had given them a huge bonus an hour before they voted. The company had been promising them a pay raise for weeks, but they hadn't seen it yet. Until voting day. One worker said he would vote no now that the company had come through with the money.

All we could do was wait.

As we sat in the union office, I flipped through the leaflet we put out today. Fifty of the people voting today had put their individual pictures on this leaflet with a quote about why they wanted a union. Fifty people were willing to step that far out, even though they could have voted secretly.

I waited with Vernon Davis, a union supporter who had actually adjourned one of the company's captive-audience meetings before the Boss had finished. Everyone just followed him out the door. That was before Thanksgiving, though, before Vernon's operation. He'd taken a medical leave in order to donate one of his kidneys to his father.

Today, he rolled into the plant in a wheelchair to vote.

Robin Bryan didn't make it that far. Robin didn't work today or yesterday because her mother just had a heart attack. Everyone knows Robin supports the union — earlier in the campaign she ripped an anti-union poster off the wall and paraded through the plant with it. There was no question how she would vote today.

But when she went in to vote, the company observer told her she no longer worked there. "They fired me while I had my ballot in my hand," she told me.

They claimed they fired her for points. She'd gone over her "allotment" when her mother had a heart attack yesterday. She'd gotten many of her other points caring for her son, who she feared may have diabetes. She's a single mother.

I knew the freelance photographer had arrived to shoot the union victory when I saw the bumper sticker on the old Toyota: "Visualize World Peace." There just aren't too many of those in Macclenny.

"So, what is this? Some kind of election?" she asked me as she loaded her Nikon.

"Yeah, it's a union election," I answered. "They're voting right now. Let me explain all this to you so you'll know what to do."

"Well, I did photograph the Clinton victory party, you know." She peered at me through the lens and asked, "So, what

observers to watch as he counted the votes. The first vote was a yes. So was the second. The third was a no.

When there were no more slips of paper left to count, he turned the box upside down for us to see. The union had 58 votes. The company had 56.

A majority of workers voted to join the union — but they were robbed of their victory. Now we have to go to court to have the nine ballots we challenged thrown out.

The whole process will take years. Years that workers will spend playing by the rules of the democratic process, while the company continues to make its

Photo by Lara Cerri



"I DON'T KNOW IF WE WON OR NOT," ONE WORKER SAID AT THE VICTORY PARTY. "I JUST WANTED TO TELL Y'ALL THAT I WON. ME. I WON."

do you have to do to get a union anyway? Just vote?"

Not quite.

We went into the vote count at 3:30. There were 124 people on the company list of eligible voters. We challenged nine of the ballots, saying they were cast by supervisors, technicians, and other workers who were ineligible to vote under federal law. The company contested three — Arnold and Robin, whom the company had fired, and another employee receiving workers compensation. The 12 "challenged" ballots were sealed in envelopes. They would be counted only if they would determine the outcome of the election — that is, if neither the company nor the union got 63 votes.

The Labor Board agent broke open the box and stirred up the ballots. He told the

own rules — and break them as it pleases.

Wendy Hodges stopped by after our "victory" party. People were upbeat, and their determination to win in court lifted my spirits.

She left the kids in the car again, but this time she didn't stay long. We joked about how we'd met at Sarah Caldwell's house, and Sarah turned out to be the one counting the votes for the company.

"I don't really understand about the court, and all," she told us. "I don't know if we won or not. I just wanted to tell y'all that I won. Me. I won."

Maybe Wendy did win. But she deserves a union. □

SEWING HISTORY

Filmmakers documenting the textile uprising of 1934 discover fear, silence, and a complex link between past and present.

By Judith Helfand

In the summer of 1990, I joined veteran filmmaker George Stoney to produce a documentary film about the General Textile Strike of 1934. George, a pioneer in community-based media, had been chosen to make the film by a research consortium of Southern scholars, union members, and community leaders assembled by labor economist and activist Vera Rony to study this watershed moment in Southern labor history.

The uprising involved hundreds of thousands of mill workers and challenged the traditional system of paternalistic control by textile bosses. But the popular memory of this pivotal organizing campaign had been lost — silenced by fear, distorted by the media, and omitted from school textbooks. The consortium wanted to reclaim a history of protest for a new generation of workers — a task that would prove far more difficult than any of us anticipated.

When I joined the project, I was

handed a videotape that contained the Fox Movietone newsreel footage of the strike. Raw, unedited outtakes revealed initial hopeful protests, including an unauthorized Labor Day parade by 10,000 workers in Gastonia, North Carolina and a spirited speech from atop a car by a rank-and-file organizer named Albert Hinson. Most of the footage, however, focused on scenes of havoc and violence. Soldiers armed with a machine gun guarded the Cannon Plant in Concord, North Carolina. Union members from across the region held a mass funeral for six strikers shot in the back in Honea Path, South Carolina.

Edited newsreels shown in theaters across the United States during the fall of 1934 reinforced the images of terror. On the screen and in the streets, the guns and bayonets of the mill industry seemed indomitable. Images of solidarity and celebration — when shown at all — seemed suspect or sinister.

This footage posed a quandary faced by all filmmakers who document labor themes: How could we go beyond the stereotypical newsreel images of violence and death to tell the drama of grassroots organizing not captured by the movie cameras? We wanted to recount the day-to-day nurturing of a labor movement based on citizenship that had inspired communities of cotton mill workers with the courage and tenacity to confront the authority of the mill owners. Our greatest challenge, we realized, was to keep the newsreels from defining what is history.

We wanted to find the people who were in the old footage. We wanted to know what those times were like from their point of view, from the other side of the newsreel cameras. So, armed with the Movietone videotape, a VCR, and our camera, we went to some of the towns that we saw in the outtakes. We hoped the people in the film would help

find their friends, their union brothers and sisters, and perhaps even themselves.

We brought our camera crew to Newnan, Georgia, where one of the most dramatic newsreels showed National Guardsmen arresting 126 strikers and imprisoning them for a week at Fort McPherson. At first, however, we couldn't find any surviving strikers in this mill community brimming with retired workers. Then three sisters from the East Newnan mill village, retired spinners who "went to work" during the strike, identified Etta Mae Zimmerman among the "outsiders" who had come from towns as close as seven miles away to help the union local in Newnan shut the mill down.

We found Etta Mae in nearby Hogansville. "I'm not ashamed of being there, 'cause I didn't do nothing that was so terrible," she said as she watched the newsreel. "Nothing except join the union."

We learned from Etta Mae that the union community in Newnan had been scattered — banished from the mill villages, or even from the town, by blacklisting. The few townspeople we were eventually able to find who had been members of the local were bitter about a labor uprising that had cost them their jobs, got their families evicted, and ostracized them from their community. Many had told no one — not even their own children — of their part in the uprising. Many remained unwilling to discuss their actions over half a century later.

We realized that the fear and silence would have to be a key part of our story. Not only would our film have to counter the simplistic newsreel images equating unionism with violence, we would also have to explore how history is used — and misused — to keep workers divided and frightened. Making the film would mean opening old wounds and revisiting bitter memories. But it would also offer an eye-opening look at the complex relationship between the past and the present.

"USE THIS COB"

As documentary filmmakers, George and I found ourselves in the position of

interlocutors — bringing the physical evidence of unionism into the Piedmont towns where it had been forged and then forgotten. The trunk of our rental car was weighed down with proof: cardboard file cabinets, organized by mill and by state, filled with copies of letters from mill workers to the Roosevelt administration demanding that their rights as workers and citizens be protected. We also brought a file full of the only comprehensive collection of photos of the 1934 strike, owned by the Bettmann Archive in New York.

For many strike veterans, our visit was the first time that they had seen these pictures and letters, far removed from their communities both in distance and

might make our project suspect. Instead, many people we interviewed were awed that their role in the labor movement had meant enough to be saved — and that the union had not "upped and left" them, as they had been led to believe.

This kind of document research was especially important in locating African-American strike veterans. To look at the photos and newsreels, one would think that black workers played no role at all. But a retired African-American mill worker from Gastonia made an obvious point: Blacks wouldn't have taken part in a crowded public event like a Labor Day parade. If whites could be fired for joining the union and marching on Main Street, blacks could well be lynched.



Photo courtesy UPI/Bettmann

OVER 10,000 WORKERS STAGED A GIGANTIC — AND UNAUTHORIZED — LABOR DAY PARADE IN GASTONIA, NORTH CAROLINA IN 1934.

cost. For George and myself, facilitating a reunion between rank-and-file participants in the strike and the photos, letters, and newsreel footage that documented their struggles was the most poignant part of the project.

It seemed fitting that our best resources for finding strike veterans were the hundreds of Labor Board cases that union locals had filed over a half century before in a vigorous attempt to seek justice for blacklisted workers. We used these documents like phone books, tracking names through city directories from the years following the strike to the present day. At first, we were concerned that showing participants their names on documents from Washington, D.C.

Some blacks formed union locals, and some white locals accepted black members. But much of the resistance by black workers took place outside the union, in letters to the government demanding equal rights under New Deal labor policies.

The documents also led us to retired textile workers who stood up to the arbitrary authority of the mill owners even though they did not belong to the union. One woman described how during the lean years of the early '30s, her boss warned employees to cut down on toilet-paper use in the plant. In response, she and a friend from the spinning room hung a corn cob from the back

of the commode with a sign that said, "Use this cob and save your job." She took as much pride in this mild act of humorous protest as many who joined the union, broadening our notion of what it means to be part of a "labor movement."

Our search for strike veterans and their supporters helped young workers learn about the historic uprising. A present-day mill worker in Honea Path had grown up thinking that "the union came in and shot people" — even though her father witnessed the events and knew that management deputies had killed the workers. Only when she read an article in the local paper about our film project was she pushed to ask her father what

really happened in her town. "Here I am, 37 years old, and he never told me that," she said.

Even though the strike was brutally put down and the workers silenced, for many the uprising was but the beginning of a long struggle for justice. We met people who have devoted their lives to the rights of working people who started out as local leaders during the strike, including Lloyd Gosset, a union activist in Atlanta; Eula McGill, a volunteer organizer in Alabama; Lucille Thornburgh, a local leader in Tennessee; and Sol Stetin, a textile worker who rose to national union president.

After filming for three years, we're now in the midst of editing the film with Susanne Rostock, a visionary film editor. We hope to finish *The Uprising of '34*

this summer and launch an ambitious campaign to put it to use as a resource for community groups, teachers, grassroots organizations, and unions.

But even before completing the film, we have seen the impact its message can have in Southern communities. At a Grassroots Leadership conference, organizer Charles Taylor read aloud from a list of local textile unions organized in North Carolina between 1933 and 1934. Workshop participants responded with amazement: "Not in my town!" "I can't believe it!" "That's the most anti-union town I know!" Thus a simple piece of paper challenged long-standing myths about the ability and desire of Southern workers to organize.

At a union summer school in Georgia, we showed footage of the funeral at

Honea Path, and discussed how working people can reclaim the history of powerful organizing that lies behind the simplistic images of violence. Afterwards, a young worker stood up and recited a eulogy for the workers who were killed there.

"You died for me," he said. "But I'm not going to experience your death as a loss of ideals and the failure of our struggle. Because we're here now doing what we're doing. And we wouldn't be organizing here now if you hadn't taken the stance you took. Thank you — you are not forgotten." □

Judith Helfand is co-producer of The Uprising of '34. Peter Miller, a consulting producer, contributed to this article.

