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Oral History of Slavery

Southern Exposure

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NO MORE MOANIN' VOICES OF SOUTHERN STRUGGLE

THE SOUTHERN TENANT FARMERS
UNION

SIT-DOWN STRIKE-ATLANTA-1936

TEXTILE STRIKE-GASTONIA-1929

COAL MINING WARS-E.TENNESSEE-
1890'S AND 1930'S

NEW LLANO COOPERATIVE COLONY-
LOUISIANA-1917-1938



I use to hope that some day we could have things, but times git worsen and worsen. We ain't never had nothing and we won't never have nothing. All our folks before us was tenant farmers and that's all we've ever done. If you know anything about tenant farming you know they do without everything all the year hoping to have something in the fall.

Sarah Easton
These Are Our Lives

They tried to separate people by class, and they tried to do it by race. Whichever was best to use, they used it. It worked on a lot of people, and some people it just didn't work on.

George Stith
Vice-President
Southern Tenant Farmers' Union

In his introduction to *These Are Our Lives*, W. T. Couch wrote, *With all our talk about democracy, it seems not inappropriate to let the people speak for themselves.* Published for over thirty years, this collection by the Federal Writers Project remains one of the more remarkable accounts of the Depression and its effects on the lives of tenants, sharecroppers, mill workers, service workers, and relief clients. Although the history of that period is contained elsewhere in numerous books, articles, and scholarly dissertations, *These Are Our Lives* and the complementary *Hard Times* by Studs Terkel, published many years later, stand out because the history they record is recreated through people rather than institutions and events. The talk of democracy has not lessened since W. T. Couch wrote his introduction in 1939, but his contention that it is appropriate for the people to speak for themselves has seldom been emulated.

Southern history in particular has been subjected to intense scrutiny as to its "uniqueness." Coming to the industrial age later than other sections of the country, it still exhibited a remarkable homogeneity rooted in its agrarian traditions when W.J. Cash wrote his monumental work on *The Mind of the South*. The post World War II industrial boom and the steady flow of federal and private capital into the region has made the South into the new American financial frontier. Thus on the surface, its recent history is not dissimilar from that of the rest of the country. It has built more than its share of the machines of war and sent a

larger percentage of its population to fight America's wars. The remnants of its Jim Crow racism are fading, replaced by more subtle forms of institutional racism. Despite its recent move into the mainstream, however, the South remains a distinct region, distinguished formerly by its "mystique" and more recently by its status as a "colony."

This issue of *Southern Exposure* is devoted entirely to history. It is not the kind of history that is found in text books or definitive theoretical works. It represents a search for that part of southern history that is usually ignored or distorted, the history of people fighting for the right to lead decent and productive lives. It is not our intent to romanticize the past, but rather to place our own work and lives within an historical context.

The pages that follow are bits and pieces of southern history—determined in part by our own interest and by our access to people and information. As the issue began to take shape, we became acutely aware of its shortcomings. Its omissions are glaring. For instance, there is no mention of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, the Council on Interracial Cooperation, or the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching. We had planned initially to interview James A. Dombrowski, who served for many years as the Director of the Southern Conference; the interview had to be postponed. Arthur Raper stopped by our office one day and regaled us with stories about his travels around the South with Gunnar Myrdal and Ralph Bunche gathering data for what eventually became *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem in Modern Democracy*. His stories deserve retelling, as do many others. However, we don't intend for this issue to be the end of our work on southern history, and we hope that future issues of *Southern Exposure* will cover some of the gaps.

But for the present, this issue is a beginning—a beginning born out of stubborn insistence that there is more to southern history than its mystique and magnolias. Many of the articles are based on oral interviews with people who were active participants in the struggles they describe—ordinary men and women who knew intimately the hardship of race and class oppression, and fought hard against it. We believe it is appropriate that these people speak for themselves.

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Southern Exposure

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Many people are responsible for helping bring together this issue of **Southern Exposure**. Most important are those who have spent many hours with us patiently answering our questions and gently dealing with our misconceptions. Included in that list are organizers and members of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, participants in the General Motors sit-down strike in Atlanta, residents and friends of the Llano Cooperative Colony in Louisiana, people from the strike area around the mining camps of Davidson and Wilder, Tennessee, and folks in Phillips County, Arkansas who told us what they could remember about the Elaine Massacre.

In addition, valuable first person accounts were contributed by Vera Buch Weisbord about her memories of Gastonia, North Carolina, Claude and Joyce Williams about their broad range of experiences and years of commitment, Mrs. Beulah Netherland about the Knoxville Race Riot, and James A. Dombrowski through his interviews in Grundy County, Tennessee in the late 1930's.

To the extent that distance and time allowed, this issue is a collective effort by the editors and the editorial staff. Fran Ansley and Brenda Bell live in the Knoxville area and are presently collecting information on health conditions in southern industry. Jacquelyn Hall is the Director of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina. Neill Herring is a labor historian. He is also a Southerner, a Methodist, a carpenter, and a former Eagle Scout. Bill Murrah works in his community's neighborhood center in Knoxville and spends a great deal of time searching out the history of the area. Bob Hall, Sue Thrasher, and Leah Wise are staff members of the Institute for Southern Studies.

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THE SOUTHERN TENANT FARMERS' UNION



Introduction

In the summer of 1934, eleven white men and seven black men met in a one-room schoolhouse on the Arkansas Delta and organized themselves into a "tenants' union." For the croppers, already living on subsistence wages from one "furnish" to the next, the decline in cotton prices brought on by the Depression had been disastrous. The New Deal's answer to the crisis, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration's (AAA) acreage reduction program, pushed sharecroppers off the land while it rewarded the planters with parity payments. Thousands of tenants and sharecroppers were evicted and forced to find work as day laborers or go on relief programs.

By the time the croppers met at the Sunnyside School, other forces were in play throughout Arkansas that were to reinforce and interact with the newly formed union. Coal miners were striking in the northwest section of the state and fighting with the United Mine Workers for control of their local union. In the Ozark Mountain town of Mena, Commonwealth College was training labor leaders. Nearby in the town of Ink, refugees from the Llano Cooperative Colony in Louisiana had established still another cooperative venture. In Paris, Claude and Joyce Williams were using the church to organize the unemployed, to hold classes in political education, and to aid the striking miners. The Socialist Party, organized earlier in the Tyronza area, had already held one state convention, boasted a sizable membership, and had brought Norman Thomas into the area to speak.

Uppermost in the minds of those planning the union was the memory of what had happened in Arkansas fifteen years earlier when black sharecroppers in Elaine had attempted to organize. Issac Shaw recalled that event, known as the Elaine Massacre, and gave a moving plea as to why the union had to be integrated: black people couldn't do it on their own without inviting racial slaughter.

It is probable that at least some of the organizers in the room that evening were aware of a similar attempt at sharecropper organizing in Alabama. The Alabama Sharecroppers Union (SCU) had been organized in 1931 by the Communist Party in response to requests from black croppers and day laborers who complained that the landlords had set day wages at 50 cents per day for men and 25 cents a day for women. The union organized around several demands including food advances through settlement time, the right for the sharecroppers to sell their own time, day wages paid in cash, and a nine month school term for black children. A skirmish outside a union meeting one night at Camp Hill ended in a gun battle and the subsequent repression quieted activity in the area and

sent the nascent union underground. The following year the union emerged in Reeltown and ended in another gun battle, recorded in John Beecher's poem *In Egypt Land*.*

Although it was not the first attempt by sharecroppers to rebel against the viciousness of the plantation caste system, the organization of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU) was to have far-reaching effect in bringing the "plight of the sharecropper" to the nation's consciousness. Subjected to continuous harassment and intimidation by the landed gentry and their hired lawmen, the union nevertheless continued to grow in both membership and mass appeal. Throughout the '30's and into the early war years it spread to six southern states. Stubbornly maintaining its union structure despite rebuffs by both the CIO and AFL, it became a mass movement—a movement that people joined with the enthusiasm they normally saved for their religion, a movement that gave common people the means to organize and fight for the right to live decent and productive lives.

It is not our intention here to tell the full story of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, nor to analyze the conditions out of which it grew.† What we present here are first person accounts by six people who were active participants in the union as organizers, national and local officers, and local members. George Stith was a young man when he joined the STFU and was quickly made secretary of his Cotton Plant local because he could write; Clay East was converted to socialism when he read *Letters to Jud* by Upton Sinclair because "it just made sense." He took in the first members of the union when it was organized at the Sunnyside School and remained active in the union for the next year; Mrs. Naomi Williams was a member of an STFU local in the Gould area; J.R. Butler taught school for a while near his home town of Pangburn, but was working for his brother at the sawmill when he attended the first state socialist convention in Arkansas. He was President of the union from 1935 to 1942, the union's most active and productive years. H.L. Mitchell is an acknowledged co-founder of the union, and served in an executive capacity up through the time the union was known as the National Farm Labor Union until its affiliation with the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen. Carrie Dilworth served as secretary of the Gould local, helped the union raise money by speaking nationally, and coordinated the transport of labor to work in the canneries during the war years.

The stories that follow are excerpted from recorded interviews conducted by the Institute for Southern Studies.

*See page 33

†See notes at end of article.

Hard Times

STITH: I was born in Baxter, in Drew County, Arkansas, in 1916. I stayed there until I was five years old. Then we moved to Tiller, Arkansas, down the road about 15 or 20 miles, on the land of T.P. Perry. My father left the farm when I was somewhere around six or seven and went to work for the US government as a detective, for this squad that looked into vice. He worked on assignment, but he wouldn't tell us just what his job was. He joined up in St. Louis where the division headquarters was. He taken it up because he wanted to get away from the farm. At that time on the plantations in the South, you didn't have too much security. You wasn't independent. You did as the plantation owner or agent say do; you taken what they give you, and that's about it.

We travelled a lot until 1930. His health got bad and he resigned. I found later, after I was grown, that he resigned partly because he almost got killed several times, and my mother had just decided that she didn't want him in the service. That's the reason he got out. And he went to work in Illinois at a steel plant where they make steam heaters and radiators, but some of the chemicals they used there went against his health. So he had to leave that and that's why we came back to southeast Missouri to the farm.

First we went to Tiptonville, Tennessee, to pick cotton. That was in 1926, if I remember right. Then he decided he would go back to the farm, that it was best for him. So we came back to southeast Missouri and started sharecropping.

I think they looked at it as a step down, but then they looked at farming as a way of life and that's it. This was a way of making it. They felt that they had to make some kind of plan where the family could be kept together and that's what they did. His health didn't get too good. We moved to the farm and after about three years his health got so bad, he wasn't able to work. My mother's health wasn't good enough for her to work either. I had a brother next to me that they let my grandmother who always lived near us keep, and this only left two boys at home.

Now here's what happened to my education. The time he got disabled to work and she was disabled to work, we lived on a small plantation. The man had 14 head of mule. It was a pretty good size plantation for mule farming. Every sharecropper had a pair of mules, and that pair of mules had to work. You lived in his house. So when my father got down sick and couldn't work, then I had to quit school and take over. I barely finished what we called elementary and that's all the schooling I got, and the most anybody got in the family.

People asked me, "What you gonna do with the 14 acres of cotton?" I said, "I'm gon' work it," and lord know, I don't know how I figured I was gonna work it. I just figured I had it to do. I was the only one to work and that was just it. So I dropped out of school and went out and got the crop ready, planted it. When it come time to chop, the owner of the plantation said, "What you gon' do about the cotton?" I said, "I'm gon' work it, I'm gon' try." He looked at me and he said, "You got more nerve than any boy I ever seen. I'll tell you what to do. You get a pair of mules in the lot. You plow your crop and after that I've got a hay crop, you can plow for me. I'll see that the cotton is chopped and what's left over I'll charge it to the crop." So that's the way we worked it. We worked on through hay season which at that time was all done by mules. When we finished with hay season I had enough money coming that I had worked over for him, more over than the cotton chopping was worth, to buy me a suit of clothes. It was the first long pants suit of clothes I ever had.

When I wasn't working the crop I worked out on farms, baling hay and cutting timber as a day laborer. I made more money by working than we did out of the crop. I don't remember how much it was we made from the crop; you never was told that. But I know the money from the crop wasn't too much, because we bought winter groceries. I know, I went with my parents when they went to trade. They bought a barrel of flour, a 50-pound sack of sugar, beans and rice. That was it.

In the last part of '34 after the crops were harvested, we came to Arkansas. The man we moved with sent a truck to move us from southeast Missouri to Augusta, Arkansas, and we paid that out of the next crop. So we didn't have much money.

In Arkansas, I worked on the plantation of A.L. Cole and Son. Their headquarters was at Wyattville, between Cotton Plant and Howell. Everybody always called it Cotton Plant because that was the closest town. The plantation I was on was about 12 square miles.

The population in the area was about 90% black, and all black on the plantation. Around Tyrone and Marked Tree where the union started, it must have been around 40 or 60% more Negroes than whites. The northeast part of Woodruff County was virtually all white. That's where we got a large part of our white membership from. This whole section north of McCrory, around South Bend, over as far as Martin, until you get up near Wynn, was mostly white. At one time Negroes wasn't allowed to go through these places north of McCrory unless they was a white person with them. But overall, the cotton growing area was about 75% black.

They really didn't want you to go to work off the plantation unless you got permission from them. They wanted to keep you busy, and you didn't get any money out of it. But they would say, "Now look, if you need a little grocery money come up and I'll give you a half book." When you borrowed money to make a crop, you didn't get cash money; you got a coupon book. A book looked pretty much like food stamps today. It wasn't good anywhere except at the company store.

The owner, Cole, he had a mint of his own called "brozeen." When he paid you off and credited your money, you got his money called brozeen. Now he wasn't the only one. There was a lot of plantations, large ones, like the Wilson plantation up near Blytheville and Ozone which had five plantations I think. Now each plantation had a different brozeen, but you could spend Wilson brozeen only at a Wilson store. The coupon books stayed for a long time, but the brozeen disappeared, and I'm not sure whether it was helpful or not. When brozeen disappeared there still wasn't any money; they went totally to the coupon book.

The plantation I lived on didn't have it, but a lot of the large plantations like Wilson and others had their own penal farm. They even held their own courts on certain plantations. Many times the agent on the place where I worked went to trial for me. I didn't go; he was my representative. It was the owner's own court. They had a judge, a legal justice of the peace on the plantation. The plantation was actually like a state. It had its own government, and the plantation owner actually appointed the justice of the peace. Now back in those days Negroes didn't vote too much, and the justice of the peace was elected by very few people. If the plantation owner went to all agents and all the white people who lived on the place and said, "Look, Mr. So and So is running for justice of the peace, vote for him," he got the votes. So he was a legal justice of the peace. Many plantations were broke up into units, often miles apart. So, no matter what unit he was on, the justice of the peace had jurisdiction over whatever his court area was.

EAST: Times were so bad that people over at one of those small towns over there stopped a bread truck. They stopped the bread truck and took the bread off the damn thing, a bunch of these damn working people out there. Couldn't get nothing to eat. And that happened over quite a bit of the country.

Photos credited to *Workers in Our Field* were taken from the 25th Anniversary book of the National Agricultural Workers Union. Courtesy of Clay East.

Back in that country, they only ate rabbits in the wintertime, see, after frost had fallen and so forth. But they used to make a remark back then that Hoover was the guy that made rabbits good to eat the year 'round. But the thing was serious.

There was a world of credit done at that time; everything was done on credit. The small farmers back at that time all had to borrow money every year to make a profit. So, if they had a bad crop year, a lot of them, that's the way they lost their farms. The bad times back there was 1920 and you just can't imagine the number of people then that was big men the year before who had lost everything they had.

They had no control whatever over what their cotton sold for. They were paid what the cotton buyer wanted to pay them. The supply and demand deal didn't work out so much. In a way, it did, but if they had a big supply and the demand for cotton went down, then the price of cotton went down. I've seen cotton sell for 4 cents a pound.

Well naturally this country was made up of those small farms to begin with—people who had come in there and bought small farms for themselves. Ritter and Emrich furnished a world of people. They had the largest store there [Tyronza] by far and had the gin and everything. Well, when a man went broke and lost his farm, they got it. So first thing you know, there's a few people who was getting ahold of all the land. See, it got to where these farms, most of them, was belonging to big businessmen, the small farmers practically all lost their farms.