RESOURCES

AMALGAMATED CLOTHING AND TEXTILE WORKERS UNION

510 Plaza Drive, Suite 1520
College Park, GA 30349
(404) 766-8856

Largest private-sector union in the South. Publishes bimonthly newspaper *Labor Unity*.

INDUSTRIAL UNION DEPARTMENT

815 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 842-7800

Sent initial organizers to J.P. Stevens. Coordinates organizing campaigns leading up to union elections.

NATIONAL LABOR COMMITTEE

15 Union Square
New York, NY 10003
(212) 242-0700

Education fund supported by 23 unions to support worker and human rights in Central America. Publishes research reports and develops organizing and educational resources.

UPRISING OF 1934

200 Park Avenue South
Suite 519
New York, NY 10003
(212) 529-3328

Video project sponsored by the Research Consortium for the Southwide Textile Strike of 1934. Producing a documentary film to use as an education and organizing tool.

INSTITUTE FOR SOUTHERN STUDIES

P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702; (919) 419-8311

Non-profit organization that conducts research and supports grassroots organizing. Offers reprints of two dozen articles and resource listings on textiles and labor history from *Southern Exposure*. Each article is \$2; the entire set is \$36. Titles are followed by volume, issue number, and year of publication:

Gastonia 1929: Strike at Loray Mill (I, 3-4, 1973)
The Factory Girl Song: A History (II, 1, 1974)
Textile Men: Looms, Loans and Lockouts (III, 4, 1975)
Textile Women: Three Generations in the Mill (III, 4, 1975)
A New Twist for Textile: What the Future Holds (III, 4, 1975)

Textile Bibliography and Resources (IV, 1-2, 1976)
On the Line at Oneita Mills (IV, 1-2, 1976)
Stevens vs. Justice: A Campaign History (IV, 1-2, 1976)
Victoria Sobre Farah: Organizing and Boycott (IV, 1-2, 1976)
Labor History Bibliography (IV, 1-2, 1976)

Women's Labor School: "I Was in the Gastonia Strike" (IV, 4, 1976)
The Men at the Top: The J.P. Stevens Story (VI, 1, 1978)
Cotton Dust Kills and It's Killing Me (VI, 2, 1978)
Special Report: Greenville, South Carolina (VII, 1, 1979)
The Heyday of Industrial Womens' Basketball (VII, 2, 1979)

Union Busters: Special Report (VIII, 2, 1980)
Workers' Owned Sewing Company (VIII, 4, 1980)
Working Women: Resources, Rights and Remedies (IX, 4, 1981)
Letter from New Deal Textile Workers (XV, 2, 1987)
Massacre in Honea Path (XVII, 3, 1989)

The South At Work: From Mills to Malls (XVIII, 3, 1990)
Confessions of a Union Buster (XVIII, 3, 1990)
Two Steps Forward: The Union at Oneita (XVIII, 3, 1990)
Through the Mill: Pension Fund Crisis (XIX, 3, 1991)

Plowing

By Ehrich Thomas

This time I've got it adjusted perfectly — not too deep, just the right pitch.

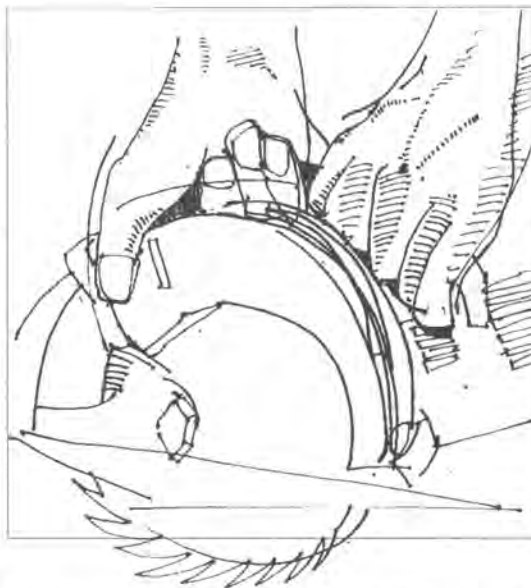
The ground is moist but not wet. Chocolate soil shears off the disks smooth and easy, laying in rowed humps like a child's braided head.

The Massey knocks and rattles, lugs low against the strong pull of the earth. I'm thankful for power steering as the tractor bounces, and I back up often, looping around. After an hour my shoulders and neck ache from constantly twisting sideways, watching.

It's supposed to rain tonight. I've been plowing since I got off work. This needs to get done or everything will be thrown off. Squash bugs, worms, beetles will take all.

I hear Alice yelling. She is four and demanding to ride. It's not warm enough for her to be barefooted and wearing shorts. Her upper lip is slick with snot. Her feet are smudged, shins spotted in bruises like dappled bananas. I take the tractor out of gear and lift her to my lap. "Go faster," she says. I try to explain. She wants off. On my next pass I notice that she has tied the dog to her wagon with baling twine.

Before dark I finish and back the plow under a sweetgum, unhitch, block up the tongue with cinder blocks. I park the tractor in the barn and gun the motor before killing it — it's



what people do. Alice runs up asking what took me so long and when are we going to eat and when is Mommy coming home. I explain, yet again, that Mom is at a seminar and will be home Saturday night. "Oh," she says. "I'm hungry."

We have macaroni and cheese for supper. Fran had said it would be a big hit and was right. We do dishes, pajamas, brush teeth, pee.

"Daddy?" Alice looks me in the eyes with her serious, extra-genuine expression. Her neck recoils like a cautious turtle's. "Mommy always reads me a Mabel story."

I read for perhaps 10 minutes (miniature people have given Mabel special gifts), before noticing her breathing. Steady, raspy exhalations sound like her mom's yoga noises. I watch her little chest rise and fall and remember this from a song Uncle Oscar used to sing:

Don't that road look rough and rocky?

Don't that sea look wide and deep?

Don't my baby look the sweetest,

When she's in my arms asleep?

Uncle Oscar died of cirrhosis of the liver when I was a teenager. Daddy died when I was 29. Big Henry. I think he

would have liked Alice. Maybe we could have worked things out. I don't know. We were far apart. I have a book on fathers and sons that Frannie gave me but . . . nothing seems to change — he's dead, I'm alive. Now I'm reading a book about cowboys driving cattle from Texas to Montana. They have to deal with Indians and robbers, grizzlies, and blizzards. They drink whiskey and play poker and fight in warehouses over beautiful women. In one section, a woman gets kidnapped by a very savage Indian and repeatedly raped by grotesque, drunken sidekicks.

Frannie is at a seminar for survivors of that kind of trauma. Sometimes, when she comes home late having seen 10 clients, she is tired, stressed out, used up. I ask if she's had a good day. She lies, says "OK" and asks about mine, goes outside to feed and turn out her horse.

When she comes back in her eyes are usually red. "You all right?" I try to sound genuine, soften my face.

"Yes." She won't look at me and starts to put on her pajamas. When I watch her undress, I wish she would leave the pajamas off, climb on top of me, grunt and groan and hoot and holler.

Beside me, she breaks the silence. "I hate this." She pinches her eyebrows together with her thumb and forefinger. "Coming home feeling this way."

Now her mouth stretches into a clown-like frown. I hand over the box of Kleenex.

Unprompted, she begins talking about job stress and pressure and being a mom and a wife. I am a problem solver and try to step in and arrange priorities. This never seems to work. Her anger swings toward me. Can't I be more of a dad? Does she have to do everything? Is sex all I think about? Is she obligated?

I defend myself. All I did was try to help. You don't have to jump down my throat. Eventually, I blame her pathetic father. All roads lead to Rome. Then the kitten noises start and I know that the end is near.

"I was just a little girl," she screeches. Her voice sounds odd and distant, coming not from her throat but deeper down and further away.

I usually end up watching David Letterman.

Right now, the 11 o'clock news is on. I have to get up early and take Alice to daycare. Fran's never been gone for this long. Maybe after work I'll rent some movies. Saturday, there's a spring fair at Silk Hope — Old Fashioned Farmer's Day. We might check it out.

Joe has already strung the drop cords out when I drive up. His Skil saw and level are on the plywood floor. He packs a golf ball-sized chew in the corner of his jaw. His shirt is off, though it's a cool April morning. "What's happening, Dick!" With Joe, everybody is Dick.

"You!" I holler back. I raise my camper top and carry tools to the floor. Joe offers me a chew and I refuse. He sticks his nose close to the pouch, lifts up, says "ahhhhh," like he's some kind of satisfied. At least twice a day he does this to me. I haven't had any since New Years. I just say no, though in the mornings, strapping on my toolbelt, I struggle; I can still feel the fat, spongy pouch in my back pocket, smell the pungent, syrupy leaves, draw on the soft nugget squished against my cheek. Oh, sweet nectar. I always kept an extra in the truck, just in case. It hasn't been long enough.

"Where are the Dicks?" Joe asks.

"It's a quarter till," I remind him. "Nobody wants to work before starting time . . . but you." I sip from my coffee cup — a brittle, plastic, insulated thing with a pushbutton hole to sip out of. I got it free, for a dollar, at a 7-Eleven. Routinely I scald myself, cheap java dribbling off my chin onto my pants.

"Saw 20 deer near Lindley Mill this morning." Joe gets quite animated. He sweeps his arms, describing the location, movement. His eyes demand my eyes. I let him have them, nod my head occasionally, pretending collaboration. (It came over the hill. It jumped out of the creek. I saw him. He saw me.) I know this technique well. I used it on Big Henry for many years.

I hear Fred and Earl in the distance: Fred's Olds 98 that he bought for \$500. It sounds like a Harley and flakes of vinyl flap on the roof like tiny flags. "Drives like a Caddy," Fred says. He is Earl's older brother by five years. They grew up on a dairy farm working seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. When their father had a stroke,

Fred sold the herd. They both live in trailers in a pasture across from their mom's house and seem happy to be out of the milking business.

Fred climbs out of the Olds, yawns, stretches high. "Paaay daaay," he sings.

"Eee hiiiiii," Earl seconds the motion. They poke around in the huge trunk, hunting nail aprons, hammers. Side by side, they could be twins — pug-nosed, flat-assed, thick-wristed boys. Men really, but they seem more like boys, laughing and teasing every day, pink-cheeked, almost whiskerless.

"Joe Joe," Fred says. Joe is carrying a heavy load of studs to the deck.

I have a book on fathers and sons that Frannie gave me but . . . nothing seems to change — he's dead, I'm alive.

"Dick Dick," Joe calls back, dropping the lumber in a pile on the plywood floor. "Saw 20 deer about a mile from the mill."

"Any real cute ones?" Fred asks. We all laugh. Fred's tack with Joe works better than mine.

By lunchtime the first-floor walls are up. We have a way of getting into a groove. Measuring. Cutting. Nailing. Talking. Toting. Sweating. Things fall into place. Maybe that's why I do this. Big Henry wanted me to go to law school. He was against me marrying. "Too young," he had said. "Your whole life's ahead of you." He couldn't believe I would actually sell my inherited stock portfolio and buy 50 acres out in the boondocks. Really, I'm not quite sure why I did what I did. I like to think it was what I wanted. I was sick of expectations and bullshit and being judged every time I broke wind.

At work there is a logical sequence, a process of steps, a rhythm. Each day a stack of wood diminishes, walls go up, roofs go on. I go home tired.

Neville shows up at 3:30 with a case of beer. He has come to pay us — a gracious pimp. Not a bad pimp, actually. He keeps us in work, pays us on time,

brings treats intermittently. "Already running rafters?" he wonders aloud, surprise in his voice clearly strategic. A well-placed compliment goes a long way. I'm a sucker every time.

We wind up the cords, get up tools and cover the lumber with plastic.

"What it is, Hank?" Neville tosses me a Bud.

"You," I tell him. "It's your world. I just live in it."

He grins. He has been in the beer for a while.

"Save me a spot," I say. Jive talking has always worked well between us.

"What's happening this weekend?" he asks. I explain that Fran is at a conference, that I'm soloing with Alice. He shakes his head in mock disbelief.

Joe is showing Fred and Earl how to gig flounder. The brothers are going to Wrightsville Beach with some buddies for the weekend. Joe holds both fists high over his head then jams them toward the floor, quick and hard. "Watch out for your feet," he cautions. "They look big under water."

Fred and Earl sip at cans, studying him like an exotic animal.

"Your old lady's at a conference?" Neville's face is twisted.

"Yeah. Trauma and Recovery."

Again, he shakes his head. We drink more beer. Joe demonstrates how to filet a flounder using a framing square and a scrap of plywood. The plywood is the flounder. He chops with the square. "Don't cut its head off. Gotta have something to hold on to." He chews tobacco and drinks at the same time. The brothers nod. They have received Joe's wisdom.

On the way to get Alice I crank the volume up on a bluegrass tape. The song is a fast banjo and fiddle duet. They are kicking ass and I pound out the beat on the steering wheel — end of the week, paid, done. Friday's are the ticket. I wonder sometimes what Big Henry's Fridays were like? I can see his hair, silver as a coon's, swooped way back, feet pointed out like a penguin's. Wingtips. Always. He shakes his head, not unlike Neville, only he looks forlorn, somehow ashamed. Of me, I always thought. Inevitably, I let him down.

Before I can buckle Alice in, she reaches for the knob and cuts the music off. "Gross, Daddy."

I collect myself. "Did you have a nice day, Sweet Pea?"

"No. When will Mommy be home?"

"One more day." I hold up my index finger. I try to kiss her on the forehead and she veers away.

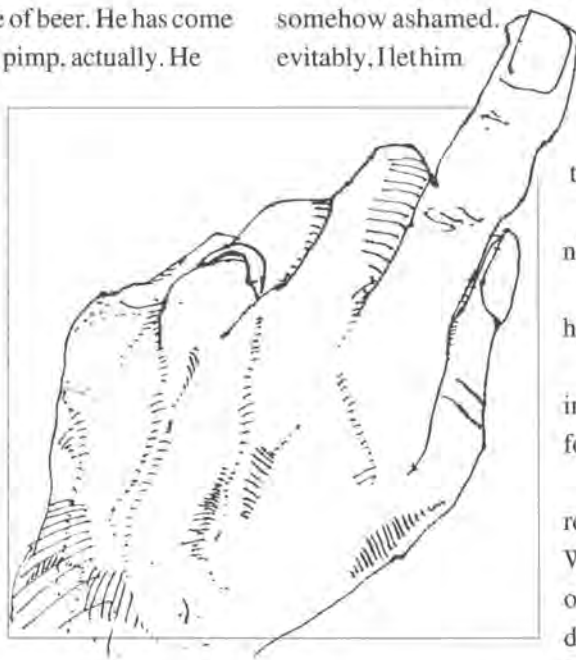
On the way home she fights the relentless droop of eyelids, in vain. Wet strands of hair stick to the side of her face and tiny drops of sweat dot her nose and lip. I get *101*

Dalmatians for her and *The Last*

Picture Show for me. Again, we have macaroni and cheese. The mean lady in her movie scares her. Halfway through she is asleep so I plug in my movie, which I saw years ago, back when Cybill Shepard could act.

The ball fields at Silk Hope School are crammed with tents, red and green antique tractors bordering the fair like a downhome cross-stitch pattern. People browse the craft alleys, starting, stopping, waiting on reticent children dizzied by the pageantry.

"Where is something fun, Daddy?" Alice shows no interest



in weaving or molasses making. Not soon enough, we find our way out of the vendor section. Alice points across the field. "Ponies! Ponies!" She wants me to gallop with her and I acquiesce.

A teenager reaches in his apron, trades me eight dollars for my ten, hefts my daughter onto Midnight; one of eight unlucky ponies destined to trod in a circle all weekend. Parents loop alongside some of the kids. Alice waves me off.

For an hour we watch the tractor pull, narrated by a gregarious MC named Leroy who knows everything about every tractor. We see four Belgium draft horses power a mechanical wheat thresher. At the old-timey saw mill run by a steam engine, we see Ernest and Beaumont Flicht. They run a modern saw mill near where we live. Ernest yells at Beaumont in public just like he does at the mill; she isn't loading logs fast enough to suit him. Near them, people stare

at the ground. Their son lingers under an oak, a gawky adolescent now, clad in camouflage with a dagger strapped to his hip. His eyes seem fixed on something far off.

After another ride on Midnight, Alice pulls me toward a drink stand. We pass the crosscut saw contest where a man and a boy pull and push. They look unhappy when a short, sappy section finally drops from the long log. Pairs of men whisper behind knuckles, anxious about their upcoming turns, planning strategies. Alice likes the smell of pine resin. I wish Joe were here. We'd be the last entry. No contest. The saw would sing in alternating swishes and afterwards we'd give Alice our blue ribbons, leaving the other dicks nudging their Cat hats and thumbing their scalps absent-mindedly.

Instead of going to the drink stand, Alice and I decide to eat under the big tent. On the way we hear over the public address system that paratroopers from Fort Bragg will be skydiving into the fair at two o'clock. I explain to Alice what will happen. Her eyes brighten. She can't help smiling. "Parashooters," she keeps calling them. She wants to ride on my shoulders.

At the big tent, I switch her to my hip.

"Pork or chicken?" A wide woman with blue hair and a gingham apron smiles at Alice, who presses her face to my shoulder.

"Barbecue plate, thanks," I say.

"You having fun with your Daddy?" the woman asks. Alice puckers her bottom lip, lowers her brow, nods up and down. My arm is tired but I don't want to put her down.

We sit at a long table with metal chairs and Alice drinks most of her Coke and licks butter from her roll. "I'm not very hungry," she says. I eat barbecue, coleslaw, baked beans. I'm a clean-your-plate kind of guy; miserably full but don't waste anything. Big Henry lives. I used to have to sit at the table until I had eaten everything on my plate, including broccoli and brussel sprouts.

Close to two o'clock we migrate to a roped-off area where the skydivers are supposed to land. An officer from the 182nd Airborne of Fort Bragg speaks on the PA describing terminal velocity. Alice is on my shoulders again.

Tiny figures jump from a plane, wearing different colored smoke flares, holding hands in the shape of a star. I hear "freefalling" over the PA. When the parachutes open I feel Alice's little legs gripping me and shaking slightly. She taps my head, whispers "Daddy." As the first of the divers nears, she squeezes tighter; I hear her

sucking air. All of the men land within a 10-foot circle at the center of the roped-off area. The crowd responds with raucous, thunderous applause. Alice slides down and hugs my neck until I think I might cry.

In my truck on the way home, Alice has fallen asleep. She clutches a Dixie cup full of homemade ice cream I bought on the way out. I slip it easily from her little fist, legs jerking as if a string joined them to the ice cream. What I have is more like a shake now and I drink it fast. It is too sweet and I wish I had another.

Dogwoods and redbuds have popped out along the countryside, azaleas ready to burst. When I was little I used to help Big Henry in the azalea beds. He showed me how to mix peat moss into the soil, build a berm around the shrubs, mulch with pine needles. We'd take breaks and have Cokes and licorice. Before supper we'd play catch in the front yard. He'd set his scotch and water by the lamppost, have a swig now and again. I'd try to sting his hand with my fastball and he'd mesmerize me with his underhanded knuckler.

Once at Pawley's Island he took me to the Pier to see a large shark that had been caught. He held my hand and walked me up close, exposed the rows of serrated teeth. I studied the monster for a long time and when we finally left, we raced to the station wagon and I won.

My gas gauge is on E and I swing by Reems' Gulf and Grocery. By the time I'm out of the truck, Robert is at the pump island. "How 'bout it, Shorty?" Robert calls me Shorty

I studied the monster for a long time and when we finally left, we raced to the station wagon and I won.

though actually, I'm average height. He must be in his mid-60s, paunchy, bald. His fingernails are caked in gunk. One of his bottom teeth is gold.

"Pretty good, Robert," I say. "How 'bout you?"

He squeezes the nozzle and the pump clicks, one, two, three, four. . . "Doing all right for a old man, I reckon. But I got a bad place. Hurts like I don't know what. Don't know how I got it, neither."

"Damn," I say. He leans over and unlaces his left boot.

"The old lady says it looks like a snakebite. Curly says a spider. What do you think, Shorty?"

I think Robert's foot has never seen sunshine. Webs of purple veins look on the verge of popping through skin as thin as an onion. Brown toenails point in different directions. He lays it across his other knee, leans against the truck for balance. "Now ain't that something?"

"Yes, Robert, it is." I want his foot back in the boot.

He opens his pocket knife, pokes around the perimeter of a cankerous-looking sore the size of a quarter on the ball of his foot. "Blame thing hurts like the dickens." He pokes, grimaces, showing his shiny tooth. "What's it look like to you, Shorty?"

"Doesn't look so good, Robert."

"Naw. It doesn't, does it? Been soaking it kindly at night." He opens the knife to a smaller, thinner blade, testing an alternative poking strategy. "But hell. I open at six ever morning. Seven days a week. Know what I mean, Shorty?"

"You should slow down some, Robert," I offer.

"Hell," he says, "people's all the time wanting shit. Ain't that right, Shorty?"

"Yep." He grimaces, face gathered into a point, like a seal's. The pump clicks off.

Robert is trying to put his sock on, teetering on one foot.

The storm door to the store cracks open. Curly pokes her head through. "Telephone, Daddy." Her nasal twang makes her sound irritated. Curly has a wild, frizzy mane and a mustache she doesn't shave often enough.

"Hey girl," Robert yells back, but he is too late. Curly has already returned to her position on the stool beside the police radio.

"That dern girl." Robert looks up from his brogan. "Need a ticket on that, Shorty?"

"Nah. Just put me down."

Robert hurries toward the telephone moving like a wind-up toy, shoelaces whispering across the asphalt. I pull away quietly, not waking Alice.

A fantasy I play with is Big Henry meeting Robert Reems. "Dad," I say, "meet the real thing." It's not much of a fantasy, really. I don't know how he would react. I certainly don't see them talking Dow Jones in a golf



cart, or fishing with worms and cane poles on the bank of a pond. All my dealings with Big Henry are this way. I pretend. Right now I see him in the bleachers at the tractor pull, shading his eyes with a folded program, content as if he'd been drawn there, with the others, in crayon. I see him gabbing with overalled men reclined on chaise lounges beside their sputtering antique hit-and-miss engines, eating peanuts, sipping sodas. Alice holds his hand and he patiently explains to her how the motors work.

When I turn onto our gravel drive, Alice stirs, opens her eyes, frowns. "Are we home?" Her voice sounds like a duck. I smile, nod. I see Frannie's car parked beside the pumphouse. She's home early.

"Look." I point for Alice to see.

"Mommy's home!" she calls.

Frannie meets us as we come to a stop. Alice leaps into her arms. The two of them together are radiant — rosy-cheeked, shiny-eyed.