I don't know what would happen to them, maybe they'd start out and try to go in and buy another small farm someplace. But not very many of those guys that actually owned those farms ever started in sharecropping. Sharecropping was generally taken up by guys that started out working as hands, see, by the month. Maybe just working by the day, mixing their jobs up.

About the acreage reduction program, all of that was very much in favor of the man that owned the land, the producer—it didn't make a damn whether he did any work or not. The government contract also stated that the way this was divided up should be decided between the producer and the tenants. And the check went to the producer, so he's sitting now with the check in his hand. Well, he can say, "You guys didn't have to pick this cotton. All you did was to plow it up, so you're not entitled to half of it." And a lot of them never did get anything. Well, since I was what in that section they called the law—that was a fair description of my position in there, because I was the only officer in that section—these people would come to me.

They'd come to me and tell me their troubles,

the Elaine Massacre ...

The following description of the Elaine story is a composite of information gathered from an account in Crisis, December 1919, by far the best account written; from a report entitled, "Lynching and Debt Slavery," written by NAACP Field Secretary William Pickens and published by the American Civil Liberties Union; and from my own travels through eastern Arkansas, from Marianna to Elaine, talking to individuals who would briefly recount their memories and then send me down the road a piece to a more knowledgeable source. I talked with almost a dozen folk that way, and ended up in Elaine interviewing its oldest citizen, who everyone said (and so he claimed) knew the story better than any man living. But senility prevented the story from getting out.

Elaine, Arkansas, one of those small towns built upside the railroad, is located in Phillips County, which is bordered by the Mississippi River to the east. In 1910, 78.6% of the population of Phillips County was black. There were 3,598 black tenants and sharecroppers who farmed 81,000 acres, and only 587 black farm owners in that year. An area of rich alluvial soil, two-thirds of the agricultural production of the county was in cotton, which became a booming business during the war years when cotton prices quadrupled, up from 11 cents a pound in 1915 to 40 cents a pound in 1919.

The black croppers were getting only 15 cents a pound for their cotton from the planters, less than half the going price. Many of them received no settlement from the planters for their cotton taken in the fall of 1918 until July, 1919, and never received a monthly statement of account which would have enabled them to verify charges to their accounts. These conditions prompted 68 blacks from the Fairthy plantation to hire a lawyer to sue their landlords for statements of their accounts and a just settlement. Some had planned further to go before the federal grand jury to charge certain planters (owners, managers and agents) with peonage. They hired a white attorney from Little Rock named Bratton, the same Bratton who a few years earlier had prosecuted black peonage cases in Phillips County for the government and had con-

victed a half dozen planters. (The Phillips County suit had followed a government inquiry into alleged peonage of Italian laborers in the South.) Bratton's fee was \$50 per tenant, plus a percentage of the money to be collected from the landlords. The black tenants held secret meetings to collect the money for Bratton's advance and the treasury as well as to gather evidence and facts to solidify their legal case.

According to the *Crisis* account, at the same time another organization, a union of black cotton pickers, arose whose purpose was to organize a strike for higher wages. They did strike, refusing to pick cotton until they got better pay. A substantial number of the cotton pickers were the wives and daughters of sawmill hands, whose relatively fair pay enabled them to bargain over wages. (There is simply not enough information to determine whether these organizational efforts were absolutely independent, though it seems unlikely.)

Because of the tense racial climate in the country at the time—there had been recent race riots in East St. Louis, one in Chicago and another in Washington, D.C., and an increase in KKK activity—black folks in the area had begun amassing weapons and ammunition for defense. It is unclear whether the sharecropper groups initiated and organized this activity or whether it merely became one of their main programs. It is probable, however, that organization was involved, organization that included black professionals in Helena, who several interviewees said obtained the weapons. They also recalled that a conflict was anticipated. One reported that black folks had a whole boxcar of ammunition. Another said they had machine guns and high powered rifles. The interesting, and unresolved, aspect of their organization is the possible role of Garveyites. One informant who proudly defined himself as a "race man," recalled that a Garvey local had tried to get off the ground in the Helena area without much success. Another said he suspected that Dr. A. E. Johnston, a prominent dentist and property owner of Helena and one of the four Johnston brothers lynched during the riot, was a Garveyite. Carrie Dilworth, from central Arkansas, said that in her youth she

had chanted the slang expression, "Don't be no fool with Marcus Garvey," which she said meant that he would get you killed and which she understood to refer to the Elaine massacre. Stith knew the same expression. The old man in Elaine claimed that a man from Winchester, Arkansas, was responsible for organizing the sharecroppers and promised them they would win 40 cents a pound for their cotton. Others I interviewed knew of no Garvey activity in the area.

The white people in the area learned of these organizing efforts and of the gun buying which came from white Helena merchants and express offices, and began meeting to figure out how to "break up the whole business and put the Negroes in their place."

The first incident that preceded the main confrontation in Elaine, mentioned only in the *Crisis* account, involved a drunken white man from Helena named John Clem, who terrorized the black community of Elaine one Sunday by shooting up their area. Suspicious that he was sent to spark a riot, black folk kept off the streets and notified the sheriff at Helena, who did nothing; John Clem continued his gunplay the following day. The second incident occurred on Tuesday at a church near Hoop Spur just north of Elaine, where the croppers were meeting. The *Crisis* article reports several versions of the event. The first version says that the deputy sheriff, a "special agent" and a black trustee drove up to the church in a car and tried to enter the church "to investigate" the meeting and were refused admittance. Trying to force their way in, they fired into the building whereupon the blacks within fired back, killing the special agent and wounding the deputy. The second version comes from the words of the trustee (whose presence is mentioned in no other account) who said that the deputy and the special agent were ambushed by two other whites and a black. The initial statements of the wounded deputy corroborated that story. This version, however, was carefully made "inoperative" a few days thereafter. The third version, the official white version, became: blacks in the church were armed and fired on the two whites without provocation when their car had happened to break down in front of the church.

The memories of those interviewed were that the blacks had guns in the church for protection and that they had been forbidden to meet.

In essence, a "nigger hunt" ensued. Whites sent their families to Helena for safety while car and truck loads of white men—headhunters—poured in from neighboring counties in Mississippi, Tennessee and Arkansas. Woods were scoured. Homes were fired into. Hunting parties often tra-

velled faster than the news, catching many blacks ignorant and defenseless. The four Johnston brothers of Helena were intercepted upon return from a squirrel hunt and were lynched. The next day, in Ratio, 12 miles south of Hoop Spur, the son of Attorney Bratton was meeting with representatives of the Fairthy 68, who were anxious to go to court, to collect the fees. They were encountered by one of the white roving bands, arrested, sent to jail in Helena, and charged with murder. Bratton was nearly lynched; Governor Brough swore in special guards to protect him and surround the jailhouse, where he was held for 31 days without bond and eventually was released without trial. Those interviewed spoke of a pitched battle. Governor Brough sent in state troopers as well as 500 federal troops from Camp Pike. One businessman told me he understood that the only way they got the blacks to surrender was by sending in black troops; the croppers wouldn't shoot their brothers.

Over one thousand black men and women were arrested by the soldiers and confined in unsanitary "stockades" and denied any contact with attorneys or friends. Another 200-300 were arrested and jailed in Helena. Each was personally investigated by army officers and the select "committee of seven," comprised of two planters, a cotton factor, a merchant, a banker, the county sheriff and the mayor of Helena, which functioned with Governor Brough's sanction. "Innocent" blacks were let go only after a white appeared to vouch personally for them, which was done only after a given wage was agreed to. That settled the strike. Black farm owners who had no whites to vouch for them stayed incarcerated longest and frequently lost their land as a result.

Within a month 66 had been tried and convicted. Trials averaged 5-10 minutes and it was reported that electric connections were used on the witness chair to scare the defendants.

The Little Rock trial of the twelve men facing the electric chair received the most attention. One of the people interviewed had an uncle who attended the trial who reported that the judge asked Dr. E.C. Morris, the prominent Helena minister and president of the National Baptist Convention, whether he thought the men were guilty of murder in the first degree. After asking for an explanation of the charge from the black and white attorneys, he answered no. Another explained to me that because four of the twelve were Masons, they didn't get electrocuted, for at the time all leaders had to be Masons, from a railroad engineer to county sheriff on up to the president of the U.S. It was clear that the attack on debt slavery had been squashed.

—Leah Wise



see. Tell me that Mr. So-and-so got the check and he hadn't given them anything. The way I saw it, they started out on the shares, and after this farmer had agreed to plow up this cotton, well, I figured that the sharecropper had carried out his part of the contract and I thought that he was entitled to half of it. And a good many of the farmers did; all of them didn't have trouble. Mostly the bigger ones and the crooked ones would only give them a third. As I said, a lot of them never did get anything out of it. I don't know just what the sharecropper could do. The owner is setting there with the check and the money and he can go down and cash it. This guy doesn't have to sign it or anything, he goes down and cashes it and he's got the money in his hand. That was the way the government contract read, that this tenant has to make a deal with the producer.

WILLIAMS: During the Depression I had a crop of my own. And if I had a little leisure time to get off, I'd go over there to the boss' place and pick cotton. And that was for 35 cent a hundred. I was a good cotton picker; and I picked 300 pounds in one day to get me a dollar and a nickel. I'd go out there in the early morning just so you could see a row of cotton. It was hard, but I made it. I tried to keep my own account at the commissary store. But now where the cheating came in was on this stuff you put on the cotton, fertilizer and all that kind of stuff, and in the seeds. When they sell the cotton, they wouldn't give me what the cotton was worth. They put it there and I had to pay it all. I was renting but I wasn't supposed to pay it all. But I had all that to pay. Yes, I owed them at that store everything. I gathered crops so much. And then when I'd get enough crop gathered, then I'd pay him. I had got all my groceries and that would leave me with nothing.

I usually made 40 and 45 bales, more sometimes, and I had enough money to run me through the winter, to buy new children's clothes for school and to buy groceries to last 'til the next time they start to furnish over in the spring. They didn't never give us nothing until the first of April. But I was wise. I'd buy enough of what I couldn't raise to last 'til April or May. I was raising hogs, had cows and made my own garden and put up dry food, beans and peas and all that. I done worked myself to death.

I had to fight for the little parity I got, because they didn't want to give it to nobody. I had a big family and they had to cut off more acres. They said I didn't deserve it, and if I got it, they wanted them checks what we got to pay for some farming debts. But they couldn't get it. The government wasn't giving it to us to pay debts. They was giving

it to you to live after they cut acreage. And I didn't stand for it. They didn't like me but they had to take it.

I only sharecropped a couple of years after my husband died. And I'm telling you that sharecropping didn't give me nothing. But now when he was living and we was renting, we could get along a little better. When he died I didn't have nothing but them little chillen. And they'd take everything I'd make so I didn't need to be there. They'd take all my half of it and I had to owe him on his half.

And another thing, they didn't allow no colored chillen to even go to school but seven months, and they made them stay in the field and the white kids was going to school all kind of every way. I wouldn't stick for that now. I taught school until I got so many children I couldn't get nobody to take care of them and it took all I made. But I taught before I had the three little children. And when I got the fourth one I had to quit and take care of them. You know in them days you had to know how to teach everything, from the first to the eighth grade. But I wasn't getting nothing but \$35 a month. They raised it to \$45 about a month after I quit. But I had to pay somebody to keep my babies. And them people charged me \$2, \$3 each kid a month. That's \$10. And then I had to feed them and go get them. bring them home, had to do this and do that, and when I'd get finished with all that I wouldn't have \$10. And I just quit teaching. My husband say, "Go head and quit teaching and sit down and maybe you'll get some peas and okra."

They built a cannery down by our school, and I run the cannery putting up fruits and such. It was the next thing I done, and I made more doing that than I did teaching.

BUTLER: Those were terrible days for everybody—Depression days that made for a lot of people thinking about trying for something better. More and more people got to thinking socialist, you know. Well, I had been a socialist for a long, long time. When I was about 16 years old, I began to read about Gene Debs, you know, and began to see how things was really beginning to work, so I became somewhat of a socialist then, and I still am. I couldn't be anything else and be honest with myself.

My father was a farmer from the time before I was born. In fact, I guess he was born a farmer over in Alabama. And then he did move to Arkansas a while before I was born. Then I never was out of the state of Arkansas until after I was grown. I never went to a, what you would call a high school or anything of that kind. We had a little country school, way out some eight miles from

Pangburn where I grew up and went to school in a little one-room country school where one teacher taught everybody, and believe it or not, kids when they'd get through what they would call eighth grade, knew more than the kids that get through high school today.

MITCHELL: I have always said that my family came down the agricultural ladder. My father was a tenant farmer who owned his team and farming tools. My grandfather owned his own farm and lived near Halls, Tennessee. He was also a Baptist preacher. From the time I was eight years old I worked for wages on the farm. I worked for 50 cents per day upwards. I made my first sharecrop about 1919.

I left Halls several times, but returned and graduated from high school there. I had moved around so much that I had missed several grades, but I was permitted to make them up.

During the year 1926 we made another sharecrop, raised cotton, tomatoes and picked strawberries. We had a cash income of \$185 for our year's work. About that time my father was operating a barber shop in the town of Tyronza, and he wrote me about how rich the land was in Arkansas. He said, "If you are going to farm, come to Arkansas. This is the place. The land is rich and they raise two bales of cotton per acre." He didn't say that the boll weevils got half of it, or three-fourths of it, but that usually happened. I went over to look at a place in Arkansas. There was a plantation owner who was anxious to have me come out. He said I could work part time in the company store and that I could make a crop too. Then I went out and looked at some of those dilapidated houses. One could see daylight by looking up and could see daylight by looking down. I decided immediately that I wasn't going to live in one of those shacks. I was ready to go back to Tennessee where it was a little more civilized.

I was about ready to leave when my father told me there was a pressing shop in the back of his barber shop and the man who had been operating it had just quit. My father advised me to take it. I told him I did not know anything about operating a pressing shop but he said I could learn, and I did learn. I soon had a dry cleaning plant and a booming business. I guess I was a fairly good salesman. I bought a car which I did not know how to drive, one of those old Fords that had to be cranked up. I put a body on it and a sign, "Tyronza Cleaners." I went all over the plantations soliciting business and I got a lot of it, especially in the fall of the year when the sharecroppers had a little money. Sharecroppers were allowed whatever money the seed brought. After they ginned the

cotton they got the money from the sale of the seed to pay for the picking. They had a saying, "Get the landlord's cotton off my seed." Then they would have a little money to spend. Most of them had at least one Sunday suit and they would usually have it cleaned and pressed. I would pick up the cleaning and return it. Of course, my best customers were the plantation owners, the riders and people of that sort. I made a fairly good income up until about 1931 or '32. Then the bank failed.

Organization of the Union

EAST: Tyronza was a little town, I'd say around 500. Just before we came back from Texas, a mule bogged down there on Main Street and they couldn't get him out and he died in there.

On Sunday everyone would meet the train and get a paper. Not much other place to go and they was always a big crowd at the depot on Sunday morning. In fact, there was generally a bunch of people that would meet the train, which ran twice a day.

The town at one time was built, all of it, right along the railroad track, facing the railroad track with a road between the buildings and the railroad track. And that's the way most towns back there were built at that time, built right up to the railroad track because all their supplies came in by rail and they wanted to be as near to that as they could, because they had to haul all that stuff by wagon. I was from an old-time Tyronza family. My dad had a nice grocery store and farmed on the side. I had a hell of a reputation as a boy. I was one of the worst in town, always into something, even when I was in school.

I couldn't say definitely, but I probably had been running a service station for a couple of years when I first knew Mitch—when he came in there and started that dry cleaning outfit. He traded with me and I looked after his cars. The last time I bought a car for him, it was a Moon; I think I paid \$125 for it in Memphis.

Mitch didn't have much to do with other people. As far as us talking about politics or anything, I never had any conversations with him at all until I got to setting around over there doing nothing and figured me out a system I thought we should be operating under and when I went over and talked to Mitchell, he said, "Why, you're a socialist." And of course, I was kind of smart-alecky and I told him, "Hell, my hair's not long enough." About the only thing I at that time knew about socialism was calling them Bolsheviks; some people said Bolshevikii and we'd see cartoons in the paper about Russians and my grandad always called them

"Roosians." But, that's about as much as I knew about them.