Frannie moves toward me, for a hug, I presume.

"We saw parachooters, Mommy!" sings Alice.

"Sounds like you guys have had fun!" Frannie matches her enthusiasm, winks at me.

I lift Frannie's travel bag from the Toyota and she takes my free hand. Alice hangs on her mom's hip, describing Midnight, the humongous bucking bronco pony she rode all by herself, two times.

Walking to the house, Frannie slips her arm around my waist and leans her head on my shoulder. When we kiss, her tongue rolls gently through my mouth. There is a look in her eyes. Her freckles seem perfect. □

Ehrich Thomas lives in Graham, North Carolina.

Beyond Stereotypes

By Jereann King

Sandy is a proud woman. For the last 14 years, she has been a top production worker at a furniture factory. She takes good care of her family and participates in her children's school activities. She dreams that one day she and her husband will be able to buy a new home and send their two children off to college. Like many adults, Sandy can't read and write very well — and like many adults with low literacy abilities, she functions well as a contributing member of her community.

You don't see people like Sandy when the mainstream media portray adults with low literacy abilities. Instead, adults who cannot read and write are shown as *confused*, *in crisis*, *lost souls*, or *carriers of some disease*. Negative stereotypes have far-reaching implications for how literacy problems are defined, and how literacy services are provided. They also affect how adults with literacy problems see themselves.

Literacy is a serious problem in this country; the Census Bureau estimates that seven million Southerners never got beyond the ninth grade. Print and electronic media provide powerful vehicles to draw attention to the problem. Unfortunately, too often they are used to "blame the victim," portraying adults with literacy problems as responsible for creating their own situations. This places the spotlight on the people who have the problem, and shifts it away from the schools, politicians,

businesses, religious institutions, and other organizations which share responsibility for creating and addressing social issues such as literacy.

Sandy's baby daughter is five years old and has started kindergarten. Sandy would like to be more involved in her daughter's schooling, so she begins

read well should get help because "illiteracy is a disease that passes from one generation to the next." Sandy feels scared and ashamed.

Most media ads about literacy campaigns are directed to people for whom literacy is not an issue — people who read and write well. One ad features a

picture of The Holy Bible with the caption, "For someone who can't read, this is pure hell." The ad urges potential volunteers to call a local literacy program to "tutor a lost soul." Another print ad depicts a can of Starkist tuna next to a can of Amor'e cat food, suggesting that those who cannot read might mistakenly buy cat food instead of tuna to feed their families. Again the ad targets literate people, encouraging them to volunteer their time or to urge someone with a reading problem to get help.

The creators of such ads insist that powerful images are necessary to get the audience's attention. An image of a mother and her child with empty holes where their faces should be *does* get our attention — but it also suggests that literacy problems are hereditary, and that people who

cannot read and write well have "nothing" in their heads. Crafty and sensationalized ads may catch the eye of potential volunteers, but what message do they send to those who might benefit from their services?

Negative stereotyping sometimes



Photo by Steve Gaj

PARTICIPATORY LITERACY PROGRAMS ENABLE ADULT LEARNERS LIKE MARGARET CODY TO DEFINE THEMSELVES THROUGH THEIR OWN WORDS.

thinking about working on her own literacy skills. She's seriously considering attending a class somewhere in her community.

Driving home from work, she hears about a program on the radio. The announcement says that people who don't

makes adults feel unwilling to ask for help; they feel ashamed and worried that they will be judged negatively if they let people know about their literacy problems. Such advertising distances adults with well-developed literacy abilities from those with literacy problems — both in terms of human qualities as well as literacy abilities. Few, if any, media ads acknowledge the incredible wealth of knowledge and experience possessed by people with low literacy skills, or give respect to their strengths and successes.

Who benefits from suggesting that people who cannot read are lost souls, or that they might abuse their families by feeding them cat food? Such images may help service providers recruit a few new volunteers or get a little new funding in the short run, but promoting negative stereotypes ultimately contributes to the problem rather than the solution. Volunteers or teachers who are attracted by such advertising are likely to promote prevailing stereotypes, making it difficult for students to develop a sense of their own power and control.

To effectively address problems of adult literacy, we must engage in a critical analysis of the messages portrayed by the media. We must carefully examine ads and ask, "Whose interests are served by this particular image?"

Literacy programs should also take a pro-active position by providing positive and alternative perspectives for ad agencies, reporters, radio announcers, and others in the media. Too often we are dependent on the goodwill and creativity of ad agencies and newspaper editors who have little perspective on literacy issues. Literacy educators can provide leadership in promoting positive images of adults with literacy problems.

To understand the complexity and impact of stereotyping, literacy educators must also examine their own perceptions of adult learners. If

educators buy into general media notions of adult learners as lost souls, they are unlikely to encourage student involvement in decision-making. Instead, they are likely to feel that learners are incapable of making decisions about curriculum and assessment, even though participatory learning offers an effective and important approach to literacy education.

Participatory literacy settings — where students help shape curriculum, program focus, structure, and their own

By centering lessons around the lives, cultures, and backgrounds of learners, teachers can build on their strengths and achievements. Lessons can be designed to help students cope with negative images and place learning experiences in a broader perspective.

Such programs give students the opportunity to define themselves through their own voices, telling their own stories and writing about their own lives.

Through the process of student writing, learners share their experiences and feelings about situations related to literacy and how they cope with family, work, and community life. The writings help dispel myths about adult learners and serve as reading material for other students.

As a result, teachers don't have to figure out how to talk about students; students talk for themselves. Students and teachers respect each other as contributing members of their shared community. And students share with each other their struggle for improved literacy with dignity.

Sandy was talking with Nora, one of her co-workers, during lunch, explaining how she wanted to learn to read and write better but didn't know exactly how to go about getting help. Nora looked surprised and said she had been thinking about the same thing but didn't really want anyone to know she had problems with reading. She explained that she was ashamed; she didn't want people to think that she was stupid.

Sandy told her friend she understood what she meant. She said she had heard about a local literacy program and suggested that they try it out together. They agreed that it would be better if they went together, because they both understood what it was really like. □

Jereann King is director of programs for Literacy South in Durham, North Carolina. A version of this article appeared in the organization's newsletter, Vision.

MY UNCLE SAMUEL

Margaret Cody worked on her literacy skills in a program for employees at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. "I was a professional dancer for 15 years for the James E. Strait show," writes Cody. "I love to write music and poetry. I also love my classes. For my age, it's a great educational experience which keeps me up-to-date."

My uncle Samuel is a funny man
He likes to tell jokes
and make funny faces
When I was small
he used to tap dance for me
and I would tap dance
with him
Boy, he could tap
I remember
whenever I wanted to go
to a movie
My uncle would give me show fare
and tell me to have a good time
He would make sure
I had money for hot dogs
and pop corn
But now he is getting old
and sick
He can't do the things he used to do
But he still tries
He used to be one dressing man
He still dresses real cool
but not like before
I wish those days were still here
But time goes on

assessment — provide environments that allow all involved to move beyond stereotypical notions of adult learners. Programs like the Star Adult Education Center in Biloxi, Mississippi and New Horizons in Franklin, Virginia enable adults to define who they are for themselves.

Preacher in the Cornfield

By Junebug Jabbo Jones

A few years back I was in New Orleans when a friend of mine asked me if I'd go tell stories to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference convention that was meeting there at the time. They had booked a ride on the Mississippi in one of those paddle wheel steamers and wanted some light entertainment. Well, I hadn't been on one of those River boats before and as New Orleans depends on the River for its life I figured I ought to check it out.

Being that the SCLC is composed of progressive preachers (or so I thought), I figured that they'd enjoy the story I call "Preacher in the Cornfield." I got the name from that old song that the slaves used to sing, "Some people say that a preacher won't steal but I caught one in my cornfield. . . ." It's got nearly as many verses as "The Legend of John Henry." Well, the time came and I started into the story, but it soon seemed like more than a few of those good preachers were of a mind to leave me for catfish bait.

I told about the time when I had a job mopping floors at the State Office Building in Cincinnati, Ohio. I was working late one night when I noticed this heavy-set dude who looked like he was trying to sneak into one of those fancy private suites up there on the 14th floor with a young woman. She looked to be in her twenty-threes.

The minute I laid eyes on him, I knew I knew that man from somewhere!

He was so busy flashing his gold-trimmed tooth at that good-looking young woman that he paid no mind to all the soapy water that I'd put on the floor. The first thing you know that guy slipped and fell! It seemed like the whole building shook when his bottom thumped that floor.

When that young gal stooped over to try to help that guy up, it struck me where

I knew him from. This here was Rev. Dr. A.B.C. Golightly, B.S., M.S., Ph.D., D.D., LL.D. — and he had several more letters tagged on to his name. It was the self-same guy that Head Deacon Johnny Green ran out of my hometown of Four Corners, Mississippi, when I was 12 or 13 years old.

From what I was to understand, the Rev. Dr. was doing very well for himself in Cincinnati, running for the City Council and everything. It was said that he had a fair to even chance of winning.

'Course I could have told them folks back in my hometown that it was something wrong — the man had to been lying! 'Else how come a man with so many figures behind his name wanted to preach at a little church like that, in a little town like that, in MISSISSIPPI! But when I was coming up, you didn't back talk no grown people and tell them they's wrong. When you'd get big enough to back talk grown people, you's big enough to leave home too.

You ever notice how it is that people's child-rearing habits work out pretty much the same as the police those people have to deal with? See, when I was coming up, the High Sheriff was just bound to be the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan — it was part of his job. So our people had to be strict on us less they wanted to see us dancing through a bonfire or swinging on the end of a rope.

What happened in Four Corners was, those grown people hired that man, Rev. Dr. A.B.C. Golightly, ("BS", "MS", and so forth), to be the Pastor of The First Missionary Tabernacle of Calvary Free Will Church of the Hebrew Profits (Colored Division). As far as I know, ours was the only church of that denomination anywhere to be found. Bishop Wilson, the founder of

our denomination, had been the pastor of our church for years and years, had never been sick a day in his life till he choked himself to death on a piece of fried chicken on the first day that we was to move into this brand-new church that he had worked so hard to build.

Lord, the way they mourned that man, you'd a thought he was the Son of God Himself Almighty. It was so many people crowded up in and around that church — people came from four counties — it took them a hour and a half just to view the body.

It couldn't have been no more than 10 days after the funeral, when here come Golightly. He said, "Er ah, I am a preacher. Er ah, I was called to be a preacher by the late Bishop Wilson. Er ah, I just finished up my schooling and I am ready to take up preaching on a full-time regulation type of basis!"

The people looked at him and said, "Well, Bishop Wilson passed away last week!"

That man let out a scream, and — big as he was — dropped down on both knees just like James Brown and real tears commenced to rolling down his cheeks! Right then he could have got anything he wanted out of them people. That's how he got the job.

At first, everything went all right. Golightly wasn't no Bishop Wilson but the man could preach. Turn him loose in a pasture, he could make a herd of cows shout! He could sure 'nough preach! Things seemed to be going fine till Head Deacon Johnny Green found out that Rev. had took to fooling around with Sister Mary Martha Rose Hill. That wouldn't have been so bad except for the fact that Deac thought he was the one who had Sister Rose Hill's nose open. So Deac didn't waste no time making sure that Rev.'s wife got the news

about Rev. and Sister Rose Hill.