Mitch told me that he'd bring down a book for me to read. I told him then that if it was about socialism, he needn't bring it down to me. So, Mitch said, "You don't have to be so damn narrow minded, you can read it and if it's no good, forget about it." I guess maybe that day or the next day, he come by there and pitched me out a little paper book, *Letters to Jud* by Upton Sinclair. Well, I never had heard of Upton Sinclair, I didn't know nothing about him. And I started in reading that thing and the more I read, the more sense it made. After that, I knew there was something wrong and everyone else did too.

That was the first one that I read. Then, I was so interested in that thing that I ordered some of them—had a slip on the back where you could order them, and I ordered ten at a time. I read *Looking Backward* by Edward Bellamy and I read some of Sinclair's larger books.

I was a Minuteman for Oscar Ameringer and was listed in the *American Guardian* every week as one of the top Minutemen. They listed you in there by the number of new subscribers you got.

Yes, right away, after I read *Letters to Jud*. That convinced me right then that what, well, it just made sense, that's all.

See, the Socialist Party was what we started first. The only thing that I could tell you about that was Mitch, my brother, and Nunally had about 12 or 14 that went in together and got a state charter. They had the first Socialist charter issued in Arkansas. It must have been in 1931, that's what I would guess. I wasn't in on that because I was running for constable at the time they first organized the Party and got a charter and all, but as soon as the election was over, then I joined the Party and got a card, see.

At that time, we was instructed about how to hold meetings. They said to get a group together at home and discuss these things and talk them over. After we got this going, we got the Odd Fellows Hall and had regular meetings in there. And anywhere from 50, I'd say, to 100, 150 maybe, would come to the meetings. Quite often we'd have people from some other surrounding town or something, but most of them were local people. Dr. William R. Amberson from the University of Tennessee was our most active participant. He attended more meetings over there at our socialist "locals" than any one person. He was over there quite often. Mixed meetings weren't held back there until we started up with the union. So this was before the union and I just don't remember any black people being in there at all.

I'd make a lot of talks. I always made a prac-

tice of telling stories that showed a comparison between socialism and capitalism and I'd always make fun and show how stupid and silly the capitalist system was, and how much more sensible the socialist movement was. At that time, they had the WPA [Works Progress Administration], which was put out by the government, see. And we always had suggestions or criticism about the way it operated.

See, that was quite a long time before the union started, that had to be in the early part of 1932, and Thomas was campaigning. I don't know whether you know it or not, but he was travelling over the country, he and his wife was driving from city to city in an old Buick. We had this meeting at the Tyronza schoolhouse and had Thomas in there to speak. People were there from Little Rock and Hot Springs, and all over the state. See the papers was full of stuff about these socialists over in Tyronza, so we had folks coming in there from all over the country. All they could get in the schoolhouse auditorium and some standing. I'd say 500 people. We took him around the countryside to these different farms. We took him out to the Norcross plantation, and he went in there and Norcross had this barn with concrete floors and running water for his hogs. Then he goes out to these sharecropper houses and there was no screens and there was flies and holes in the floor and roof and everything. And when he got up to make this talk at the schoolhouse and told about how they was treating the animals so much better, the cows and all too, he had concrete examples.

The way I remember the union getting started—see, in the South we call twelve o'clock "dinner." When Norman Thomas was there to speak we had dinner at my home and during the meal, Norman was the first one that planted that idea in our heads. He told me at that meeting, "What you need here is a union." In other words, the Socialist Party wasn't going to be any help to these tenant farmers. This was after we had taken him out, see, and shown him the conditions in the country and all. And that is where the idea originated, when Thomas told us that. So, after he left, we talked the thing over. Mitchell was actually the big planner in this deal. There was Mitch and myself and two other guys, I think probably Ward Rogers and possibly Alvin Nunnally.

I can't remember just how many there was at the first meeting, but as I remember, it was about 50-50, about half white and half black. But there wasn't any particularly strong dissent against a mixed union. We had to have an understanding among the union members, and you couldn't have much understanding if you had two separate unions. So, we didn't have any complica-



Photo from *Workers in Our Fields*
Fairview Plantation School

tions to amount to anything about that. I got up and I was pretty hot by that time and it was, as I said, getting up pretty late and I told them we'd come down here to decide what or whether we was going to have a union or not, and if we was going to have one, well, let's make up our mind and get some members in here. So I took in the first members. They started signing some cards, we had some cards and all there and these guys joined up.

MITCHELL: We had organized the Socialist Party, too, but that was just to start with, and then as things got worse and the Depression deepened, by 1933, we had 2,000 members of the Socialist Party of Arkansas in the Tyronza area. I became the Secretary of the Socialist Party of Arkansas in 1933. We got Norman Thomas to come down in the early part of '34. This was after Hiram Norcross, the planter, went out and measured all the land he had and evicted 40 families after they had started planting the crop. He didn't like the idea at all, having to pay the sharecroppers half of the government plow-up money. He was arguing that they should just get a third, because they did not have anything invested except their labor. They plowed under every third row of cotton. The next year they agreed to reduce the cotton by 40%. After we organized, we filed a suit against Norcross on the basis of his evicting those 40 odd families and enforcing the rights of the sharecroppers under the AAA contract.

BUTLER: I got this letter from Mitchell and they told me that they were going to have a state socialist convention at Tyronza, and invited me over, and I went. While at that convention, I saw things happening to the people that lived around there that shouldn't have happened to a dog. Clay

East, Mitchell, myself and some others decided that a union was about the best thing that could be thought up.

After I had gone back to my sawmill job, I got a call from Mitchell, and he told me that they were ready to start building a union there. In fact, I think they had already had a meeting at which they, well, sort of got together on some ideas. So I went back over again, and we worked out a constitution and started organizing. It wasn't long before we had an organizer or two in jail because the plantation element in that part of the country absolutely did not want them "niggers" organized, and they didn't hesitate to say it in just those words. The whites were niggers, too. There was no difference, and some of 'em was beginning to see that there was no difference. Of course, there was still a lot of prejudice among white people in those days, but hard times makes peculiar bedfellows sometimes, and so some of them were beginning to get their eyes open and see that all of them were being used. So it was easy to get a start on organizing.

None of us who were really interested in getting the work started would agree to having a separate union or separate meetings or anything of that kind. A lot of the Negro people agreed with us because they knew that if they had a meeting with just black people there, they wouldn't have any protection whatever, but a few white people might have protective influence, so it was to their interest really to have all of it together.

We never did have any particular difficulty because of the integrated meetings. We'd have threats, but nobody ever tried to break up a meeting just for that lesson. I think our effort at organizing was actually the beginning of the civil rights movement. Thinking of the thing in an overall picture, you know, I believe that we started something that over the years has been very productive of good results.

Of course we had opposition on every hand, the law enforcement officers and the plantation owners and a lot, even, of the white sharecroppers themselves were opposed to an organization that took in both races. But we overcame all of that to some extent and we were ready. People knew that it just had to happen. They all knew that they were in the same boat and that they all had to pull together. That's about the best way that I know to express it. As soon as we began to tell them what the situation was and what might be done about it, well, they could see that the white people were being treated just the same as the Negroes, and so there was no great opposition at all to integrated meetings.

The first two years, I never drew one penny of

salary and but very little expense money. I would go over to Memphis—at first over to Tyrnza—and do whatever I could, you know, and then go back to my sawmill job. I was still doing some sawmill work. The mill belonged to my brother. There was no market for lumber to amount to anything. He had a few hands that worked for him all the time and he paid us 50 cents a day for our work and he traded lumber for fat hogs or a cow, or a mule, anything. And if it was eatable, why it was killed and eaten.

Early Days of the Union

MITCHELL: Evictions occurred continuously. We estimate something like a half a million or a million as a result of the cotton plow-up program. The same findings were made by Dr. Calvin Hoover who was doing a survey with Howard Odum, I believe. Their estimates were a little higher than ours. I think his were 900,000 evicted as a result of the cotton plow-up in 1933 and the reduction in the cotton program in 1934.

In the beginning, if a union family was evicted and the family wanted to, we'd put them back in the houses. This was done now and then. Usually the plantation owner didn't want them and most of them didn't want to stay. We did that continuously in 1935 because there just wasn't any place for them to go and many people had come back from the city. There wasn't the relation between the farms and the cities as close as it is today.

They'd go to Chicago, stop first in Memphis, or St. Louis, and then wind up in the Chicago or Detroit area. Many of them, both black and white, went to Detroit after jobs opened in the auto plants.

In the beginning, we were trying to get a section of the law enforced providing that sharecroppers should not be evicted from the land because of the operation of this AAA program. We were trying to get that enforced, but of course, they didn't pay any attention to the law, any more than they do now when poor people are concerned. We filed a lawsuit in the courts, and about the time the lawsuit was being thrown out, we sent a delegation to Washington to see the Secretary of Agriculture, Mr. Henry Wallace, the great liberal. As we



H. L. Mitchell

Photo by Bob Dinwiddie

always did, we had representation of both whites and blacks; there were two other whites beside me and two blacks, McKinney and another minister, Rev. N.W. Webb, a union organizer from Birdsong, Arkansas.

We got up early in the morning. Because of the inter-racial composition of our group, we drove day and night as there was no place for us to stop and we didn't know what else to do. I had never been to Washington but once. We arrived in Washington early in the morning and pulled up on the side of a street and went to sleep in the car, as we'd done on the way up. I think I drove all the way because nobody else could drive. At 7 a.m. we had a little breakfast somewhere after finding a store that was open. We bought cheese and crackers, bread, baloney, cold drinks, etc. At 7:30 we walked over to the Department of Agriculture. There was no one there but an unarmed guard who told us the Department of Agriculture farmers didn't get there till about 9 o'clock. So we went to see the Washington Monument and that was even closed.

Soon after 9 o'clock we went back to the Department of Agriculture. We marched up the stairs, the guard had told us the Secretary's office was 204. We went right into the Secretary's office, and the receptionist asked who we were and we told her we were a delegation from the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and we wanted to see the Secretary. She asked if we had an appointment. Of course we did not. I never heard of having to make an appointment to "see" anybody before. I hesitated and didn't know what to say. McKinney stepped up and said, "Ma'am, we will just sit down here. If Mr. Wallace is busy, we'll just wait until he gets through and we can talk to him then. The receptionist didn't know what to do with a group of people who intended to sit in the office and wait for Mr. Wallace. About that time I remembered a letter I had addressed to Paul Appleby, the Undersecretary of Agriculture, and I asked her if she would deliver the letter to Mr. Appleby. Paul Appleby came out and soon he got Henry Wallace out there to see us.

Wallace promised to send an investigator down to investigate the displacement of people under the AAA. We evidently put up a rather convincing story to him. Wallace told us he had the right person for the job. She was a lawyer, Mrs. Mary Conner Meyers, who had just finished working on a case for the Treasury Department. It was Capone's income tax evasion case in Chicago. This led to the imprisonment of that racketeer. Wallace said he would see that Mrs. Meyers was sent down to Arkansas. He told us to go back and tell our members we had seen the Secretary of Agriculture and that something was going to be done.

but not to say what or who will do it.

STITH: When I heard about the union I lived at a little place called Cotton Plant in Woodruff County. The way I heard about the union was through a friend of mine who was older. We used to run around since neither of us was married. He said to me one night, "Come to the union meeting with me," and I said, "What kind of meeting?" And he said, "A farm tenant union." I said, "What is it good for?" He said, "It's good to make times better for us."

This must have been in 1935. I got in early enough to get in on the strike. Anyway, I says, "Okay, I'll go with you." He said, "It'll cost you a dime to get in." And I said, "I don't have a dime." He said, "I got a dime." So I went to the meeting with him and he paid the dime. That made me a member.

The meeting was at a private home on the plantation that I worked on. However, there were three plantations in that one union local and we rotated. Sometimes we'd be on the plantation I was on. Then they would decide it was best to move to one of the other plantations because the land owners didn't want the union. We were a little bit afraid because they had been beating up and killing a few to try to break the union. So we were afraid to meet at one place too long. We would rotate our meetings, and we had outside guards with shotguns.

I guess there were about 50 people at that first meeting. At one time that union local had a hundred and forty or fifty members, and there were many locals that were larger than that. This one was a combination of three plantations. About 95% of the families on the plantation joined the union.

And that very night my friend got up a motion that I would be made secretary of the union local. I couldn't write much better than he could, I don't think. He was secretary but he wanted to give it up because he didn't think he could write good enough. None of the others could write too well, not so far as writing letters and communications. They could write their name and put down some figures. But when it come down to writing or communicating in a business manner, they didn't. And I hadn't never either, but for some reason I was just able to do it. Actually, my job was really only to keep minutes, read communications and to record and hand down whatever decisions was made by the local. When the local was called on for meetings in Memphis, I usually went. They usually tried to send the person who was thought could get the best understanding and bring it back. Sometimes that would be the local president and/or the



Photo from *Workers in Our Fields*

George Stith

secretary. Where they figured the secretary couldn't quite do the job, it might be the vice-president. Of course, in the local I was in, it would always be me that was the one. I guess that give me a lot of courage. They thought I could do it so I always tried. I remained secretary until I moved to Gould in 1947.

I believe the president of our local at the time I joined was Will Curry. Although our local was all black, it had been organized by a white fellow—I can't think of his name—along with a colored man by the name of Farrish Betton from south of Cotton Plant. Betton was later made vice president of the organization. The two together organized the local. Betton wasn't a sharecropper. He was what was known as a tenant. He rented. He lived in this community I call Dark Corner; it's in Monroe County. And he was a justice of the peace in that community. That wasn't an all black community either. It was about 70% black. The white man who was justice of the peace had died. Before his death he requested from the quorum court that they make Betton justice of the peace because he was the only other qualified person in the area then. He had a high school education which was at that time good. And he stayed justice of the peace until he left there. Of course, he had some trouble—out of both races, in fact. And he had all kinds of threats, even after he got in the union, not for being justice of the peace, but because he was in the union. He was told to get out. I remember him telling me that from time to time some of the white people—and I use the word because he used it—would come to him and tell him, "Look, Betton, you're justice of the peace and you're too good a man to be mixed up with these low class people. So the best thing for you to do is just get out of it."

They tried to separate people by class, and they tried to do it by race. Which ever was best to use, they used it. It worked on a lot of people, and some people it just didn't work on. For instance, the agent on the plantation where I lived wanted to join the union because he knew the problem, but he was

afraid to. And he says to me, "Now George, look, I know you. Anything y'all need that I can give you, just tell me. Information or anything else, I'd get it."

Our local had all kinds of committees for whatever we thought was necessary. We had program committees, we had committees to make decisions on strikes. When we elected the first strike committee, it was made standing. Anytime we decided on a strike, this committee was consulted and told what the problem was. Strikes were talked about all the time, all the time. Strikes was actually voted on by a local at the STFU headquarters in Memphis. The union would call in the locals. They would say to the locals, this is what we have in mind. The secretary would tell the local to decide whether it was a good thing. Then they would send their representatives over to Memphis. Somehow we got them there, a lot of times I don't know how. But when we got to Memphis, a decision was made. Because legal procedures and very little of the law was on our side, a strike was always decided in Memphis. It were talked about by the executive committee, which usually involved a person from almost every area, at least from every state. Where unions was heavy, we had it broke up into areas or districts. For instance, this area local was in Pine Bluff, and the executive committee would decide which would be best. They would report their decisions back to the locals. Sometimes the idea for a strike would come from the local. The local would write in and say, well this is what is happening here; we believe if we could have a strike, it might could do some good. The executive branch of the union would look into it. If they thought it feasible, they'd say go ahead and have a "local." This was known as a local strike. But most of the time we tried to do it on a larger basis because it was more effective. Plantations used one against the other. For instance, if we struck on this plantation and the other two around didn't strike, they would be used against us. The owners would say, "Look, such and such a thing is happening over here, go over and help him out."