Now Rev.'s wife was a great big woman, Rev. Mother Gilda Golightly. She was a preacher too. She had to weigh at least 300 pounds, she was over six feet four inches tall, had a mustache and everything. She had one eye that cut off on its own from time to time.

To pay the note on their new church they used to go down to the Court House square on Saturday's to set up a booth to sell chicken and chitterlings dinners. They set up there right between the white Baptist Church and the white Court House to sell dinners.

Sister Rose Hill was known to be a shouting lady. She would shout if you's to holler, "Jackie Robinson was a baseball player," and you could get in the right key. But Sister Rose Hill could sell them dinners. It was more than a few would come to town just to buy a dinner from her — Joe Blankership used to say, "I'd pay 50 cents for one slice of white bread if I could just stick the money in Sister Rose Hill's purty little hand!"

That very next Saturday, Sister Rose Hill was down at the Court House selling and here come Rev. Mother Gilda preaching and saving souls that day. She had started preaching around that chicken and chitterling stand and it wasn't long before Sister Rose Hill got happy and was shouting all over herself. Before she knew what she was doing, she twisted and knocked over that big kettle of chitterlings, slipped, and fell all up in the stinky stuff.

Rev. was passing by in his Cadillac car at the time. He seen Sister Rose Hill slip in the chitterlings. He stopped his car right in the middle of Main Street. He ran over and stooped down to help Sister Rose Hill out of the chitterlings and slipped and fell down plum on top of her.

All the time Rev. Mother Gilda ain't stopped preaching yet . . . 'cept it taken Rev. too long to get up off of Sister Rose Hill. Rev. Mother cut her wandering eye

over at Rev. and Sister Rose Hill down there wiggling in the chitterlings. She cut the other eye over at the big pot of grease they were frying the chicken in. She taken that big Bible she was preaching with and swung it so that it knocked over that big kettle of grease so that it spilled right on the seat of Rev.'s \$150 suit! Sister Rose Hill stopped shouting and both of them got out of their chicken-hot, chitterling-funky clothes no sooner than you

wouldn't nair one of the big shots take the time of day with the first one of us 'cept it was someone with a camera around.

A Big Shot would wave to one of the little fellows always be snuffing up behind them. This little busy body would come over and say, "What's your name, brother?" The white ones would call you "Sir."

"What's your name, Sir?"

"My name is Jones, MISTER Junebug Jabbo Jones."

Illustration by Jacob Roquet



They run back over to the Big Shot and act like they wasn't whispering back to him. He come and wrap his arm around you, flicking ashes all over the place, blowing cigar smoke all up in your face saying, "JJ my man, how long have you been with us? Fellows, get a picture of Mr. Jones here. Mr. Jones is a man who knows the dignity of a well-mopped floor. . . JJ, my man, I too have mopped floors in my day. Never give up hope, my friend. . . Did you get that picture, gents?" And before I could get a word in edgewise they'd be tramping all over my "well-mopped floor."

But the second reason that I didn't pass a report of Rev.'s background in Four Corners to those people in Cincinnati

was the fellow he was running against for that City Council job. He was the lawyer for the Cincinnati Klan. On top of that he was known to be in good company with the people from the Mafia in that territory!

Now that might surprise you if you know anything about the Klan, because the Klan is just about as hard on Catholics and Jews as they are on black people.

Nobody ever said anything to me about why those SCLC preachers got so upset about this little story. Maybe some of them felt that the shoe was fitting more than a few feet around there. □

Junebug Jabbo Jones travels the country collecting the wisdom of everyday people. He sends along stories from his home in New Orleans through his good friend John O'Neal.

could say, "Jack Johnson." It was a mess.

But that's not why they fired the man. While Deacon Green was chasing after Rev. trying to find out about his private business, he found out that several thousand dollars of church money was missing. On top of that he found out that Rev. had snuck and had the deed to the church property transferred over into his name. That's why they fired the man — that scamper was a thief!

Now the question comes up if I passed a report on Rev.'s background in Four Corners to the people in Cincinnati. No, I did not. There was two reasons for that. Here I was a stranger in a foreign land, and those people there didn't have no idea who I was or nothing. There was plenty of us manual workers in there, but

IN THE CANE COUNTRY OF LOUISIANA,
A GRANDMOTHER RECALLS A LIFETIME
ON THE PLANTATION.

Lulu's Story

By Patsy Sims

Editor's note: When journalist Patsy Sims published Cleveland Benjamin's Dead in 1981, she provided a devastating look at the struggle for dignity among sugar cane workers in Louisiana. In June, the University of Georgia Press will publish an expanded edition of the book featuring material cut from the original. One previously deleted chapter includes an oral history of Lulu King, who worked on the sugar plantation her entire life. Sims visited her in 1972.

The shortcut to the home of Joyce Hadley's grandparents was really just two ruts cut by tractors driving back and forth through the fields. If you followed it a mile or two in the opposite direction, it led to Coulon Plantation, where her father, a brother, and her other

grandfather lived, and where, until two years ago, it seemed she too would spend her life. But at 18 she had married, moved with her husband and year-old son into a house that had hot and cold running water, and found a job with the Plantation Adult Education Program as a liaison between the staff and the fieldworkers, building a trust between the two.

"Long as I can remember, my grandfather's been working on one plantation or another — Orange Grove, Coulon, Rienzi, where we're on our way to now," she recalled as the car bumped over the muddy road. "He can't work anymore, but my grandmother works for the owners so she can hold the house. She gets paid something like \$20 a week. She milks cows, cleans house, irons,

babysits, stuff like that."

As the workers' houses loomed larger, as we neared Rienzi, Joyce's frustrations mounted. "It's a cycle," she said. "My grandmother lives here, an' she has two sons an' a granddaughter here. They *all* live here in their own houses an' work. One son is 39 an' another is 24. The granddaughter is even younger, about 20. There's a daughter living with 'em too, during grinding. They just *don't* get off. It's just 'Mama did it, an' if Mama could do it, it's good enough for me.'" She sighed. "Mostly, it's being afraid. It's hard enough living here. Just think about going into town where you have to pay rent. That be just one more bill you have to worry about."

We turned onto a dirt-and-gravel road that led to the houses, some of them

painted and in better condition than most I had visited. An old man waited eagerly in the doorway of one, his grin widening as we neared the house, and him. At 63, Willie King was lean and stooped, his chin spiked with gray, his voice husky and worn out, yet his spirit seemed unbent. As he recalled the past, he chuckled often — the way so many plantation people did, as though humor was their answer to a difficult life. After we were introduced to him and his wife, Lulu, he relaxed in a rocker, contented as we talked.

"I worked on the plantation 30-some years," he said. "I butchered till I was 30, till I start workin' in the fields. That was in '28, somethin' 'round then. It was hard work, yeah."

He rocked and chuckled good-naturedly.

"Why did you leave the butcher's and come to the plantation? The pay wasn't very good, was it?" I asked.

"Well, I jes' did. 'Round town, things was so tough. It was the Depression, you know."

I asked how much he made when he started working in the fields, and he chuckled again. "I don't wanta tell you no story — we was gettin' 80 cents a day. Then we got a raise, we got a dollar a day. An' after that, we got a dollar ten cents — the price is goin' up, li'l bit, li'l bit," he said, his voice rising with the waxes. "An' after that, we got a dollar



"I BEEN RIGHT LIKE THIS, LIVIN' ON THIS SAME PLANTATION ALL MY DAYS," SAID LULU KING. "WORKED ALLLLL MY LIFE IN THE FIELDS."

an' 20 cents. Well, that stayed until Governor Long win — the *first* Long — an' he raised us to a dollar an' a half. He cut all them long hours, from dark in the mornin' to dark at night, an' start payin' a li'l bit more, but they kilt him. Then they start us off at 20 cents a hour, an', well, it jes' kep' on up, kep' on up till where it is now." He fell silent, and when he resumed there was disappointment in his voice. "But now they makin' more an' I can't get none a it."

He and his wife had raised 12 children. Now the two of them and a grand-

you!"

"What do you do?" I asked.

"Scrap cane behind the cutter," she answered.

Willie King interpreted simply, "That's when you foller the cutter an' pick the cane up an' throw it on the other side a the road where they be puttin' it at."

Golena warmed her hands over the heater. "Rest of the year I do house-work," she explained, "but durin' grindin' I can make more money in the fields. I make but \$6 a day cleanin', an'

son lived on the \$115 Willie received from Social Security, plus another \$24 he got from "old age" and the \$24 Lulu made babysitting and keeping house. Rent came free, but still there were the utilities to pay for.

"I tell 'em that's all I'm workin' for is gas an' water' an' medical bills," Lulu said good-naturedly. That and the house was why she kept going. "When you ain't able to work," she explained gravely, "they put you out."

Two women in yellow rubber overalls and jackets entered the house and edged up to the gas heater. Joyce introduced the older one, in her mid-30s, as Aunt Golena; the younger, 20, as her Aunt Lois. Even with layers of sweaters and slacks and the rubber overalls, the women shivered and Golena complained, "That wind go right through

durin' grindin' I *clears* about a \$157 ever' two weeks."

"The womens get the *same* price as the mens! They get a dollar eighty cents a hour! Now *that's* the common labor like I was!" Willie King shook his head with finality. "An' I can't get none a it. I worked till last year but my legs give out an' my wind got short — I jes' couldn't make it no more."

Lulu King crossed her swollen ankles as she rocked and reminisced. She had never been more than an hour and a half away from home, no farther than her ancestors had ever traveled from Rienzi after the first one came as a slave. Once a month she made a trip to Charity Hospital in New Orleans and back — always back, as though a giant magnet was pulling her, as it had her parents and, even now, her children and theirs. One time she would have liked to see outside Louisiana, what the world was like, to see it or to read about it. But now, she reckoned, she had "done got too ol'."

A large woman, her face fatly wrinkled, her eyes still bright with hope, she sat rocking and watching the red-faced Pepsi-Cola clock over the doorway and, through the window, the dirt road that led past the house where she was born and into the fields.

"That's the time I use' to always pray, when I was out in the fields. I could talk to Him better. Wouldn't be nobody to bother me, an' I could ask Him to save me an' to he'p me keep on agoin'. When I got religion, it was out in

the fields. Them same fields right outside the window. It was in 1922, on the 17 day a May when I was 13. I never forget that day. Look like it was a *daaaark* road wit' a fork in it. One road goin' this-a-

to find Jesus?" He say, 'Go this-a-way.' But look like somethin' say to me, 'No, don't go that-a-way.' So I went t'other way, an' look like the more I'd go up that road, the bigger that light would get.

When I got to the end of that road that light, look like it jes' lit up the *whoooooole* world. An' then that hymn jes' come out, 'bout 'Poor Mona Got a Home.' I don't know how I didn't feel. I jes' felt light. I was happy. I was cryin'. An' then I got baptized that third Sunday in July up there at the church on Main Street. It was a pool at the back a the church, an' we all was in white. An' well, look like religion what kep' me goin' all these years. The he'p a the good Lawd, that what he'p me to make it. They say the Lawd always makes a way, so I didn't see no harder day in my 60 years than what I'm seein' now.