Racial makeup of a local depended a lot upon the area where you organized. Agriculture labor, especially in the cotton fields, at that time was about 85 or 90% black so your membership normally ran just like your area. In Arkansas in the early days of the union. I think our white support was an over-average percentage compared to their population at large. Our white membership at one time ran higher than 15% whites, much higher, especially in certain areas. And it increased as the union spread into other states. In parts of Alabama there was nothing but whites.

It was a community thing. Naturally the communities were segregated. That's why we had seg-

regated locals, because whites and blacks usually didn't live on the farm together.

There were locals that were integrated though. When we first started there was no integrated local. Even though white and black organized together, it was set up on the basis of race. Let me tell you this. When I went to Louisiana in 1953 down in the sugar cane fields, we had the same situation there. Certain plantations were all black and certain plantations were all white. The first time I went to a place called Raceland to make a talk to a group of sugar cane workers, I was the first Negro, except the janitor, that had his foot in the American Legion Hall. The workers were all white, and I went in there that night, and they looked at me sort of funny and said, "Is this who gon' talk?"

Later when we had our district meeting to bring our locals from the whole sugar cane area together, you had the whites and the blacks. And when they sat down and talked and thought of the situation, they decided we were all in the same boat. So they said, "Well, when are y'all gonna meet, we want to come over. When we're gonna meet, we want y'all to come over." Now this was a thing that just happened. I mean segregation run out so far as the union was concerned. They couldn't see segregation.

No, The whites had problems as well as we did. Usually we held it in a church or a country schoolhouse. A lot of time they were held without authority, but we could always get in. But the whites had a problem. Where they belonged to a church, the higher ups also belonged, and they couldn't get the church to have a meeting. So they had to come to a Negro place in order to have a meeting place.

Repression

In 1935, Normas Thomas again came to Arkansas and attempted to speak in the community of Birdsong. The meeting was broken up by a crowd of angry planters and lawmen, and Thomas was assured that no "gawd-damn yankee bastard" was welcome in Arkansas. Union organizer, Ward Rogers, had been arrested earlier when he threatened "to lead a group that would lynch every planter in Poinsett County." In the "reign of terror" that followed, union meetings were banned and union members were arrested on the slightest pretext. The union moved its headquarters to Memphis, and its officers depended on dark nights, fast cars, and back roads to get them in and out of the state safely. Acting under pressure, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration sent an attorney, Mary Conner Myers, into the state to investigate the massive evictions and wave of

repression. Mrs. Myers was considered an "impartial" observer, but the report that she subsequently wrote for the department was considered too controversial to be released.

STITH: After what happened at Tyrone where they beat up a few and maybe killed some of them, we decided on a local basis that we had to put up some kind of defense if we were going to meet. We were not just going to let people come in. And this is what I heard a lot of: "We're not gonna let them do us like they did in Elaine, just come and kill us out. So we gon' be prepared." I didn't know too much about the Elaine riot, though my father was there. But we never had cause to use our guns.

I think most of the whites and some of the blacks did decide not to have guns, but around Cotton Plant area, we didn't see it. Where the plantations was larger and more controlled, you had more trouble. The smaller plantations—I lived on a smaller plantation—we didn't have as much trouble, yet they resented organizing and they put out threats. But they didn't have as much Ku Klux kind of power in that area as in some other areas.

MITCHELL: We had a system of guards, inner guards and outer guards. We didn't call it a defense committee, but they were provided to warn the members in the meeting if any trouble was about to start. The guards were not armed. We did one other thing because of this Elaine catastrophe as we knew that the colored people would be slaughtered as well as people like Clay East and me. We decided that under no circumstances would the union retaliate, no matter what happened. We would try to influence public opinion and attempt to get the public on our side. If we had fought back it would have been our Negro members who suffered most. We were sure of that fact and we didn't want another Elaine Massacre.

In the records of the union there is a set of instructions we sent to members of the union about attending union meetings. We advised them not to go in groups of more than two or three at a time. They were to go quietly to the meeting place and to have their outer guards and inner guards watching. If the planters came, the guards were to notify the members to disperse. If they wanted to sing, that was all right, but they should keep their voices low. We had this all worked out.

We had friends, national and regional. First of all, of course, was Norman Thomas, who had access to radio and newspapers. In Memphis we had a friend at the University of Tennessee Medical College, a rather famous physiologist, Dr. William R. Amberson. Dr. Amberson was a man of great standing and he had access to the local newspaper.

In addition there was also a Socialist local in Memphis so we were not entirely without contacts. And, of course, the entire Socialist and labor union press were aware of our movement down in Arkansas.

DILWORTH: I'll tell you the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union had a secret society. When we first opened up to try to build an organization, you'd have to go to different towns and different places. We would have signs when we'd get off the bus or off the train or out of the car, so you could get to see if there was any members there. Just rub your right hand across your face this away (gestures, rubbing back of right hand across forehead from left to right). We also had something you had to say to get into the union hall.

EAST: We went over in a different section to a Negro church and Butler was there and Mitch was there and myself and possibly another speaker or so, I don't know. We had a good turnout, possibly 100-150 tenant people in there. And just before we

got the meeting started, here come one of the big planters from over there, Mr. Sloan.

He came in with a couple of big deputies, see, with their pistols buckled on them and he just came marching in there. He wanted to see what was going on. Well, you don't know how a lot of those colored people felt back there when the boss man comes in and sees them at a union meeting. They was a little bit shaky, but I'll say this, that the colored guys back there, if anything, were more solid than the whites. They'd go ahead and sacrifice and get killed or beat up or anything else before they'd give up.

I had a big six-shooter on and a pretty bad reputation if I do say it, not a bad reputation, but they knew that I wouldn't do to fool with. So, I got up and told them that "If you folks are going to be scared because your boss has walked in here and so forth, just quieten down, now this thing is perfectly legal. We've got corporation papers and we got our constitution." Well, he wanted a copy of this, Mr. Sloan did. So Mitch says, "Well, if you've got ten cents, you can have one." So he sold him a



Photo from *Workers in our Fields*

Norman Thomas Speaking in the Arkansas Delta, 1935

copy of the constitution. And then Mitch proceeded to tell him, "Well, you folks are not eligible for membership in this, so we'll ask you to leave." And I have often wondered what he would have done if Sloan had refused. But at the time, he got up and walked out. He and his men went trudging out of there with his six-shooters and all, see.

We got a raft of members signed up at that meeting. You didn't need much. Those folks were in a bind and they was being mistreated and when you got up and pointed these things out to them, why you didn't have much trouble signing them up. Practically all the people that came to meetings signed up.

Crittenden County was an outlaw outfit, I'm telling you, the law was. Howard Curlin was the sheriff and they had the roughest, toughest bunch of gangster officers that they could collect. They didn't pay any attention to the government or anyone. I've been in their jail and seen this big leather strap; they didn't try to hide it or anything. And you couldn't get a reporter or a lawyer out of Memphis to go into Marion. They wouldn't take a case of any kind. You couldn't get them to go in there. They'd say, "Naw, we won't go in there, not to Crittenden County." And Mary Conner Myers was sent down there from Washington; Roosevelt sent her down there. That was the report they would never publicize because it was so hot. She helped break up the Capone Gang in Chicago and all, so she knew what rough stuff was, and she said that Capone and all them boys was sissies beside this bunch down in Arkansas. And that's the report she come out and made in Memphis, see, after she'd been over there. But the full report was never published. They never made it public after she went back to Washington.



Photo by Sue Thrasher

Clay East, 1973

BUTLER: Not too long after we began organizing, one of our Negro organizers got thrown in jail in Marion, so a bunch of us went down to get him out. We knew that if there wasn't something drastic done that he would just be kept in there for however long. So we gathered up a bunch of white people, white members of the union, and we got a big truck and took a load of 15 or 20 white people. All of them were cripples, they all had to have some kind of support, a walking stick of some kind. I think most of them felt like a stick of some kind might help them out. They might have to have some sort of protection. People were scared in those days, people had always been controlled by the plantation owners and their henchmen, the sheriffs and the deputies and all that, and people were afraid of the law because those laws would beat a man up. They could throw him in jail and keep him as long as they wanted to. A man didn't have a chance to fight if he wasn't a plantation owner. They could charge him with anything and he was guilty.

So we drove up on the courthouse yard and they began to pile out of the truck, and Mitchell was along. I was there. Ward Rogers was there too. And here came the sheriff or the deputy perhaps to meet us with his hands back of him. "Now Ward, we don't want any trouble here. I'm gonna bring that fellow down and turn him over to you. We're gonna turn him loose." He brought the man down from the jail and turned him over to us and we went on back home, and we didn't even have to ask him could you do it, when he saw that crowd get out, you know.

One time Powers Hapgood, who later on became the state director of the CIO for Indiana, came down and spent a while with us in the early days of the union. And he and I one day went over into Arkansas to see this man Stultz. We were not bothered on the way in; we parked outside on the roadway and went through a gate on down to the sharecropper cabins where Stultz was living. We talked with him and when we started back out, here came the riding boss, or whatever his title might have been, along with four or five others, and they attempted to cut Hapgood and I off from getting out, but we beat them to the gate and headed for our car. They passed by where a bunch of scrap lumber was and they all grabbed pieces of scrap lumber and took out after us. Well, Hapgood had locked the doors of the car—I hadn't thought to tell him not to do it, but he had—so he was working as fast as he could and he got the door open and I got in and we had a big .38 special pistol



Dorothea Lange/FSA

J. R. Butler, President, Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, Memphis, Tennessee, 1938

in the glove compartment. So, as soon as he got the door where I could get it open, I was in there and had that gun. So, that car had a running board, you probably have seen cars with running boards, so I stood on the running board with one hand on the inside of the car and held the gun in the other hand. I told Powers, "Get the hell out of here, before I have to kill one of them." So, as quick as he could start the car, we left. By the time he got ready to roll, they were as close to us as the door there. And they would have beat us up; I don't know if they would have killed us, probably wouldn't. But they would have beaten us up if they had caught us.

I carried a gun most of the time. Of course, if I had ever had to use it, why, I'd have been in trouble. But I would have used it if I had to. There was a lot of violence against union members. Any number of union people were visited at night by sometimes one maybe, sometimes half a dozen, and maybe their houses shot at, anything they thought would discourage them and get them out of the union. But I don't believe the Klan, actually as a Klan, was ever any—sometimes I want words, and can't think of the words I want—I don't think the Klan gave us as much trouble as just individuals.

There was one thing that I thought about telling you, a little incident that occurred during the time of the union. Over at Earle, Arkansas, there was a plantation man that was also a deputy sheriff and he needed some work done on his farm, so he got around and arrested, I believe, 11 members of the union and threw 'em in jail. When they had their trial the judge turned them over to him then to work out their fines, and he put them out on his plantation under guard, and had them working out there. We found out about it and we got some pictures by a man crawling around through cotton rows and making pictures and so on. Well, we brought charges against them in the Department of Justice.

The Department of Justice sent two lawyers down to Memphis to check. Well, old Peacher had got scared enough that he'd turned all these people loose. When these Department of Justice investigators came down there, they said, "Now we will not go into Arkansas to make any investigation, but if you can get some of those people and bring 'em here to Memphis, we'll question 'em." So I went to Earle, and ran across one or two of the fellows that had been enslaved. They gathered up others, and they had about seven of them around my car, telling me about what had been done and how and



Photo by Sue Thrasher

J. R. Butler, Phoenix, Arizona, 1973

all that, and here came a deputy sheriff. His name was Graham, he rammed his car up close to mine, jumped out, grabbed a .38 out of his holster, slammed it down across the door into my ribs, and said, "What the goddamned hell are you doing over here?" Well, I knew I had to tell him something, so I said, "Well, I'm over here getting the evidence that's gonna send you and Paul Peacher and a few more of you to the penitentiary for the rest of your lives." I said, "The FBI knows exactly where I am. They know exactly what I'm doing, and they know exactly when to expect me back in Memphis, and if I'm not there, they're gonna find out why." He jerked the gun down, slammed it back in his holster, and said, "All right." He got back in his car and pulled out.

Well, when that happened, all of the fellows that had been around talking with me just disappeared except for three, and those three stayed with me and were still talking, and we saw a car go down the road towards Memphis that was loaded with about a half a dozen men with rifles and so on. One of these guys said, "They're going down to waylay us." Then I said, "Now, do you know of a way that we can go that will take us back to highway 70?" One of 'em said, "Yes, I know. We'll have to go through one man's wash lot." I said, "That don't make any difference, let's get down to highway 70." So we went to highway 70 so we could go into Memphis on a different road, you know, instead of on highway 64. I told the fellow, "Now, get down in back and stay quiet because we're going in. If somebody gets in our way, we're still going in." I had that big old Hudson that I'd bought. Well, I opened it up and we went. We expected—I expected really—that they would try to block me at West Memphis, but they didn't. I think some of them might have been parked around there, but they didn't try to block the highway. So I went on through and I got the men over there and the Department of Justice men asked them enough questions to get enough for an indictment and we got Paul Peacher indicted and convicted of peonage.

EAST: There was this guy from the Workers Alliance, Dave Benson, and a bunch of colored folks that had been put in jail over at Forrest City. That was in Cross County, see. They had been put in jail for inciting to riot, and this boy, Benson, was in for no driver's license. They had a bunch of trumped up charges against him. We couldn't get a lawyer in Memphis to take the case and I went and got this lawyer from Little Rock. I had a fast automobile, a '35 Tereplane, and I still wasn't scared to go into Arkansas. When a union man

went into Arkansas, he was taking a good chance of getting killed or at least beat up.

I don't remember the lawyer's name, but his father was one of the attorneys that defended the Scottsboro boys.

When we got to Forrest City, he went into the courthouse and the men came up for trial. It was so tense, I was setting in the back of the courtroom myself and an old colored guy passed by and there was this old cripple man setting there with a damn walking cane and he hit at him just as hard as he could. That thing was so tense you could just feel it in the air, I knew it was bad.

This guy from the Workers Alliance told the lawyer, "Don't do a damn thing for me; this thing is too bad." He had been in jail there for several days, and he realized what the situation was.

Well, when this attorney left the courthouse, there was a damn mob following him—a bunch in a group, see. And they followed him down to my car. I started down there, and this guy took off and the mob turned on me. The lawyer went down to a cafe to get something to eat and the boys went and took him out of that damn cafe and I understand beat him up and put him on a bus and told him, "Don't you ever come back into Forrest City, or we'll kill you."

Well, this man Bunch, he led this mob on me, telling them all I had done. He had that mob ready. Well, they was backing me up, they was on me and they was hollering, "Kill the son of a bitch," and all this kind of stuff. I backed into a kind of ditch and fell on my back, and when I fell, I had my head up against a hedge and these guys was trying to get ahold of me. I was just laying on my hips and I'd wheel and kick one and every time one would get close to me, I'd kick the hell out of him. And some big guy—never did know who he was—got right straddle of me and told these guys, said, "Get the hell off of him. Leave him alone." Well, I got up and they was hollering, "Kill him!" and all that kind of damn stuff and I told them, "Now listen. If I've violated any kind of law or done anything, then put me in jail." I could see that they didn't have much of a leader and the jail was just right up there behind the courthouse.

They put me in jail and then they was just marching through and saying, "Goddamn, we'll hang you tonight. We'll break your neck," and all this kind of stuff. And, some gals come in there and I could see they thought, "Why, that's a damn shame to hang that nice looking boy like that." And an old boy that I went to school with down in Blue Mountain, was a bookkeeper for someone up there, and he come in. He never did speak to me and I didn't say anything to him and I could see him shaking his head to think, "By God, old Clay's one of

the top boys at school and to think he's in something like this." And they was calling me "nigger-lover" and all that stuff.