"I been right like this, livin' on this same plantation all my days. Born last house down the street. It's no more fittin' to live in now, but that's where I was born an' where me and King got married. Ever since I knowed, my family was on this plantation, till 15, 20 years ago — till they move, they scattered an' moved away. They all was cane workers: Cut cane, ditch, plow with mules — like

that. My mama was 'bout 60 when she stop. She jes' fell down sick an' had her kidney taken out an' she never did work no mo'. My daddy worked till he died. He died when he was 59, but he worked *alllll* a it. He always did work mules. My grandfather did the same thing. An' my



"I WORKED TILL MY LEGS GIVE OUT AN' MY WIND GOT SHORT," SAID WILLIE KING. "I JUST COULDN'T MAKE IT NO MORE."

way. One like that. A voice, a hymn, was a comin' to me, singin' 'Poor Mona Got a Home at Last.' Seem like the mo' I'd get to that fork, the mo' that voice'd come to me. There was a *biiiiig* man standin' in the middle a that road, so I said to him, 'Mister, could you tell me which-a-way

great-grandfather — well, I reckon he did too, but I never did knowed him. Reckon he mighta been a slave. My chil' ren they be married an' gone now, but they all did work on the farm at one time or 'nother. Start when they was 14 years old, most of 'em. Junius an' Turner an' Oliver, the one live next door, still do work in the fields, an' two my daughters from in town come in durin' grindin' to scrap cane.

"I started workin' when I was nine, 'side my mama. Worked *alllll* my life in the fields pickin' up rice an' scrappin' cane, till this arthritis got me in the hip. Scrap cane, cut cane, cut rice, load rice, sack it up — done *ever*'thing. Now I can't do too much. I'm not able. Jes' some babysittin' in town. An' King he don't work no mo' neither. When I started in the fields it was eight of us in the family. Seven sisters an' one brother. I was the oldest. We jes' was poor. We didn't have nothin' an' the chil' ren then had to work. They had a bunch a us kids workin' on the place. We was workin' for 40 cents a day. From five in the mornin' till five at night. We'd work five days in the field, an' the six we'd stay an' clean up us house an' wash the clothes. There was no time for playin' in the fields. The boss man'd be on your back, an' if you wouldn't work, he'd whip you. I never was whipped, but I was afraid of 'im. At that time, colored folks wasn't good as a good dog to the white folks. An' they always was callin' you a nigger. 'Get out there, *nigger*.' 'Nigger, do this, 'n *nigger* do that.' An' you be scared to say anything. They never did hit me, jes' talk rough, an', well, I jes' thought that was our name, nigger.

"All what money we made we would

give to Mama, an' on Sunday she'd give us a quarter. There was a nickel for me to spend an' one to put in church, an' if I had my monthly church fee to pay that was 15 cents. I thought I had aplenty with that nickel. After church we'd go to that fruit stand in town, an' I'd buy me the most candy I could get. I'd buy me a *biiiiig* peppermint candy 'cause it was mo'.

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PEPPERMINT
CANDY 'CAUSE IT
WAS MO'. IT
LASTED LONGER.
THAT BE WHAT I
ALWAYS GOT.**

mo'. It lasted longer. That be what I always got. My mind would be on it 'fore I'd get to that fruit stand.

'Gonna get me a peppermint candy.' Sometime we use' to take the overripe fruit, them bananas an' oranges an' things that'd be rotten. We'd get a big pile for 15 an' 20 cents. We jes' come up so poor we was glad for anything we could get.

"I only had one Sunday dress I always wore to church. It was navy blue with little white star dots on it an' lace on the collar. For the week I had different clothes, but never too many. Jes' a change a suit. When one get dirty, we'd wash it an' put it back on. Christmas, Mama use' to buy us a doll an' that was all we was gonna get till it was Christmas again. Only time I got a birthday present was

when I was growed up an' my chil' ren give me somethin'. Like when people celebrate their birthday, well, we never did when I was small. It jes' was a day you knew you had but it wasn't anything special. The week I married King I worked in the fields. I had 16 chil' ren. Raised 12 an' the other four died. Out a all I had I only lost three wintertimes from workin' in the fields — that's the three born in October. That one next door, he was born New Year's Eve day an' I worked the day before that, out in the field cuttin' cane.

"I would keep the older ones home to see to the little ones durin' grindin', an' before the first one was big enough my sister'd mind 'em. It was hard workin' an' bringin' up kids. I use' to work all day in the field, come home an' have to wash an' cook. I use' to bathe my child' ren an' put their day's clothes on 'em before I'd go to bed, 'cause I wouldn't get up time enough in the mornin' to dress 'em, an' the older ones wasn't old enough to put the clothes on 'em. They jes' could keep changin' diapers. Sometimes I jes' sleep 'bout an hour then I had to get back up an' go to work again.

"By me workin' 'round white people, they use' to always give me a little clothes an' stuff for my chil' ren. An' furniture, it was the same thing. All what I got was give me. Ever'time I wished for somethin' the white folks'd come along an' give me a little piece better than what I had an' I throwed away what I had. I never bought nothin' new but that stove an' TV. Paid for 'em on time. An', well, the TV's so old now till it don't even show the picture. Sometimes it goes out an' it comes back again but I sure wish I could get one I could sit down an' look at.

"**W**e lived in one them ol' houses cross the way till nine or 10 years ago when we moved to this one. First time I ever had a bathroom was in this house, when they put one in three years ago. Before that, we bathed in a tub. One of those wood tubs that be made out those barrels. Ever' night we had to heat 14 tubs a water on the stove. Still do have to heats water but now it's jes' King and me. We used to have a shack out back, too. A little tin buildin'. Raïn, snow, storm, anything else, you had to go outside. I remember it rained like I don't know what in that ol' house across the road. If it start rainin', we had to get up from sleepin' an' start pullin' the bed from under the leak. An' jes' like you see through that glass, you could see the road through the cracks in the wall. The rug on the floor, it be raisin' up like I don't know what. Plenty time we use' to have to put rags on the floor to stop the col' from comin' in.

"Still, I reckon I rather go live back in that ol' house than move in town. I

been on the plantation so long till look like I ain't gonna feel right if I ever get off. I know I'd miss it. All my life I been knowin' these people. I likes it hyere. I knows it hyere. An' I could go anywhere with my eyes shut. I don't know. I never did like no town. I jes' got that fear feelin' 'bout it. Hyere we don't have to pay no rent — an' I worry 'bout that, 'bout havin' to move to town an' pay rent with the little bit a salary an' security we get. Lotta time they make you move when you can't work no mo'. But the boss tol' me, 'Lulu,' he say, 'if you wanta stay in there, stay. Jes' keep it up. Keep the grass an' the trash out the yard.' An', well, he ain't never bothered me. I been knowin' him an' his wife both since they was babies. I lived in the house next to his mama. When they move on the place, the boss wasn't big as this boy hyere, an' I 'Mister' him. I 'Miss' his wife, too, Miss Caroline. An' I got chil'ren older than what they is. But I always did 'Mister' 'em all. Look like it jes' more manners to me. That's jes' my way. When I was comin' up, you *had* to say 'Yes ma'am,' 'No ma'am.' Didn't care who you was. If you didn't, you jes' was gonna get punished. Sayin' 'Yeah' or 'No,' you was too sassy. Now they tell 'em anything they want, but I still say 'Yes ma'am' an' 'No ma'am' an' that's how I taught my chil'ren. Even now, people I'm babysittin' for they be after me to come sit to the table. But I'm so use' to bein' out in the yard — like a dog — I tell 'em all the time, 'I'll eat when I get done doin' my work.' Look like I jes' can't make myself go sit down there with 'em. I tell 'em all time, I tell 'em, 'I jes' feel like a fly in a bowl a milk. That jes' the way I come up. Not say I hate y'all or scorn y'all, but it's jes' the way I was brung up.'

"Sometime I sits down hyere now an'

thinks 'bout how white folks use' to do us. When my chil'ren was growin' up, there'd be a slavery picture on TV an' I'd say, 'The way you see those people, that jes' the way we was.' 'Cause in a way we was treated like them slaves. Not the way they people use' to go buy 'em from different people an' they couldn't go from one place to another. We could leave on our own. If you didn't like this place, you could move an' go to

they treated us when the blacks wasn't mixed up with 'em like that. I was scared. But it turned out awright. There's some care more 'bout you. They treat you nicer than what the others do. Still, them what treats me nice I be scared. I don't trust 'em. I think they be like the ol' ones use' to be. Because you got some of 'em, they hate you still. They cut your guts out if you ever walk 'cross their door. They got some right hyere in town now. I *knooooows* of 'em.

If you go an' ask 'em for a drink a water, if you ain't got a paper cup, they ain't gonna give you no glass. If they give you a glass, they rather to throw it in the garbage an' break it up to keep from puttin' their hands on it. But I ain't got nothin' in me against 'em now. I forgive 'em what they did to me 'cause look like that jes' the way they was livin'. I don't regret that. In a way, I'm glad, because I never been in a jailhouse in my life. Never been on no witness trial. An' I know how to go amongst the white folks. So I'm glad I lived that life I did 'cause I was out of trouble.

"To me, I had a good life. I was able to work, to get mostly what I needed — not what I wanted, but what I needed the baddest. An' if the Lord'd wanted my life to be better, He

would a made it better. Still, I talk to Him sometime, 'bout Heaven. I *know* I'm goin' there. I'm fightin' *haaaard* to go there. I thinks about it, an' I asks Him to let my best day down hyere be my worst day there. I don't know what'll be up there. All I wanta do is be happy — be happy an' sit down 'n rest." □

Patsy Sims is the author of The Klan and Somebody Shout Amen! She is assistant professor and coordinator of the Creative Non-fiction Writing Track at the University of Pittsburgh.



PAY REMAINS LOW AND WORKING CONDITIONS DANGEROUS IN THE SUGAR CANE COUNTRY OF SOUTH LOUISIANA.

somewheres else an' stay, but it wasn't no better. The boss man might treat you a li'l bit better than what the other man did but you might be in a worsen house. There was really no place to go. Things was pretty much the same ever'where you went.

"I never thought I'd live to see things change like they did, the way white folks treat blacks. An' I'm glad for my chil'ren they did, 'cause I reckon I be more worried. When they started goin' to school together, that's one thing I kicked against my chil'ren doin' because I knowed how

Accessing the Media

By Valerie Menard

In nature, biologists point to the number and vitality of certain species as indicators of an eco-system's health. In a democracy, it could be said that an indicator of the system's health is the number and vitality of grassroots organizations.

Some grassroots groups seek to inform or educate, like those offering health services or literacy campaigns. Others work to motivate citizens to action — to attend a rally, vote, or lobby for legislation. Whatever the goal, however, an organization's success depends in part on its ability to "get the word out" — and integral to any outreach effort is accessing the media.

The first step of any media campaign is to find out all you can about the variety of media outlets in your community; the options may astound you. Start with the Yellow Pages for basic media listings, and then go to the public library and look up who owns and operates each outlet in *Editor and Publisher's Yearbook* and *Broadcasting and Cable Market Place*.

Despite the recent rush of technological advances known as the "information superhighway," there are still three major types of media — newspapers, television, and radio. Although each operates differently, and accessing each requires a different approach, a few basics apply to all three.

The single most effective tool for reaching all media is the press release. Since this serves as an editor's or news manager's introduction to your group or event, the release should be well thought out and carefully conceived. When reviewing releases, most editors look for two things: timeliness (how current the news is) and newsworthiness (how important or unusual the news is). Editors also look for information that will help them identify which community of readers the news will most interest.

The format of a press release sent to the mainstream media should be simple and limited to one page. It should contain all the basic information — who, what, where, and when — as well as the name and phone number of a contact person.

Send the press release to the appropriate editor or manager, but don't stop there. Get to know individual reporters, and send your release to them as well.

After you send the release, follow up with a phone call to confirm that it has been received; if you have a dated story, call the day of the event. Remember: News is hard to plan, so one phone call may red flag your event as a priority.

Although the ultimate goal of your organization may be to convince an editor to feature a story about your group and its activities, don't overlook other ways of getting your story out. In newspapers, the best way to tell your story is in your own words — through op-ed pieces and letters to the editor.

Each newspaper has its own requirements for op-ed pieces, but most stress that they be short, between 200 and 300 words, and to the point. Be careful to focus on a specific issue — a column that serves as a commercial for your organization won't get very far. Op-ed editors want to read about the relevance of your cause, not about how wonderful your organization is.

Similarly, keep letters to the editor short (about 50 words) and to the point. Most newspapers also require a signature, phone number, and address. Before you start writing, study your paper to learn what kinds of letters get printed. After you submit your letter, you might want to follow up with a phone call, but don't overdo it. Newspapers are not required to print every letter, and as an editor once told me, "Persistence doesn't always pay off."

When getting the word out through

newspapers, don't forget about the alternative press, including community and weekly newspapers. Although they target smaller, more specific markets — from ethnic minorities and environmentalists to shoppers and suburbanites — the sheer number of non-mainstream publications magnifies your options tremendously. The basic theory here is: power in numbers.

Because these publications target specific audiences, focus your press release to make it relevant to each paper or magazine. Again, take the time to study the publication before you approach it with a story. Editors at alternative publications are just as inundated with press releases as editors at major dailies, but because their periodicals tend to advocate a particular point of view, it is often easier to convince them that your group is promoting a cause relevant to their audience.

Unlike daily papers, alternative weeklies are rarely blessed with a big staff of reporters, and their editors often use press releases as "filler" articles. That changes the rules for writing press releases. It often helps to call the editor to discuss your release, and offer to write it as a story tailored to the style and length the publication needs. Alternative editors are usually more accessible than those at daily papers, and more willing to meet with your organization and lend editorial support.

The alternative press not only helps target specific audiences, it also provides a pipeline to mainstream media. Reporters and editors at major media outlets subscribe to their alternative competitors and read them carefully, looking for story ideas and sources. If your organization gets coverage in a community paper, it can lend your group credibility and attract the attention of the major media — giving you a chance to shape issues and heighten awareness of your work.

Two years ago, for example, the bilingual weekly where I work received a flyer notifying residents of a minority commu-

nity that a public hearing would be held to discuss the expansion of an Exxon gasoline facility. We contacted a local environmental group, researched the history of the tank farm, and discovered chemical contamination. A week after our story ran, the mainstream media picked it up and began to cover the issue. Public outcry increased, forcing state officials to work around the clock to assess the level of contamination. In February 1993, Exxon shut down the facility.

Community papers may be small, but they often carry a big stick. Accessing them can give your organization exposure that reaches well beyond your own community.

Network television reaches a large and diverse audience, but accessing that audience through the news department of your local network affiliates may prove difficult. Television news managers prioritize the news not only according to its timeliness, but to their ability to cover it — that is, how many camera crews and reporters are available at the moment. Nevertheless, some days are “slow” news days, and human interest stories take precedence. For most grassroots organizations, this is your chance.

Watch for weekly features, like regular reports on consumer or health issues. Because they are developed by a reporter and not mandated by an editor, such features tend to be less structured than breaking news coverage and more oriented to providing general information — making them an ideal avenue for your organization.

Above all, don't forget about public service announcements (PSAs). Non-profit organizations can qualify for free airtime, usually reserved by TV stations at dawn and after midnight. Some stations will even produce a free, 30-second announcement — especially if you can convince them your group has broad-based appeal. If you produce your own announcement, focus on the mission of your group — cleaning up toxic waste or improving education — not on the group itself. Each station has its own rules regarding PSAs, so call your station's community service liaison for specifics.

While local network affiliates can provide access to a wide audience, the explosion of cable TV has expanded the

TOOLBOX

For more information about accessing the media, contact:

Alliance for Community Media
Southwest Region
Austin Community Television
1143 Northwestern Avenue
Austin, TX 78702
(512) 478-8600

Alliance for Community Media
Southeast Region
Tampa Education Cable Consortium
703 N. Willow Avenue
Tampa, FL 33606
(813) 254-2253

National Federation of Community Broadcasters
666 11th Street NW, Suite 805
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 393-2395

availability and number of stations that provide the public direct access to the airwaves. The rules governing public access are determined by contract agreement between the franchising agency (usually your local government) and the cable company, so call to find out the guidelines in your community.

In most cases, public access allows organizations 30 minutes of free airtime. For groups lacking the expertise to produce a TV program, most stations offer training in basic video skills and provide free equipment and studio time to those who complete the classes. Studio time is often limited, however, and must be booked in advance.

The goal of public-access television — increasing the diversity of viewpoints and information on the air — naturally complements the needs of most grassroots organizations. The success of public access television is measured by the extent to which it is used by the community it was established to serve: namely you.

As with television, radio is a medium with a proven track record of effectively reaching a large and diverse audience. With radio, however, it's particularly important to examine not only what stations you have in your community, but how they are formatted. Most music stations, for example, have limited news departments and infrequent news reports that last less than five minutes.

News and talk radio stations provide the most access; such stations generally employ a staff of reporters who cover particular beats, and they need reliable contacts in the community to effectively report the news.

Because radio is a medium of voices, news managers look for people who can speak about issues in a concise, interesting, and articulate way. If you have a conference to announce, a radio news manager may look at your list of guest speakers to see if you've invited someone they might want to interview.

Again, don't ignore public service announcements. To turn your press release into free airtime, contact the marketing director at each station and be prepared to discuss not just the who, what, where, and when of your release, but the why of your cause. More and more radio stations co-sponsor worthwhile community

events, so be prepared to present a convincing argument that your cause will impact a diverse group of listeners.

Local talk shows — generally 30-minute programs that focus on a specific issue — also provide access to large audiences. Persuade the host to feature your group and send an articulate member of your organization to discuss your work and debate the issues with local callers.

Above all, don't forget about public radio. Just like public access television, public radio is generally less restrictive than the mainstream media and tends to schedule some time during the day for discussion of community issues.

Regardless of the medium, grassroots organizations need to develop better personal relationships with reporters and editors. Don't be afraid to meet with editors and managers to discuss your goals or present information on a specific issue. Remember: This is a reciprocal relationship. In order to do their job and cover the community thoroughly and fairly, journalists need to know who you are and what you are doing.

In short, they need you as much as you need them. Grassroots organizations must get the word out, and the media represent one of the best ways to reach a wide audience. Access them. □

Valerie Menard is managing editor of La Prensa, a bilingual weekly in Austin, Texas.

Picturing the Past

By George C. Stoney

FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION PHOTOGRAPHS OF FLORIDA

By Michael Carlebach and Eugene F. Provenzo Jr.
University Press of Florida. 127pp.
\$34.95 (hardcover), \$19.95 (paper)

THE PICTURE MAN: Photographs by Paul Buchanan

Edited by Ann Hawthorne
University of North Carolina Press.
147pp.
\$24.95 (hardcover), \$12.95 (paper)

For the past four summers I have traveled across my native South recording the experience of former textile workers in preparation for a film about the events of the early 1930s that culminated in one of the largest strikes in U.S. history. I found most witnesses to the events initially reluctant to recall the conflict; they often summed up their decades as spinners or weavers or doffers in a few brief generalizations.

To keep the conversation going, I soon learned to ask if they had photographs of themselves “back then.” Out would come shoe boxes, cigar boxes, candy boxes, sometimes even albums, stuffed with memories. Stories that clung to the faded prints would take us back — for example — to the time when “I got my first store-bought coat . . . fur trimmed! I saved a whole year for that. . . !” An hour later we were recording a life story rich in details of hope and struggle, one far more complex than any

of our superficial schedule of questions would have brought forth. For the pictures were touchstones to their *individual* lives.

It is this specificity of image that can give even the most ordinary of photographs power and poignancy — if the context is known and preserved. But without context (who is it? where is it? when was it taken? and why?) even those few photographs that have become generally recognized as icons or “works of art” would lose most of their power.

The compilers of *Farm Security Administration Photographs of Florida* and *The Picture Man: Photographs by Paul Buchanan* have gone to considerable lengths to give us context for the collections they sample and celebrate. Michael Carlebach and Eugene Provenzo introduce their collection with a 46-page es-

grams launched by the New Deal agency to improve the lives of tenant farmers and migrant workers in the South. The authors also describe the FSA’s photography unit, headed by photo curator Roy Stryker, sent to Florida in the late 1930s to document the agency’s work. Their essay is the best brief description of this famous unit’s work I have come across. It counters the misconceptions published by many photo historians who have been busy of late berating Stryker for “prodding his staff to make propaganda rather than art.”

Most of the pictures chosen for the Florida volume are of migrant farm laborers, with emphasis on their generally appalling living conditions. There are scenes of the few — pitifully few — model migrant camps the FSA operated; the contrast they provide all but shouts out, “There should be more!” as Stryker

most assuredly intended the photos to do.

Carlebach and Provenzo’s essay also presents (again with admirable brevity) the history of the industry that spawned such wretchedness: Florida’s large-scale truck farming industry.

It is at this point that the value of context becomes tangible, for the reader now comes across a familiar photograph, one reproduced so often that it has become an icon, and if you will, a genuine work of photographic art. Its caption reads,

“Arthur Rothstein: Winter Haven, January 1937. The family of a migratory fruit worker from Tennessee camped in a field near the packing house.” After reading



Photo by Arthur Rothstein

A NEW COLLECTION PROVIDES THE CONTEXT FOR FSA PHOTOS OF FLORIDA FARMWORKERS, LIKE THIS FAMOUS 1937 IMAGE OF A MIGRANT FAMILY.

say describing efforts by the Farm Security Administration to establish sanitary, well-run labor camps for migrant farm workers, part of a broad-based set of pro-

the accompanying essay it is all but impossible to retreat into photo aesthetics from the facts of this family's life. The six pairs of eyes bore into your soul.

Unfortunately, the text tells us almost nothing about these people as individuals. Given the passage of time, given the shifting residence for most of those pictured, such a project might have been next to impossible. Yet we feel we are missing an important part of their story. Consider how enriched we were when, in 1989, Dale Maharidge and Michael Williamson published *And Their Children After Them*, updating James Agee and Walker Evans' famous photography and text about Southern tenant farmers, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, published almost 50 years before.

While on their Florida assignments the FSA photographers, as was their wont and Stryker's expectation, took pictures of what they thought worth recording beyond the agricultural scene: race tracks, swimming pools, tourist hotels. If the examples chosen for this volume are representative, the editors found few photographs that seem revelatory today, although they worked hard in their layout to confront with contrast. The tragedy of the migrants' lives stands on its own.

There is not a single famous icon among the 100-odd North Carolina photographs chosen for *The Picture Man* by Ann Hawthorne. Beginning in 1977 with a series of visits with their maker, Paul Buchanan, Hawthorne brought to light and rescued with much craft and loving care an all but forgotten trove. Yet as we study one after another of these startlingly beautiful and evocative portraits, one feels invited into their lives. No veil of reserve holds us at bay.