Well, Sheriff Campbell come in there. Of course, he knew I was the deputy sheriff over in Poinsett County, knew I was from a good family and all and he didn't want this damn thing. He was afraid he might be getting in a little trouble about that. If I'd been a flat stranger, he just might have made a different story and that's one way I always had it figured. I could do better by myself than I could with someone with me. He come in there and asked me, "East, would you like to get out of here?" And I told him, "Why sure, I haven't done a damn thing. I haven't violated any law. They got no right to put me in jail." So, he said, "Well, we're gonna take the state rangers and take you out." I told him, "Well, O.K." Well, that's when this boy spoke up and said, "Clay, you're a damn fool if you go out of here. They're just laying a trap for you. If you go out of here, they'll get you just sure as the world." And I told him, "Well, I'll take a chance on that. I'm going out." Well, there were three of these guys, there was a captain and two other guys, all in uniform. I still wasn't scared. I didn't believe that any damn guys would get me, somehow. So, that's what I'm telling you, that ain't bravery, you've got nothing to be brave about. The only time that I was afraid was when I walked down there with that damn lawyer, because I knew these guys was fixing to nail me. And, I had sat in that courtroom when I could feel that tension. You've never been in anything like that, I don't imagine. It was terrible. Everybody in there was so damn tight.

Well, anyway, we got in the car and started out toward Memphis. By that time, the captain and this other guy was following us, and already two or three carloads of guys was on the road after us. So, I told this guy, "Now, if those guys catch up with us, there ain't a damn bit of use of you getting hurt. You either give it to me or give me a chance to get that damn gun of yours and I'll get out and get away from you and you won't get shot." Those guys was really gonna shoot us up. And he said, "They're not getting by the captain back there." He said, "We've started out to take you into Memphis and that's where we're going to take you." But, I still figured they'd get us at West Memphis, but they didn't and there wasn't anybody else that showed up. After we got to the bridge, the guy got out on this end of the bridge and I thanked him for taking me in there and I went right down to the *Press-Scimitar* and told them about what had happened and they come out in the paper that afternoon with big headlines about what had happened over there.

They hired this lawyer from Helena, Arkansas.

They couldn't get a Memphis lawyer to go over there for nothing. Man, they wouldn't cross that river. Not for the union. But Mitch—I'm quite certain that it was Mitch—contacted someone and found out about this guy some way and he said hell yes, he'd take the case. And he took it and went to Forrest City and this damn gang ganged up on him and he told them, "You men are a bunch of fools. I'm an attorney, I'm working for a living. I don't care nothing about them niggers and croppers in there. All I'm interested in is in the money. I've put in a lot of time in school and been out a lot of expense in order to make a living being an attorney. I don't care nothing about these people." And they let the damn fool go ahead and plead the case and he got these guys out.

Strike!

In September of '35, the union called its first major strike. Nearly 5,000 cotton pickers responded by staying out of the fields. No written contracts were gained, but most of the planters eventually agreed to pay higher wages. More important than the wages, however, was the boost to union membership. Following the strike, chapters were spontaneously organized in Oklahoma, Missouri, Tennessee, and Mississippi. By the end of the year, the union claimed a membership of 25,000.

STITH: The strike of '35 was one of the most unique things ever happened. It was well-planned. We decided after meeting a half a dozen times—and when I say we, every area had representatives, locals and from districts. We met in Memphis and talked this thing over starting back in early plantin' season about what we would have to do about trying to get some better wages because living costs had went up and wages wasn't going up. There was a lot of day labor involved. We had been able to get some of the things adjusted like commissaries or brozeen; a lot of that had disappeared. But the wages just wasn't going up any.

After meeting several times beginning in the early fall, I think it was, and working on this thing for another year, we decided upon a cotton picking strike. In the cotton picking season cotton is perishable to a certain extent. Cotton has got to get out of the field and get ginned up before the weather gets bad or you take a loss on your cotton; the quality of it goes down.

So we had decided a general strike would be the thing. But it taken a lot of planning to figure out how we were going to do it. The executive committee finally got together and had all these handbills printed up, brought them in and made packages to



STFU Headquarters were located on the second floor of this building in Memphis, Tennessee.

go to each area according to what they thought their needs would be. And they had them all passed out there. And then we set a strike date. All the representatives came in and got their strike handbill with strict instructions. They didn't put them out until that night, eleven o'clock was the time. And that night at eleven o'clock, they was all over Arkansas, Missouri, part of Tennessee, part of Mississippi and Alabama. And when foremen got up the next morning and found so many, they said an airplane put them out. And we did it all by hand or car. It was all done at the same time and that scared the farmers to death. They wouldn't agree to sign a contract with the union, but they started to make concessions to the labor. Well that's really what we were looking for; we was trying to make things better for the people. We'd love to have had a contract but we never dreamed of a contract. We thought it was impossible and it turned out to be just about that.

DILWORTH: It was Sunday night. We got our papers together at eleven o'clock exactly. Everyone, all over Arkansas where there was an organization alive, had to be on the job at 11:00 passing out leaflets. We'd cover this street, then we'd go to another. We ain't supposed to go back there on the same route because if you do, somebody is gonna see one of them things. Oooh, I don't know how many we passed out. We spread them handbills saying, "Don't go to the fields and pick no cotton," over every street in this town.

I was riding in my car. Marie Pierce, a student from Memphis, was riding in the back seat with Mr. Bolden. Mrs. Burton and I sat in the front. I was laying down on my stomach holding the door cracked open, and I'd push the leaflets through the crack and spread them out in the street. You pick up speed and that'd just make them things go flying all over the yards.

By the time we got down by Mr. Dean's house, we had done the whole route. Then this car came swooping by us. I said, "Cut the lights off and let's go right into these woods." We got down in a little curl and cut the motor off. If they had caught us, I don't know what they would've done to us. But, they couldn't tell where we was. They went out there where they was fixing the levee and got stuck in the mud. Water was up to our knees in the car. It was three o'clock that next morning when we got home and it was still raining. It wasn't no easy job.

White folks thought a plane had flown over there and spread all them leaflets. They were all over the state.

MITCHELL: There was a kind of unofficial bargaining. They wouldn't recognize the union as

such, but they'd watch to see what the union was going to demand, particularly after that cotton picking experience of 1935. We'd call a wage conference every year, maybe twice a year, with several representatives from each local union, and they would decide what we were going to ask for. Often, we'd make a survey of our members and have a ballot to see what they thought the union should ask. We'd do this before the wage conference. Then we'd tabulate all of the returns and say, here's what the members think that we can get. The conference would determine we can get a dollar per hundred this time. We would try that. We would announce that the union was demanding a dollar per hundred pounds for picking the cotton. We'd invite all plantation owners to meet with us to work out a contract and an agreement, but of course, they never did. This had the same general effect as a wage contract. It was kind of the old IWW idea. If you didn't have a contract, then you take action on the job. If the boss didn't pay the union rate, the people quit work and went somewhere else—where the union scale was paid.

We thought in terms of a trade union. I don't know if we really ever expected it to happen. At least we used all of the usual union terms. We didn't just go out and say this is the way we're going after it. We always wanted a contract signed by all of the plantation owners. We would work out model contracts. We had proposed contracts for sharecroppers and contracts for tenants and wage workers and we had circulated them around. Sometimes the fellows on the plantation would take them to the owner and ask him to sign the union contract. Sometimes they got thrown off the land as a result of doing that. The nearest thing that we ever had to such a contract was at the end of 1935. The lawyer for the union, whose name was Herman Goldberger, had been meeting with a plantation owner by the name of C.H. Dibble. Mr. Dibble was fair and liberal for that area. He'd come from some other area of the country and owned a medium sized plantation. He had, as I recall, thirteen families which meant 500 or 600 acres of cotton. Word got out that Dibble was negotiating a union contract. He was told by his banker that if he signed a contract with the union they would foreclose his mortgage and that he had to get rid of the union members. He served them notice about Christmas that they were going to be evicted if they did not move by the first of the year. Maybe we made a mistake, I don't know, but we laid down the law to Mr. Dibble at our convention that if he tried to evict these people, we were going to put them back in their houses. We said we were going to put a picket line around his plantation. It became a question as far as the entire community was concerned, I

mean, the upper class part of it, the guys on the right side of the tracks had Mr. Dibble do what he had threatened to do—evict all these families, which he proceeded to do. He threw them out in the middle of the winter.

Support

BUTLER: Sometimes I would just go to New York and make personal appeals to people. One of the ladies who took a big interest in raising funds for the union would make an appointment for me to see this one or that one or some other one and I'd go and try to talk them into making the donation. Donations was the only funds that we ever had in the union that amounted to anything because nobody was ever able to pay any dues; there was no money to pay dues with. Sometimes we'd take a dozen Negroes, just the pure old sharecropper type Negroes, and let them make these appeals for funds. Sometimes that worked better than for me to do it. Of course we never did have any funds ahead, we never did have enough money at any time to operate on, but we wouldn't have had anything if it hadn't been for that.

The Workers Defense League was one of our chief supporters. They raised a lot of money and they collected a lot of clothing, things of that kind and shipped down to distribute to the ones who were most in need. Our relation with the Workers Defense League was very close and very good. I'm not sure that went for everyone in the organization, but generally speaking that was the truth.

There was a New York committee that put on what they called National Sharecroppers Week. I was in New York I guess all of the week that had been designated and any number of others were there. Mrs. Roosevelt was at the big final meeting that we had that week; the Saturday night meeting. That committee had hired a professional fundraiser to organize a week of fund-raising. I don't

know what percentage they gave him for his labor, but they did raise quite a bit of money. I guess that at the end of that week, the union treasury had more money in it at one time than it ever had before or since. Might have had as much as two or three thousand dollars. I think they tried to do it over a time or two.

There was no definite salary. After some interest built up in New York and we began to get some contributions in, why I put in full time and I put in for expenses, you know. For gas and oil and for rooms to live in and so on. That was allowed out of whatever contributions we were getting.

For awhile, Mitchell got along the same way that I did. That is, he just drew enough out for himself and his family to live on. And I stayed with him part of the time, too. We did anything we could to cut the expenses and then later, in 1937, when we joined up with UCAPAWA, they arranged for me to have a salary of fifty dollars a week. So that went on for three or four months, as long as we stayed with it. I was about to get rich.

DILWORTH: I went to New York to make a speech for Sharecroppers' Week in 1946. Frank P. Graham sponsored me. I sat at the speaker's table, and everything you picked up carried their workers on it. I said, Lord have mercy. Every table was covered with white linen and there was somebody round every table. I couldn't see nobody. I just saw this clear blue sky. I made my speech, and when I got through, folks was just patting. I didn't a bit know what I said. I talked about ten minutes. And whenever I come to myself so that I could see the audience out there, I said, "We are climbing Jacob's ladder, and every rung goes higher and higher. We're going to organize the South as God being our helper." And the people just hollered. This was in the Henry Hudson Hotel. I stayed there five nights, room 284. And when I come out, I had integrated the hotel. I was the first colored to stay there.

*We were a mass movement, something
like the civil rights movement 30 years later.*

CIO Affiliation

In 1937, the Union, anxious to be a part of the CIO, affiliated with the United Cannery Agricultural Packinghouse and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA). It was an uneasy and strained relationship from the beginning. The STFU found it virtually impossible to comply with the bureaucratic guidelines of the international union, and the UCAPAWA President, Donald Henderson, was neither sensitive to the union's needs, nor very astute in his assessment of the divisions that should be made among agricultural workers. Finally in 1939, the Executive Council of the STFU voted to withdraw, but not before the union had been torn apart by internal strife and its ranks depleted.

BUTLER: *We joined the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America [UCAPAWA] in 1937. We had to convince them at Denver, and we went, and everything went along pretty smooth. I was made vice-president. It was supposed to be one union then, but like I say, it didn't work out. I thought it would be a good thing if we could do it, but when we tried it, we couldn't do it. The UCAPAWA had a set of officers that were determined to control everything, and the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union wasn't ready to be controlled, never was.*

Well, I think they thought that it would be a big boost to their membership for one thing. UCAPAWA was practically a paper union. They didn't have any members to amount to anything at all, but since they were a part of the CIO, they were considered more important. So we joined in with them as I said, and it wasn't but a little while until they began trying to tell us what we had to do and how we had to collect dues and how we had to send a certain amount of dues to the UCAPAWA offices and all that sort of thing. We never could collect any dues, we never did. Oh, maybe one man would pay a dime a month, maybe a dime would roll in at the end of the year. People didn't have it and there was no such thing as collecting dues. So we pulled out then, pulled out of UCAPAWA.

STITH: *McKinney was a communist, but I don't think his views were so different than mine when it comes down to the lower class man, the little man, especially the farmer. But I think his difference of opinion was where we should be as a union. Partially, he did, I know, agree with UCAPAWA about the organizing of farmers in one union, sharecroppers in another, and tenants in another. And that's where the difference came about between us, because we couldn't see it in that light.*

We felt like that was a policy that would divide us instead of putting us together. He was stubborn about what he believed to be right—about principles. I don't know anything about his background: At that time I was very young. I was active in the union and only concerned with its activities.



E. B. McKinney

MITCHELL: *We thought, and our people thought, that the CIO was going to sweep the whole country and was going to organize all the unorganized. That's what they talked about; they were going to bring about a complete change in the lives of everybody and make things better. Everybody was enthused about the CIO. John L. Lewis standing, defying the automobile companies saying, "Shoot me before you fire on these men who were in the factories, the sitdowns." It was inspiring to people who didn't know any better, who didn't know John Lewis, a business trade unionist whose interest was in getting a huge membership that could pay union dues. We wanted to be a union. We wanted to be in the mainstream of organized labor. We just felt that we must get into the CIO.*

We thought and wrote in 1935 and 1936 to the AFL about the possibility of a charter as a national union. The response from Secretary Morrison was not very encouraging. I don't remember the exact words, but he considered us farmers and the AFL had fraternal relations with the Farmers' Union, the Grange and Farm Bureau, and they wouldn't be interested at that time. It was not until after the CIO experience that we even tried to get the AFL consideration.

We were naive, I guess. The ordinary trade unionist never understood the STFU. We were a mass movement, something like the civil rights movement 30 years later. We could have opened the doors in areas where there were farm people. We could have moved into the farming areas around any industrial area. We could have become a great political force, and been a great voice for the CIO in rural America. That's what we thought, that's what we saw in the CIO.

Leadership

STITH: I wasn't a full-time organizer until I moved to Gould. I still had a crop. I'd get up at five o'clock every morning and go to the field and do a day's work. I was a share tenant, I rented. I had a mule outfit to farm with; I had all my own tools and my own stock. If it was possible I would leave the day's work off and do it the next day, then I would leave and go do what the union wanted me to do. If not, I tried to do a day's work and go at night to do what they wanted me to do. I didn't have a car then. If it wasn't anywhere but 10 or 20 miles, I'd ride a horse. If it was farther, we always had one or two union people around who had a car who were willing to take me and the union got the gas.

The problem was that blacks in the agriculture field didn't have leaders with enough education to do what was necessary. That's number one. And number two, a black man wasn't recognized enough to get into the places where he needed to go, even if he had enough education. Even at that time government organizations didn't look at a black man too much. So a black person as president could not have been too successful in getting a lot of outside help. It was the major role of the union to bring in outside support, money, etc. It had to be. It was the only way we could survive. We had no funds. The members didn't have enough money to pay dues to the organization for it to operate. We had to have outside help. A black man was discussed sometimes, to my remembrance, as being president. And I was discussed at one time. But we decided, and it was partly my decision along with others, blacks and whites, that if a black man got to be president it might divide us. So we decided, well at least we'll put him in second spot, make him vice-president.

This is the way most blacks wanted it. There were some few who felt like they were able to lead. When one was found, and he felt that away, we always found somewhere to put him in a leadership position. I really got put into it. I didn't feel like I was a leader. I just wanted to help get things better. But they felt like I was, and they put me into it.

At that time we had a family membership. Where there was a widow involved, she was the head of the family, so she took out a legal membership. But where there was a man and his wife involved, she was a member too. She had a voice when it come down to talking or voting on.

Women were very active and made a lot of the decisions. Women decided to do things that men felt like they couldn't do. We had several locals around Cotton Plant and I believe in one of the locals all the officers were women. This was be-

cause men were afraid. Owners never bothered women. They never beat up any women. Oh yes, I think they did in Mississippi and maybe one place in Arkansas. But usually they would pick on the men. They was a little bit slow about bothering women. They might go to her and talk to her. And women look like always were apt to move out. They would walk up and say to the plantation owner, look, this is what I ain't gonna do.

In this case usually men took the first step. You'd always find somebody who felt it was not a woman's job. It's all right if we gonna use some women for help. And even though he might have been afraid, somebody always stepped forward. There are cases where women said, "I will," first and a man would say, "I'll do it, you don't have to."