Only a handful of the portraits in that national treasure which is the FSA photo file affords this welcome, and for good reason. FSA photographers, for all their artistic skills and political good intentions, were outside observers. Occasion-

ally, when they had the time to settle down in a place, the veil was lifted, as we see in Russell Lee's collection made in Pye Town, Texas, or in Jack Delano's 79-plate introduction to *Tenants of the Almighty*, Arthur Raper's classic study of Green County, Georgia in the late 1930s. But these are exceptions.

Hawthorne begins her eight-page preface thus: "Paul Buchanan did not



PAUL BUCHANAN INHERITED A 4/5 CAMERA FROM HIS FATHER AND USED IT TO TAKE EVOCATIVE PORTRAITS OF SMALL HILL FARMERS.

think of himself as a photographer, and at our first meeting, neither did I. My only guide to him was an unsigned note left tucked behind a photograph in an exhibit I had hung in Bakersville: 'There's a man with old pictures of this area you might want to meet.'"

Here, and in a 26-page transcript of an interview with Buchanan that closes the book, Hawthorne gives us a wonderfully direct impression of their meetings. He tests her bona fides by challenging her to tailor-make a cigarette. She is wise enough to ask little on their first visit, allowing him time to see her go and return, observed by neighbors always ready to spread suspicions about outsiders bent on exploitation. This small hill farmer "without a telephone" had not taken a photograph in more than 35 years. The occupation had been a means of supplementing his meager income, as it had been for his father, from whom he inherited his 4/5 camera.

One can only guess how much labor

went into the rescue effort: salvaging glass plates, printing from negatives damaged by time and weather, copying from faded prints. This is regrettable, for what Hawthorne has done should be a wake-up call to archivists all over the country. Here is proof that photographs of humble origin have stories to tell well worth all the effort of their preservation.

And in this instance, at least, one finds photos that can stand comparison with images in the FSA files now considered "works of art."

Despite all her dedication and time spent in the four North Carolina mountain counties where Buchanan traveled on weekends as an itinerant portraitist, however, Hawthorne tells us almost nothing about the people who confront us so confidently in his photographs. Had the publishers, the University of North Carolina Press, teamed her with one of its many authors who know the area, we might have a text as rewarding as the photographs themselves, a combination that would have provided

a fuller understanding of the society they represent. Instead, we get a few paragraphs of introduction by Bruce Morton which simply anticipate Hawthorne's preface.

Both *Picture Man* and *Photographs of Florida* are well printed on coated paper. With a sturdy, beautifully designed dust jacket, *Picture Man* feels so good in the hand that paying double for the hardback edition still makes it a bargain. *Photographs of Florida* is bound with an attractive cover; the publishers use heavy stock in the paperback edition for a sturdy text. Both books will well serve readers interested in the recent history of the South. To describe them simply as "photo collections" is to deny them their true importance. □

George C. Stoney is Goddard Professor of Cinema at the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. From 1940-42 he served as Associate Information Director for the FSA in the Southeast, including Florida.

ORGANIZING TOOLS

To encourage grassroots activists to listen and learn from others, Rural Southern Voice for Peace provides communication training for volunteers. The Listening Project helps community organizers conduct interviews that enable them to assess local needs and values, overcome mistrust and opposition, and involve more people in social change efforts. Listening has helped reduce racial polarization in Keysville, Georgia and broaden support for environmental activism in Harlan County, Kentucky. For more information, contact:

Rural Southern Voice for Peace
1898 Hannah Branch Road
Burnsville, NC 28714
(704) 675-5933

In a new book entitled *Beyond the Politics of Place*, long-time activist Gary Delgado examines "new directions in community organizing in the 1990s." Supported by the Ford Foundation, the report examines the history and limitations of traditional community organizing and suggests how activists can address the changing cultural dimensions in society. Delgado also includes a chronology of events leading to the 1991 Environmental Summit of People of Color, and an appendix of organizer training centers. To order, send \$10 a copy plus \$3 shipping and handling to:

Applied Research Center
440 Grand Avenue, Suite 401
Oakland, CA 94610
(510) 834-7072

Savings Groups: *A Tool for Community Organizations*, a new manual by Kathryn Keely and Chris Weiss, is a guide for citizens groups that want to take advantage of this old but innovative development strategy. Savings groups enable individuals to pool their assets, providing resources for community projects and collective development. The work-

book includes organizing steps, information on potential barriers, and lessons learned from the Savings Network, a coalition of groups that operate savings programs. To order, send \$15 to:

Rural Strategies
P.O. Box 2125
Charleston, WV 25328
(304) 344-8805

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

In *The New Resource Wars*, Al Gedicks of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse documents how multinational corporations and their government allies have combined forces in an assault on native peoples and the natural world. From Quebec to Ecuador, he also examines how native peoples have used direct action, legal challenges, and international coalition-building to defend the environment. To order this 270-page paperback, send \$15 to:

South End Press
116 St. Botolph Street
Boston, MA 02115
(617) 266-0629

Not In My Back Yard: *The Handbook* is designed as an easy-to-use, how-to guide for citizens organizing to protect themselves and their communities from the threat of toxic pollution. Written by Jane Morris, director of a long NIMBY campaign during the 1970s, the 300-page book offers detailed strategies and an organization plan for dealing with vested interests, as well as a dictionary of tips and tricks for activists. To order, contact:

Silvercat Publications
4070 Goldfinch Street, Suite C
San Diego, CA 92103
(619) 299-6774

Another recent handbook for citizens battling toxic waste is *What Works: Local Solutions to Toxic Pollution*. Prepared by the Environmental Exchange, this 157-page report presents 38 full-

length profiles of local citizens groups, descriptions of more than 90 regional and national organizations working on toxic issues, and a special section on model curricula and innovative programs for students from elementary school to university. To order, send \$17 plus \$2 shipping and handling for each copy to Public Interest Publications, P.O. Box 229, Arlington, VA 22210. For more information, contact:

The Environmental Exchange
1718 Connecticut Avenue NW #600
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 387-2182

Combining community development with grassroots education, the Southern Appalachian Labor School has created a regional network of local chapters working for environmental justice. Through three annual environmental justice conferences, SALS has brought together activists from several Appalachian states to share experiences and build more effective coalitions to combat environmental justice. For information on the network and future conferences, contact:

Southern Appalachian Labor School
P.O. Box 127
Kincaid, WV 25119
(304) 442-3157

As one of the more enduring and effective regional organizations, Southerners for Economic Justice has played a key role in making workplace health a central focus of the environmental justice movement. Working to build coalitions with youth, women, and communities of color, SEJ provides organizing support and strategic assistance to combat plant closings and workplace toxics and to promote grassroots economic development. For information about current projects, contact:

Southerners for Economic Justice
P.O. Box 240
Durham, NC 27702
(919) 683-1361

The Burn Belt

By Mary Lee Kerr

The blaze that charred Atlanta in *Gone with the Wind* was more than an isolated display of Hollywood pyrotechnics. From the first European settlements to the latest Southern factories, high rates of fires and fatalities have earned the region a dubious reputation as the "burn belt."

One of the nation's earliest recorded fires destroyed most of the Jamestown settlement in Virginia in 1608. "Most of our apparel, lodging and private provision were destroyed," Captain John Smith wrote. A New Orleans fire in 1788 left 816 of the city's buildings in ashes, and a second fire in 1794 destroyed much of what had been rebuilt after the first blaze.

Some of the South's most historic cities have been leveled by wartime fires. General William Sherman ordered his troops to torch Atlanta and Savannah during the Civil War. One eye witness described the burning of Atlanta as "a grand and awful spectacle. The heaven is one expanse of lurid fire." Confederate troops set Charleston and Richmond aflame to prevent the Union from seizing the cities' supplies.

In this century, industrialization has increased the risk of fire and explosion in working-class communities. In 1947, 400 people died when a cargo of ammonium nitrate fertilizer exploded at the Monsanto Chemical dock in Texas City. In 1989, a blast and fire at Phillips Petroleum killed 23 workers and injured 232 in Pasadena, Texas. In 1991, a grease fire at the Imperial Foods chicken processing plant in Hamlet, North Carolina killed 25 workers and injured 54 others trapped behind locked exits.

The most striking fire pattern in the nation, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), is the high fire death rate in the South. Between 1988 and 1992, Southerners were 25 percent more likely to be killed by fire than those outside the region. The South also has a higher rate of fires and more property damage from blazes than other regions.

Lightning and other natural causes are to blame for some fires. Mark Lackey, a meteorologist with the National Climatic Data Center, says lightning is most common in the South, particularly in North Carolina and along the Gulf Coast of Florida.

But most fires are caused by social and economic conditions. "High fire rates are directly related to poverty," says Sharon Gamache, executive director of the Learn Not to Burn Foundation, an affiliate of the NFPA. Poor people have fewer opportunities to learn about fire safety and less money to spend protecting their families. "If you're on a limited income, the

cost of a smoke detector may be prohibitive," observes Meri-K Appy of the NFPA.

In addition, many fire deaths in the South result from lax fire codes and weak enforcement. In 1989, 32 elderly residents died in fires at Virginia and Tennessee retirement homes that lacked basic sprinkler systems. Industry representatives have resisted legislation mandating sprinklers because of the cost.

Ernest Grant says many of the fire injuries he sees as a burn nurse in Chapel Hill, North Carolina are caused by poverty and lax housing codes. Many poor people who have no heat put kerosene heaters dangerously close to their beds, he says, and manufacturers often use flammable materials to build mobile homes.

But most fire injuries Grant treats are caused by a staple of Southern agriculture and one of the nation's leading killers: tobacco. "In well over 50 percent of the injuries we see, smoking plays a part. Sometimes people just fall asleep smoking in bed."

Better fire codes coupled with education are reducing fires in the South. The NFPA provides a curriculum to teach fire safety in public schools, and the Learn Not to Burn Foundation funds fire-prevention programs in high-risk

communities. In Mississippi, a state with one of the worst fire death rates, the Foundation supports a local coalition that is developing a fire-prevention education program for pre-schoolers.

Louisville, Kentucky had the fifth worst fire death rate in the nation before Russell Sanders took over as fire chief in 1986. Sanders gradually shifted the fire department's emphasis from fighting fires to preventing them. Firefighters now visit schools and nursing homes to teach fire safety, go door-to-door inspecting homes and installing free smoke alarms, and organize fire-prevention festivals. This year they plan to train social workers to teach the elderly how to protect themselves from fire.

Such education has reduced the need for fire runs, Sanders says. "Since we implemented the program, fires are down 19 percent and we have seen a 35-percent reduction of fire deaths. We have not lost a single child in four years."

Sanders says implementing good fire-prevention programs in communities nationwide would dramatically reduce death and damage from fires. "I've seen well over a 1,000 fires in 27 years," he says, "and I've never seen one that could not and should not have been prevented." □

Mary Lee Kerr is a research associate with the Institute for Southern Studies in Durham, North Carolina.



Photo by Mark Dolejs/Durham Herald-Sun

SOUTHERNERS SUFFER THE HIGHEST DEATH RATES FROM FIRE; POVERTY AND TOBACCO ARE THE LEADING CAUSES.

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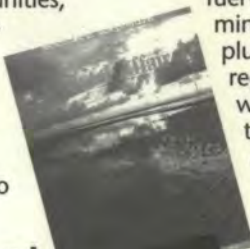
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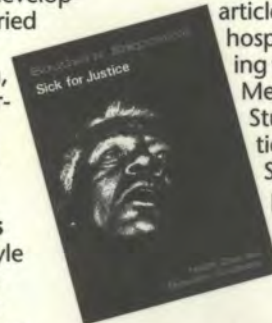
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