I remember a lady by the name of Henrietta Green who was very outspoken. She was in the Howell local. At one time we were working on this large plantation that was rented. The manager didn't own it. He rented it from a widow. In making a sharecrop, instead of getting half of your corn, we got one-third of it. The manager said he had to give the lady owner a load; he took a load, and we'd take a load. So the union met and decided that we wasn't going to make any more crops on the third. It would have to be half. Henrietta Green, a strong woman in the Howell local, and my father, who was pretty active here locally, and I forget who the other person was, were the three people who made the decision that they would be the ones that would walk up to the boss and say, "We're not going to make it any more on thirds. We want half our corn." Henrietta was an older woman. She was along the age of my father. This is the way they rationalized it: I'm older than you are, and I don't have much to lose. Anyway, the manager answered, no! So they refused to plant corn. He said he didn't care. But everyone on the Howell plantation refused to plant corn. Ten days later the manager said he'd pay them half.

BUTLER: We considered the whole family as members of the union when any one of them, either the man or his wife, got interested, why we just counted them in as members of the union. We were not discriminatory in any way, so far as I recall.

Yes, we had some women, and especially there was one that could make just about as good a speech as any of the men could. Henrietta McGee was her name. She went with us on trips to New York and Washington, one place and another and made speeches before groups and was a big help in getting contributions, because she got right down to earth with the things that she had to say.

She was a widow from over there in eastern Arkansas somewhere, I don't know which town she

was from, but she was as active as any other union member that we ever had. And, to give you an idea of her character, she went with some of us to Atlantic City to the first convention of the CIO as a separate organization from the AFL. While we were there, I remember all of us went to a restaurant for a meal one time. Mrs. Roosevelt was there. Several of us went in and set down at the same table and Henrietta was in the group. She was black. Well, this waitress wouldn't serve her at all and Mrs. Roosevelt saw that the waitress wouldn't serve her. So Mrs. Roosevelt went over and invited Henrietta to come over and sit at her table. The same waitress came along and she didn't dare refuse, because of Mrs. Roosevelt, you know. So, she tried to apologize to Henrietta. She said, "You know, a while ago, I didn't know that you were a Puerto Rican." Well, she said, "I'm not. I'm a nigger, nigger sharecropper from down in Arkansas." All that the waitress could do was turn her head and not say anything. She went ahead and served her.

Migration

By the beginning of the war years, the mass base that the union had so successfully built earlier had begun to fade away. J. R. Butler left in 1942 to become a machinist. Mitchell and the vice-president, George Stith were able to arrange labor exchange programs to provide STFU members with higher paying jobs, usually in food processing canneries.

MITCHELL: We broke away from the Cannery and Agricultural Union of the AFL-CIO, and then we resumed the name Southern Tenant Farmers Union and kept the name and the organization through 1945 intact as it was. One of our outlets during the war time was sending workers to work in food processing and on farms out of the South. We started with the Farm Security Administration furnishing transportation. We sent 2,000 people to the West—California, Arizona, New Mexico and West Texas. We sent people with them to be kind of



Photo courtesy of H. L. Mitchell

STFU Convention, Little Rock, Arkansas, 1944

stewards to see that their contracts were lived up to. It wasn't really a contract. It was a government statement that they were going to be paid so much and that kind of thing. Then, after sending that group out there, we sent 500 to Florida to work in the vegetable harvest and I guess it must have been in the fall of 1942. It was right after the war had started and gotten underway. Then they passed a law, really to stop the union from sending people out of the South to work on jobs where there were labor shortages or alleged labor shortages. It required each individual who was transported by government funds to have the written consent of the county agricultural agent before he could leave his home. At the same time they authorized the first importation of Mexican-American and British West Indians to work on farms.

It was the same damn people that are doing everything: the damn big plantation owners, the power structure. We called it the system; you guys call it the power structure. It is all the same. See, we had made an inroad with the whites and the blacks here. We had done something that none of these agrarian movements had really done. They had all floundered on this damn race thing; but we didn't. We didn't flounder on it. We held our principles.

STITH: The union sent me into the Gould area. They had a lot of locals in here, and they had formed what was known as an area local. Mrs. Dilworth was the secretary of it. Actually headquarters was in her house, but Pine Bluff was where we finally wound up with an office. But they wanted me in this area to help out. It was heavily populated with sharecroppers and tenants and they thought that maybe, with my experience, I could come down here and help out. It was at the time that the union membership had begun to dwindle because the members were finding other places to go. The union would pay me according to my report, whatever time I put in they would pay me expenses. As the vice-president of the union you were called on to do many different jobs, to go to many different places, even though you may not be a full time employee. During the war, the Manpower Commission asked the American Federation of Labor if they could supply them with farm labor to work in the cannery food division and we was it.

The first time I shipped labor from Cotton Plant we couldn't get busses. So we decided that we would get a truck to take them over to Memphis, and from there arrangements were made for a train. The second load I shipped, we had three trucks left Cotton Plant going into Memphis, and the State Employment Security Division had these trucks stopped in Forrest City and they put the

truck drivers in jail. As the vice president, I had to see that it was arranged. We didn't have local telephones so I had to go all the way to Brinkley to get to a public telephone to call in to Memphis and tell them what had happened. The people caught rides into Memphis; some walked, however they could get there.

DILWORTH: I took people out to New Jersey, out to California, to Washington, D.C., and even to Atlanta to work in the canneries. Getting people together was easy. I just notified them and talked at different churches. Asked how many wanted to go and I'd get the names. I carried 27 people on one ticket to California. We had the big buttons, with this hoe and plow and a boll of cotton on it, and I'd tell them, don't pull it off, just keep it around your neck, because that's your pass. We left here going through Oklahoma and down through Texas and they got laid up on a road there. And we stayed there a whole night till our train came along. I had already notified them that we was on the way. See, they had barracks with stoves and lights, beds and everything. We got there about three o'clock in the morning. They met us and I told them we had a lot of kids and the children were crying for milk. Them white men was running around just having a fit. I stayed two weeks in California, but at that time I had been taking a crew once a week.

The companies paid for your trip out. When you worked you had to pay the money back. That's the way it went. Most of the people I transported stayed. They was making good and that's why they just didn't want to come back. I didn't take the young people out. Those that went away and had jobs had their families with them and they stayed out there.

One day them white fellows came in the office when we was sending labor from Pine Bluff. They called theyselves wanting to do something but they didn't do nothing. I don't know who they were, some kinda law. They come in and ask me, "Girl, you know what you doing? Don't you know it's against the law to move people from one area and send them off?" I said, "If my area don't produce nothing, let 'em go." That's just the way I talked to them. And they didn't do nothing to us.

WILLIAMS: I sent four of my children off with Mrs. Dilworth to New Jersey to work. First, I sent my son, John Williams, Jr. He went in 1944 and every summer thereafter for four years. He worked in a cannery and cooked tomato paste. He was 19 and was going to school at Durmont Baptist College. Out of their weekly earnings, they had to pay for their groceries and reimburse the money for the ticket that was given.

The next summer in 1945 I sent my oldest two daughters, Ruby and Sadie. They were 19 and 20. You had to be 18 or 19 to go. Altogether the three of them went. The girls wasn't going to college or nothing, but I just sent them on up there. They was working with me on the farm. But now when time come to go, well, I'd just take them out of there and let them go. I wanted to let them learn how to do something excusing chopping and picking cotton. They earned enough to do 'em a little.

Looking Back

STITH: Unfortunately, most of the people coming along now don't know anything about the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. All the things that the union fought for, that the people on the farms have been able to get like social security and minimum wage, they just see that the government just give them that. And when you tell them this is something that we fought for for years, that we went to Congress hoboing our way or going in trucks or busses or cars, they don't believe it.

BUTLER: Most of the unions have gotten to where they're not rank and file anyway. Even the industrial unions are controlled by officials that are elected once every two years or once every four years or sometimes maybe not that often. Back in the earlier days, when people thought about joining the union, it was something like joining a church, getting together to work together for the things they wanted. It was never a mass movement, you know, but it was big enough and so much out of the ordinary that it drew the attention of the world, and so in that way I think we did a lot of good. There were probably things that we could have done if we had known more about what to do, but we were just novices, we just had to play it by ear as we went, and that was all we could do.



FOOTNOTES FOR STFU

1. "Brozeen" is spelled phonetically; we know of no written form.
2. Deputy Paul D. Peacher had been responsible for breaking up a union meeting in Earle, Arkansas in January of 1936 where two men had been shot in the back and another beaten senseless. In June of that same year, Dr. Sherwood Eddy visited Peacher's prison farm and talked to thirteen black prisoners who all said they had been arrested for vagrancy, even though some of them were property owners and others had lived in the area for a number of years. Peacher was eventually indicted by a federal grand jury, convicted, and fined \$3500.

3. The issue of whether to remain affiliated with UCAPAWA became a major point of contention in the union in 1938-39. When the decision was finally made to leave, three of the union's best known black leaders, E. B. McKinney, Owen Whitfield, and Leon Turner, along with the Rev. Claude Williams chose to remain with the CIO.

NOTES FOR THE STFU

The most complete account of the STFU can be found in Donald Grubbs' *Cry From the Cotton*, University of North Carolina Press, 1971. Grubbs deals in depth with the impact of the Depression on cotton tenancy, and the New Deal's half hearted attacks on rural poverty. He traces the history of the union from its early days as an outgrowth of the Socialist Party through its demoralizing days in the UCAPAWA. Contains an extensive and useful bibliography.

For further reading, see the following:

Will Alexander, Edwin Embree, and Charles Johnson, *The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy*, University of North Carolina Press, 1935.

Jerold S. Auerbach, *Southern Tenant Farmers: Socialist Critics of the New Deal*. Labor History, Vol. 7, No. 1, Winter, 1966. (Also reprinted in the Bobbs-Merrill reprint series in black studies.)

Howard Kester, *Revolt Among the Sharecroppers*. Covici-Friede, 1936. This book was written while Kester was working actively with the union.

Mark Naison, *The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the CIO*. Originally published in *Radical America*, Vol. 2, No. 5, Sept.-Oct., 1968, now available from the New England Free Press, 791 Tremont Street, Boston, Mass. A valuable and analytical account of the union's short lived affiliation with the CIO/UCAPAWA. See also recent article by Naison in *The Journal of Ethnic Studies, Black Agrarian Radicalism in the Great Depression: The Threads of a Lost Tradition*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Fall, 1973.

The papers of the Southern Tenant Farmers' union are housed at the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and are also available from the Microfilming Corporation of America. For a complete listing of southern libraries that have purchased the papers on microfilm write to H. L. Mitchell, P. O. Box 2617, Montgomery, Alabama, 36105.

Additional oral interviews with members of the union have been conducted by Kate Born of the Department of History, Memphis State University, and will soon be available through the Memphis State Library.

IN EGYPT LAND

By John Beecher

I

It was Alabama, 1932
but the spring came
same as it always had.
A man just couldn't help believing
this would be a good year for him
when he saw redbud and dogwood everywhere in bloom
and the peachtree blossoming
all by itself
up against the gray boards of the cabin.
A man had to believe
so Cliff James hitched up his pair of old mules
and went out and plowed up the old land
the other man's land but he plowed it
and when it was plowed it looked new again
the cotton and corn stalks turned under
the red clay shining with wet
under the sun.

Years ago
he thought he bought this land
borrowed the money to pay for it
from the furnish merchant in Notasulga
big white man named Mr Parker
but betwixt the interest and the bad times coming
Mr Parker had got the land back
and nigh on to \$500 more owing to him
for interest seed fertilize and rations
with a mortgage on all the stock—
the two cows and their calves
the heifer and the pair of old mules—
Mr Parker could come drive them off the place any day
if he took a notion
and the law would back him.

Mighty few sharecroppers
black folks or white
ever got themselves stock like Cliff had
they didn't have any cows
they plowed with the landlord's mule and tools
they didn't have a thing.
Took a heap of doing without
to get your own stock and your own tools
but he'd done it
and still that hadn't made him satisfied.
The land he plowed
he wanted to be his.
Now all come of wanting his own land
he was back to where he started.
Any day
Mr Parker could run him off
drive away the mules the cows the heifer and the calves
to sell in town
take the wagon the plow tools the store-bought furniture
and the shotgun
on the debt.
No
that was one thing Mr Parker never would get a hold of
not that shotgun . . .

Remembering that night last year
remembering the meeting
in the church he and his neighbors always went to
deep in the woods
and when the folks weren't singing or praying or clap-
ping and stomping
you could hear the branch splashing over rocks
right out behind.
That meeting night
the preacher prayed a prayer
for all the sharecroppers
white and black
asking the good Lord Jesus
to look down
and see how they were suffering.
"Five cent cotton Lord
and no way Lord for a man to come out.
Fifty cents a day Lord for working in the field
just four bits Lord for a good strong hand
from dawn to dark Lord from can till can't
ain't no way Lord a man can come out.
They's got to be a way Lord show us the way . . ."
And then they sang.
"Go Down Moses" was the song they sang
"Go down Moses, way down in Egypt land
Tell old Pharaoh to let my people go"
and when they had sung the song
the preacher got up and he said
"Brothers and sister
we got with us tonight
a colored lady teaches school in Birmingham
going to tell us about the Union
what's got room for colored folks and white
what's got room for all the folks
that ain't got no land
that ain't got no stock
that ain't got no something to eat half the year
that ain't got no shoes
that raises all the cotton
but can't get none to wear
'cept old patchedy overhalls and floursack dresses.
Brothers and sisters
listen to this colored lady from Birmingham
who the Lord done sent I do believe
to show us the way . . ."

Then the colored lady from Birmingham
got up and she told them.
She told them how she was raised on a farm herself
a sharecrop farm near Demopolis
and walked six miles to a one-room school
and six miles back every day
till her people moved to Birmingham
where there was a high school for colored
and she went to it.
Then she worked in white folks' houses
and saved what she made
to go to college.

She went to Tuskegee
 and when she finished
 got a job teaching school in Birmingham
 but she never could forget
 the people she was raised with
 the sharecrop farmers
 and how they had to live.
 No
 all the time she was teaching school
 she thought about them
 what could she do for them
 and what they could do for themselves.
 Then one day
 somebody told her about the Union . . .
 If everybody joined the Union she said
 a good strong hand would get what he was worth
 a dollar (Amen sister)
 instead of fifty cents a day.
 At settling time the cropper could take his cotton to the
 gin
 and get his own fair half and the cotton seed
 instead of the landlord hauling it off and cheating on the
 weight
 "All you made was four bales Jim" when it really was six
 (Ain't it God's truth?)
 and the Union would get everybody the right to have a
 garden spot
 not just cotton crowded up to the house
 and the Union would see the children got a schoolbus
 like the white children rode in every day
 and didn't have to walk twelve miles.
 That was the thing
 the children getting to school
 (Amen)
 the children learning something besides chop cotton and
 pick it
 (Yes)
 the children learning how to read and write
 (Amen)
 the children knowing how to figure
 so the landlord wouldn't be the only one
 could keep accounts
 (Preach the Word sister).

 Then the door banging open against the wall
 and the Laws in their lace boots
 the High Sheriff himself
 with his deputies behind him.
 Folks scrambling to get away
 out the windows and door
 and the Laws' fists going *clunk clunk clunk*
 on all the men's and women's faces they could reach
 and when everybody was out and running
 the pistols going off behind them.
 Next meeting night
 the men that had them brought shotguns to church
 and the High Sheriff got a charge of birdshot in his body
 when Ralph Gray with just his single barrel
 stopped a car full of Laws
 on the road to the church
 and shot it out with their 44's.
 Ralph Gray died
 but the people in the church
 all got away alive.

The crop was laid by.
 From now till picking time
 only the hot sun worked
 ripening the bolls
 and men rested after the plowing and plowing
 women rested
 little boys rested
 and little girls rested
 after the chopping and chopping with their hoes.
 Now the cotton was big.
 Now the cotton could take care of itself from the weeds
 while the August sun worked
 ripening the bolls.

Cliff James couldn't remember ever making a better crop
 on that old red land
 he'd seen so much of
 wash down the gullies toward the Tallapoosa
 since he'd first put a plow to it.
 Never a better crop
 but it had taken the fertilize
 and it had taken work
 fighting the weeds
 fighting the weevils . . .
 Ten bales it looked like it would make
 ten good bales when it was picked
 a thousand dollars worth of cotton once
 enough to pay out on seed and fertilize and furnish for
 the season
 and the interest and something down
 on the land
 new shoes for the family to go to church in
 work shirts and overalls for the man and boys
 a bolt of calico for the woman and girls
 and a little cash money for Christmas.

Now though
 ten bales of cotton
 didn't bring what three used to.
 Two hundred and fifty dollars was about what his share
 of this year's crop would bring
 at five cents a pound
 not even enough to pay out on seed and fertilize and
 furnish for the season
 let alone the interest on the land Mr Parker was asking
 for
 and \$80 more on the back debt owing to him.
 Mr Parker had cut his groceries off at the commissary
 last month
 and there had been empty bellies in Cliff James' house
 with just cornbread buttermilk and greens to eat.
 If he killed a calf to feed his family
 Mr Parker could send him to the chain-gang
 for slaughtering mortgaged stock.

Come settling time this fall
 Mr Parker was going to get every last thing
 every dime of the cotton money
 the corn
 the mules
 the cattle
 and the law would back him.
 Cliff James wondered

why had he plowed the land in the spring
why had he worked and worked his crop
his wife and children alongside him in the field
and now pretty soon
they would all be going out again
dragging their long sacks
bending double in the hot sun
picking Mr Parker's cotton for him.

Sitting on the stoop of his cabin
with his legs hanging over the rotten board edges
Cliff James looked across his fields of thick green cotton
to the woods beyond
and a thunderhead piled high in the south
piled soft and white like cotton on the stoop
like a big day's pick
waiting for the wagon
to come haul it to the gin.
On the other side of those woods
was John McMullen's place
and over yonder just east of the woods
Ned Cobb's and beyond the rise of ground
Milo Bentley lived that was the only new man
to move into the Reeltown section that season.
Milo just drifted in from Detroit
because his work gave out up there
and a man had to feed his family
so he came back to the farm
thinking things were like they used to be
but he was finding out different.

Yes
everybody was finding out different
Cliff and John and Ned and Milo and Judson Simpson
across the creek
even white croppers like Mr Sam and his brother Mr Bill
they were finding out.
It wasn't many years ago Mr Sam's children
would chunk at Cliff James' children
on their way home from school
and split little Cliff's head open with a rock once
because his daddy was getting too uppity
buying himself a farm.
Last time they had a Union meeting though at Milo
Bentley's place
who should show up but Mr Sam and Mr Bill
and asked was it only for colored
or could white folks join
because something just had to be done
about the way things were.
When Cliff told them
it was for all the poor farmers
that wanted to stick together
they paid their nickel to sign up
and their two cents each for first month's dues
and they said they would try to get
more white folks in
because white men and black
were getting beat with the same stick these days.

Things looked worse than they ever had in all his time of
life
Cliff James thought
but they looked better too
they looked better than they ever had in all his time of life
when a sharecropper like Ralph Gray

not drunk but cold sober
would stand off the High Sheriff with birdshot
and get himself plugged with 44's
just so the others at the meeting could get away
and after that the mob hunting for who started the Union
beating men and women up with pistol butts and bull
whips
throwing them in jail and beating them up more
but still not stopping it
the Union going on
more people signing up
more and more every week
meeting in houses on the quiet
nobody giving it away
and now white folks coming in too.

Cliff James looked over his ripening cotton to the woods
and above the trees the thunderhead piled still higher in
the south
white like a pile of cotton on the stoop
piling up higher and higher
coming out of the south
bringing storm . . .

III

"You"
Cliff James said
"nor the High Sheriff
nor all his deputies
is gonna git them mules."
The head deputy put the writ of attachment back in his
inside pocket
then his hand went to the butt of his pistol
but he didn't pull it.
"I'm going to get the High Sheriff and help"
he said
"and come back and kill you all in a pile."

Cliff James and Ned Cobb watched the deputy whirl the
car around
and speed down the rough mud road.
He took the turn skidding
and was gone.
"He'll be back in a hour" Cliff James said
"if'n he don't wreck hisseff."
"Where you fixin' to go?" Ned Cobb asked him.
"I's fixin' to stay right where I is."
"I'll go git the others then."
"No need of eve'ybody gittin' kilt" Cliff James said.
"Better gittin' kilt quick
than perishin' slow like we been a'doin' " and Ned Cobb
was gone
cutting across the wet red field full of dead cotton plants
and then he was in the woods
bare now except for the few green pines
and though Cliff couldn't see him
he could see him in his mind
calling out John McMullen and telling him about it
then cutting off east to Milo Bentley's
crossing the creek on the foot-log to Judson Simpson's . . .
Cliff couldn't see him
going to Mr Sam or Mr Bill about it
no

this was something you couldn't expect white folks to get
in on
even white folks in your Union.

There came John McMullen out of the woods
toting that old musket of his.
He said it went back to Civil War days
and it looked it
but John could really knock a squirrel off a limb
or get a running rabbit with it.
"Here I is," John said
and "What you doin' 'bout you folks?"
"What folks?"
"The ones belongin' to you.
You chillens and you wife."
"I disremembered 'em," Cliff James aid.
"I done clean disremembered all about my chillens and
my wife."
"They can stay with mine," John said.
"We ain't gonna want no womenfolks nor chillens
not here we ain't."

Cliff James watched his family going across the field
the five backs going away from him
in the wet red clay among the dead cotton plants
and soon they would be in the woods
his wife
young Cliff
the two girls
and the small boy . . .
They would just have to get along
best way they could
because a man had to do
what he had to do
and if he kept thinking about the folks belonging to him
he couldn't do it
and then he wouldn't be any good to them
or himself either.
There they went into the woods
the folks belonging to him gone
gone for good
and they not knowing it
but he knowing it
yes God
he knowing it well.

When the head deputy got back
with three more deputies for help
but not the High Sheriff
there were forty men in Cliff James' cabin
all armed.
The head deputy and the others got out of the car
and started up the slope toward the cabin.
Behind the dark windows
the men they didn't know were there
sighted their guns.
Then the deputies stopped.
"You Cliff James!" the head deputy shouted
"come on out
we want to talk with you."
No answer from inside.
"Come on out Cliff
we got something we want to talk over."
Maybe they really did have something to talk over
Cliff James thought

maybe all those men inside
wouldn't have to die for him or he for them . . .
"I's goin' out," he said.
"No you ain't," Ned Cobb said.
"Yes I is," Cliff James said
and leaning his shotgun against the wall
he opened the door just a wide enough crack
for himself to get through
but Ned Cobb crowded in behind him
and came out too
without his gun
and shut the door.
Together they walked toward the Laws.
When they were halfway Cliff James stopped
and Ned stopped with him
and Cliff called out to the Laws
"I's ready to listen white folks."

"This is what we got to say nigger!"
and the head deputy whipped out his pistol.
The first shot got Ned
and the next two got Cliff in the back
as he was dragging Ned to the cabin.
When they were in the shooting started from inside
everybody crowding up to the windows
with their old shotguns and muskets
not minding the pistol bullets from the Laws.
Of a sudden John McMullen
broke out of the door
meaning to make a run for his house
and tell his and Cliff James' folks
to get a long way away
but a bullet got him in the head
and he fell on his face
among the dead cotton plants
and his life's blood soaked into the old red land.

The room was full of powder smoke and men groaning
that had caught pistol bullets
but not Cliff James.
He lay in the corner quiet
feeling the blood run down his back and legs
but when somebody shouted
"The Laws is runnin' away!"
he got to his feet and went to the door and opened it.
Sure enough three of the Laws
were helping the fourth one into the car
but it wasn't the head deputy.
There by the door-post was John McMullen's old musket
where he'd left it when he ran out and got killed.
Cliff picked it up and saw it was still loaded.
He raised it and steadied it against the door-post
aiming it at where the head deputy would be sitting
to drive the car.
Cliff only wished
he could shoot that thing like John McMullen . . .

IV

He didn't know there was such a place in all Alabama
just for colored.
They put him in a room to himself
with a white bed and white sheets

and the black nurse put a white gown on his black body
after she washed off the dried black blood.
Then the black doctor came
and looked at the pistol bullet holes in his back
and put white bandages on
and stuck a long needle in his arm
and went away.

How long ago was it
he stayed and shot it out with the Laws?
Seemed like a long time
but come to think of it
he hid out in Mr Sam's corn crib
till the sun went down that evening
then walked and walked all the night-time
and when it started to get light he saw a cabin
with smoke coming out the chimney
but the woman wouldn't let him in to get warm
so he went on in the woods and lay down
under an old gum tree and covered himself with leaves
and when he woke it was nearly night-time again
and there were six buzzards perched in the old gum tree
watching him . . .
Then he got up and shooed the buzzards away
and walked all the second night-time
and just as it was getting light
he was here
and this was Tuskegee
where the Laws couldn't find him
but John McMullen was dead in the cotton field
and the buzzards would be at him by now
if nobody hadn't buried him
and who would there be to bury him
witheverybody shot or run away or hiding?

In a couple of days it was going to be Christmas
yes Christmas
and nobody belonging to Cliff James
was going to get a thing
not so much as an orange or a candy stick
for the littlest boy.
What kind of a Christmas was that
when a man didn't even have a few nickels
to get his children some oranges and candy sticks
what kind of a Christmas and what kind of a country
anyway
when you made ten bales of cotton

five thousand pounds of cotton
with your own hands
and you wife's hands
and all your children's hands
and then the Laws came to take your mules away
and drive your cows to sell in town
and your calves
and your heifer
and you couldn't even get commissary credit
for coffee molasses and sow-belly
and nobody in your house had shoes to wear
or any kind of fitting Sunday clothes
and no Christmas for nobody . . .
"Go Down Moses" was the song they sang
and when they had finished singing
it was so quiet in the church
you could hear the branch splashing over rocks
right out behind.
Then the preacher got up and he preached . . .

"And there was a man what fought to save us all
he wrapped an old quilt around him
because it was wintertime and he had two pistol bullets
in his back
and he went out of his house
and he started walking across the country to Tuskegee.
He got mighty cold
and his bare feet pained him
and his back like to killed him
and he thought
here is a cabin with smoke coming out the chimley
and they will let me in to the fire
because they are just poor folks like me
and when I have got warm
I will be on my way to Tuskegee
but the woman was afear'd
and barred the door again him
and he went and piled leaves over him in the woods
waiting for the night-time
and six buzzards settled in an old gum tree
watching did he still breathe . . ."

The Sheriff removed Cliff James from the hospital to the country jail on December 22. A mob gathered to lynch the prisoner on Christmas day. For protection he was taken to jail in Montgomery. Here Cliff James died on the stone floor of his cell, December 27, 1932.



"In Egypt Land" is taken from John Beecher's *To Live and Die in Dixie*, 1966. Mr. Beecher has been active in popular struggles in the South all his live and published a number of other poetry books. His collected poems will appear in a single volume published by Macmillan in the Spring, 1974.



Claude and Joyce Williams Pilgrims Of Justice

by Mark Naison

Few American radicals have displayed as much consistency in the face of the ups and downs of American politics as Claude and Joyce Williams. From their initial political involvement with the miners and sharecroppers of Eastern Arkansas in the early Depression, they have played an active role in the southern organizing drive of the CIO, the interracial work of the UAW and other unions in wartime Detroit, the voter registration drives and desegregation campaigns of the late fifties and early sixties, and the rise of the student movement and the peace movement in the South. Throughout their careers, they have experienced both physical persecution from the right, and suspicion and skepticism from many people in the organized Left.

The history of their work merits particularly close examination at this time, when the Left in America appears to have lost some of the

momentum and effectiveness it displayed in the 1960's. The re-election of Nixon marks the naked hegemony of the corporations in all areas of American life. The mood of optimism and expansiveness of the Sixties has given way to pessimism and despair. Whereas we were once able to sustain ourselves on the unfolding energy of blacks, students and women asserting themselves after years of political passivity, we now confront the limits of the "New Left Coalition;" none of these movements, individually or collectively, proved capable of resisting the militarization of American society or achieving more than localized reforms.

Mark Naison teaches Afro-American Studies at Fordham University in New York, and is an editor of *Radical America*. His research on southern radicalism led him to the Williams, with whom he has worked closely for the last three years.

The building of a revolutionary movement, or even the protection of traditional American rights and liberties, requires far broader participation from the mass of American working people than we had initially envisaged, and many in our ranks were unable to adjust to the demands of the new situation.

Fortunately, the present deterioration of the American economy has begun to lay the basis for the re-emergence of working class radicalism. Nixon's economic policies represent a freezing of both living standards and class boundaries. Since much of the "passivity" of the American working class in the postwar period can be attributed to an unprecedented rise in real wages and a vast expansion of educational opportunity, it is reasonable to expect a resurgence of class politics, if not class consciousness and class struggle. Certainly the corporate elite and the upper middle classes have become more "class-conscious"—the working classes could very easily move in a similar direction in the next few years.

However, the thirty year absence of a class oriented Left has taken its toll. Most of the "natural leaders" of the American working class have been either assimilated upward through the mass educational institutions or have become entrenched in trade union bureaucracies. Perhaps the only arena for working class self-activity has been local politics—where the right has been far more active than the left. Nevertheless, it is from such leadership that any class movement will emerge, not from the remnants of the new left. So those of us still "alive and kicking" have quite a political chore; to work with and align ourselves with emerging working class protests and leaders who have no traditional orientation toward Marxism, Socialism or revolutionary objectives.

The Communist and Socialist parties in America have historically been unsuccessful at inspiring popular working class movements based on American cultural and political traditions. However, some people within these organizations have been able to "translate" revolutionary concepts into popular idioms with striking effectiveness. The socialist journalists Oscar Ameringer, editor of *The American Guardian* and Bob Ingersol, editor of *Appeal to Reason*, Socialist Party candidate Eugene Debs, union leader Harry Bridges, and radical congressman Vito Marcantonio, are examples of people who built massive constituencies within the framework of socialist or communist programs. They are among the few truly "charismatic" working class leaders that have emerged on the American Left.

Claude and Joyce Williams fall within this tradition. They are among the few twentieth

century radicals who have been able to communicate effectively with the people of the American South. In a section which has never lacked for grass-roots leaders and mass movements—mostly conservative—they developed an approach to black and white Southerners that uses the Bible as a reference point for class struggle, civil liberties, and racial brotherhood. While never intending to become the leaders of an autonomous "movement" or "crusade," the Williams have used this approach effectively in both the trade union movement and the civil rights struggle. A brief analysis of their careers is useful, both for the exposure of their philosophy, and for the popularization of methods of political work that have continuing applicability.

"God said It, Jesus Did It, I Believe It, and That Settles It!"

Claude and Joyce met in the 1920's when they were students at Bethel College in Tennessee, the seminary school of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Both came from families which had no historic connection to radical movements; Joyce's parents farmed in rural Missouri, Claude's in the hills of Tennessee. In the communities where they grew up, the church was the sole outlet for humanitarian impulses and aspirations to social leadership. To "do good" for people was to save their souls. As Claude put it: *I at first conceived my purpose to preach the redemption of men's souls from hell to heaven. When I joined the church and entered the ministry, my purpose was to preach the gospel of repentance and salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.*

The Williams began their ministry in the small town of Auburntown, Tennessee, and settled down to raise a family. Claude rapidly achieved a reputation as a preacher who could make people "experience" their religion. His parishioners left church burning with the desire to live righteously and trembling with fear of the hell Claude so graphically described [*I preached till they could feel the flames lapping around their legs*]. Away from the pulpit, Claude and Joyce seemed the ideal ministerial family—attractive, pious, sociable—and they reaped the rewards of their position. They were well-housed, well-fed and bathed in social approval.

Yet there were stirrings of dissatisfaction within them. Even within the "literalist" terms of their religious beliefs, disquieting questions arose. Were the members of the church taking their religion seriously? Was the comfort they endowed the minister with a reflection of their piety, or a

subtle incentive to politely acquiesce in their sins? The "righteousness" Claude strove to move people towards seemed absent from their daily lives, and his very seriousness and enthusiasm was offended by their hypocrisy.

Moreover, Claude found the treatment of the black people in the community disturbing. Although white supremacy had been part of Claude's background, both he and Joyce had come from "hill" areas where the black population was small, and they were not prepared for the systematic humiliation of black people that they observed in Auburntown. They made gestures of Christian concern toward the local black community, preaching at the black church and helping to raise money to rebuild it. Although such actions were not antagonistic to the southern tradition of paternalistic race relations their contact with the black community provided the Williams with an image which simply did not fit the racial perspectives Claude had been taught. (Joyce's family had been free of such stereotypes.) They kept their doubts to themselves for the time being, but these feelings contributed to a growing sense of discomfort with the "southern way of life."

The very effectiveness of the Williams' ministerial labors, their charisma, and the respect with which they were held by local people, contributed to the sense of constriction they experienced. The more emotional the congregation's response, the greater the church attendance, and the more impressive their reputation, the more they hungered for reading materials, outside contacts, and more sophisticated and informed discussion of theological and social issues. It was as though the Williams' success in conventional Christian labors only served to dramatize the insufficiency of those labors by biblical standards of righteousness. They read avidly in the few magazines, newspapers and books that were available to them in their local community, and looked forward to a chance to expand their frame of reference more systematically.

That opportunity became available in 1927 when Dr. Alva Taylor began offering a series of courses on contemporary religion at Vanderbilt Divinity School in nearby Nashville that were designed specifically to broaden the perspectives of southern churchmen. Claude asked for a leave of absence to enroll in this program and found himself placed in a milieu which provided unimagined opportunities for intellectual and theological growth. Not only did he find religion emancipated from narrow debates over immersion, baptism and the nature of the trinity, but he found himself in a community of people committed to connecting theological issues to all aspects of life. A number of

young southern preachers there found the analytical and comparative approach to religion as "liberating" as Claude did, and were equally committed to making the church a vehicle for social reformation. Such views, commonplace in many Northern seminaries, had an extraordinary freshness to young southerners brought up in biblical literalism, especially when presented by a man like Dr. Taylor who came from a similar background. Claude and his fellows—Don West, Howard Kester, and Ward Rodgers, all of whom were to play an extensive role in socialist and trade union activity in the south—developed a collective conception of their social purpose: to make religion assume its proper role in modern society.

When the sessions were completed, the Williams' sense of restlessness was even greater than before. The experience at Vanderbilt, Claude recalls, had stripped the aura of "sanctity" from Jesus Christ, and allowed him to stand as the Son of Man, a human figure whose actions and purposes were explainable in human terms. It was less and less possible for Claude to preach the joys of heaven and the terrors of hell without feeling hypocritical. He had begun to conceive of God's purpose to be the establishment of a Kingdom of God on Earth, a Divine Republic, or a completely democratic republic. With such an outlook the social inequities that surrounded the Williams became increasingly difficult to separate from their ministerial duties and aims. The "great fixed gulf" they saw between the planter and the sharecropper, between the property owners and those who worked with their hands, between the black and white people appeared as concrete obstacles to the achievement of God's will. They had to preach on these themes to be true to their convictions.

It was not an easy thing to do. Claude and Joyce were loved and respected in Auburntown because they had been the embodiment of the best of the old ways; they had brought sincerity, eloquence, and scholarship to bear on the traditional striving for redemption through Jesus Christ. To tell their congregation that they no longer believed what they had been preaching would be painful, for their parishioners had little basis to accept the new frame of reference. When Claude began confessing the change in his outlook and began preaching on subjects such as racial equality, trade unionism, Christ as a human being with human purposes, they did not stop listening to him but their displeasure was evident. Claude and Joyce began to realize that Auburntown was perhaps not the best parish in which to get their message across.

In early 1930, an opportunity arose to move to

a new setting. A colleague at Vanderbilt told Claude and Joyce of an available parish in the mining community of Paris, Arkansas. This was an ideal place for the Williams to develop their new outlook; the parish was in a state of collapse, the church in disrepair, and the local population in desperate economic straits. The material comforts and security that had marked their life in Auburntown, would be gone but they could devote themselves to a community that needed political organization and struggle as much as spiritual guidance.

The situation in Paris proved to be every bit the challenge that the Williams friend had warned. The Presbyterian congregation had been reduced to less than fifteen people and a general air of demoralization and decay marked the entire community. The Depression's effects were fast making themselves felt, and local community institutions, whether religious or political, had made little provision for the forced idleness and poverty. There was no place for young people to amuse themselves other than a local pool hall (off-limits for the pious). There was no program of private or public relief for the poor, and the local miners faced the crisis of the Depression without a union to defend their interests. The Williams saw immediately that there was no way they could divorce the "salvation of souls" from the salvation of bodies—the only congregation they would have would be the one they could gather through their own efforts.

Their first step was to set up activities which gave the youth of the community opportunities for recreation and self-improvement. With a small parish fund, they purchased athletic equipment, set up a gym in an empty room of the parish house, and organized baseball and basketball leagues. They opened their own collection of books and magazines as a library, organized lecture series on contemporary topics, and stimulated study and discussion groups. Departing even further from the "fundamentalist" path, they began to organize dances at the parish house, explaining to shocked parishioners that young people needed coordinated outlets for sociability.

These activities soon won the Williams a reputation with the working people of the community regardless of denomination. Their house was always full of visitors; the recreational and instructional programs were active and dynamic, and Sunday services packed. The local elders and business leaders did not approve of these activities, but they kept their disapproval relatively private, for the programs had not yet begun to pose a major threat to local political or economic activities.

This atmosphere of toleration began to vanish

quickly, however, when Claude and Joyce began to work with local miners who were facing layoffs, wage cuts and outright starvation. A group of miners had come to Claude one day after services and had asked for his help in trying to meet the crisis. Their families were without food; on the occasions when they could find work, they were forced to work overtime without pay; and the union local they had organized had been allowed to deteriorate by the John L. Lewis machine in the United Mine Workers. Claude readily agreed to give them all the aid at his disposal: a place to meet, help with writing literature, and connections with outside sources of political or financial support. After a series of discussions, he persuaded them to reorganize their local and fight for autonomy within the UMW.

This was the opportunity to participate in the struggle that Claude had been waiting for. In the three years since leaving Vanderbilt, his vision of the Kingdom of God on Earth had begun to take on increasingly socialist overtones. His exposure to the humanization of Christ in Dr. Taylor's classes, his contacts with other churchmen possessed by same zeal for reform, his participation in interracial conferences, and his increasingly wide reading on scientific and social topics had, in the context of the Depression, made him more and more radical in his political beliefs. But more importantly, Claude saw these beliefs borne out by the Bible. As he reread the Bible with new eyes, he saw the Son of Man as a revolutionary who was continually identified with the extremest victims of society—the poor, the suffering, the exploited. The same was true of virtually all the Old Testament figures who represented the prophetic impulse, from Moses through Amos and Isaiah. Looked at from this perspective, the Bible read as "the longest continuous record of struggle against oppression that mankind possessed." Claude saw an almost uncanny continuity between the impulses that brought him to the ministry and his growing commitment to class struggle. His work with the miners seemed to fulfill the religious motivations that had guided his life and to fulfill them in a more organic way than he had ever experienced before. He had brought consistency to his world-view and his actions.

I could not, naturally, conceive what the Kingdom of God on Earth would be. . . . But it was, as I understood by the Bible, to be established by the spirit and strivings of men. Come, Go, Do, Ask, Knock, Strive, Relieve, Free, Heal, House, Clothe, Feed were words of action addressed to man in relation to its accomplishment. Clearly, before man could become qualified and have the privilege of becoming active in this struggle, he must have

freedom of speech, press, movement, association and opportunity.

Organized labor, civil rights groups, the Socialist Party, pacific and kindred movements were using these freedoms to relieve, heal, clothe—to obtain economic justice, political equality, racial brotherhood and other democratic objectives—steps toward a truly democratic republic. They were "doing the Will of God." They were fulfilling Divine Purpose. Religious purpose required that I identify myself with their democratic efforts.

The struggle in which the Williams now plunged rapidly put their new views to the test. Even to hold their own economically the miners had to take on a staggering array of enemies—the mine operators, local business groups and political leaders, and the Lewis machine in the UMW, all of whom seemed in collusion with one another. With the Williams' help, the union organized a successful strike for recognition in 1932, but found themselves embroiled in a conflict with Arkansas UMW leader Dave Fowler who was following Lewis' directive to place all mine locals under direct control

of the central office. In addition, the miners organized hunger marches and relief drives to try to force the local government to distribute food to their families and provide decent wages on work relief projects. In the mass mobilization that these activities required, Claude's and Joyce's church became the focal point—a meeting place, a refuge from repression, a place for study and self-improvement. This was deeply reassuring to the people from religious backgrounds, for the struggle in which they were engaged seemed very different from what their religious heritage prescribed, and Claude's ability to translate it into religious terms greatly increased their courage and resistance. Claude and Joyce infused the struggle with the atmosphere of a crusade; the people's struggle for bread and freedom was a direct extension of the Son of Man's struggle to make the world righteous. With the miners' help, they drew up plans to build a huge "Proletarian Church and Labor Temple" which would be the embodiment of the unity of the class struggle and true religion, a place where miners and all working people would come to wor-



The NEW EARTH

SCRIPTURE : REV. 21:1-8

TEXT : ... A NEW EARTH, WHEREIN DWELLETH RIGHTEOUSNESS - 2 PETER 3:13



<p>F</p> <p>F-ELLOWSHIPING WITH ONE ANOTHER (1 JOHN 1:7)</p> <p>A</p> <p>A-DMONISHING ONE ANOTHER (ROM. 15:14)</p> <p>I</p> <p>I-NSTRUCTING ONE ANOTHER (2 THIM. 3:14, 17)</p> <p>T</p> <p>T-RUSTING ONE ANOTHER (JAMES 2:1-4)</p> <p>H</p> <p>H-ELPING ONE ANOTHER (GAL. 6:2-5)</p>	<p>V</p> <p>V-ISION - A PEOPLE'S VISION (REV. 20:10)</p> <p>I</p> <p>I-NSIGHT - DISCERNING THE TIMES (LUKE 12:54-56)</p> <p>C</p> <p>C-OURAGE - FROM UNITY IN ACTION (ISA. 41:10, 17)</p> <p>T</p> <p>T-RUTH - TRUTH THAT FREES (JOHN 8:32)</p> <p>O</p> <p>O-RGANIZATION - ALL FOR EACH (JOHN 15:1-8)</p> <p>R</p> <p>R-ESOURCEFULNESS (JAMES 3:5) (COR. 1:26-28)</p> <p>Y</p> <p>Y-IELDING - EACH TO ALL (1 PET. 3:18-22)</p>	<p>W</p> <p>W-ARS OF AGGRESSION (LUKE 9:45)</p> <p>O</p> <p>O-RGANIZED TYRANNY (LUKE 22:11, 12)</p> <p>R</p> <p>R-ANK HYPOCRISY (MATT. 23:2)</p> <p>L</p> <p>L-AND MONOPOLY (LUKE 10:16-21)</p> <p>D</p> <p>D-OLLAR DIPLOMACY (JOHN 18:30)</p>	<p>R</p> <p>R-IGHTEOUSNESS</p> <p>R-EIGN OF THE PEOPLE (DAN. 7:26, 27)</p> <p>I-NTERNATIONAL GOVERNMENT (HEB. 12:26, 29)</p> <p>G-OD WILL TOWARD ALL MEN (LUKE 2:13, 14)</p> <p>H-EAVENLY PLACES ON EARTH (ISA. 35:2-10)</p> <p>T-RUE FREEDOM (LUKE 4:17-19)</p> <p>E-CONOMIC JUSTICE (ISA. 65:21-25)</p> <p>O-PPORTUNITIES FOR ALL (ACTS 2:17-20)</p> <p>U-NITY OF ALL (ACTS 17:26)</p> <p>S-OCIALISM of JESUS and the PROPHETS (MATT. 23:14-16)</p> <p>NEITHER WARS NOR BUMBLES OF HONEY (MICAH 4:3)</p> <p>E-VERY MAN SHALL EARN HIS OWN BREAD (2 THESS. 3:10)</p> <p>S-ECURITY FOR ALL THE DISABLED (LUKE 14:16-17)</p> <p>S-SERVICE TO ALL THE MOTIVE OF ALL (MATT. 23:10-12)</p>
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ship, hold meetings, study, and meditate.

Needless to say, the local Presbyterian elders were outraged by the direction their young minister had taken. The mine operators and business people, traditionally the pillars of the church, saw their preacher using the pulpit to organize resistance to their political and economic influence, and they wrote to the Presbytery demanding that he be removed from his pastorate for "heresy." As evidence for their claim, they not only referred to his political activities, but his "immoral" social programs—dances, lectures on nudism, family planning, and socialism—and his failure to preach only the "Gospel of Salvation" and the Presbyterian position on the Trinity.

Claude and Joyce tried to combat this effort to depose them from their pastorate. A number of influential religious leaders—including Alva Taylor, Willard Uphaus of the Religion and Labor Federation, and Reinhold Niebuhr—supported Claude's claim that his activities were fully within the framework of his religious convictions. But the Presbytery, looking both to its sources of financial

backing and its image of respectability, removed Claude from his pastorate, claiming their action involved no "condemnations" of his work, but was merely an effort to avoid controversy and division in the parish. The final decree of the Presbyterian General Assembly bespoke their peculiar motivation: "The pastoral relationship between the Rev. Claude Williams and the First Presbyterian Church of Paris, Arkansas, is hereby dissolved on behalf of an influential minority, for the good of the Kingdom of God." As in the Bible, the institutional church had allied itself on the side of the rulers and the wealthy against the oppressed.

The actions of the Presbytery effectively ended the Williams' role in the Paris struggle, but it freed them for broader work among the sharecroppers and the unemployed of Arkansas, and strengthened their religious convictions. The Williams needed no church to pursue their religious mission; they believed it would unfold wherever the disinherited were struggling for bread, land and justice.

They had little difficulty in finding places to

TOWARD the KINGDOM

TEXT: "YE HAVE HEARD... 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE and a TOOTH FOR A TOOTH:' But I say..." Mtt. 5:38-9. SCRIPTURE: Joshua 20th Chapter.

J udge	P raying	H itlerism	K I N G D O M o f G O D
E mancipator	E arnest	A nti-Semitism	
S ustainer	O rganized	T yranny	
U niversal Man	P ersistent	E xploitation	
S ympathizer	L oyal	R acism	
	E nergetic	S laughter	

(Note: The image contains a large 'X' over the middle section and various lines connecting the words, suggesting a complex relationship or contrast between the positive and negative terms.)

apply their energies. The state of Arkansas was alive with political and economic struggles in the early Depression: hunger marches, strikes, and the dramatic organization of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU) in the Delta region. There was a small but vigorous group of socialists and communists throughout the state—homespun radicals whose acquaintance with Marxist theory was less impressive than their organizational ability and capacity to translate socialist ideas into the local idiom. Claude and Joyce were in close contact with all these people, some from Vanderbilt days, some through the miners' struggle, and others through their work with the Arkansas Socialist Party and the American Federation of Teachers. In addition, Arkansas had its own labor college, Commonwealth, which sought to play an active role in these emerging class movements, and Claude worked closely with the people there. It was a time of great enthusiasm and expectation, when revolutionary utopias were talked of without embarrassment and strategic viewpoints were debated as though the revolution were "around the corner." The class militance of the sharecroppers and miners, the growing effectiveness of unionization drives and the erosion of racial barriers in the course of struggles evoked images of a spiral of popular protest leading to the final "people's victory." In such a context, acts of personal courage and commitment were routine.

Claude and Joyce chose to move to Fort Smith, an industrial city in western Arkansas, where they immediately became involved with the organization of the unemployed into the Workers Alliance. Wages had been cut in the local work relief projects from 30 cents to 20 cents an hour just at the time when local miners had gone out on strike. In protest, the Workers Alliance began organizing marches and demonstrations. When the Williams' close friend Horace Bryan was arrested for his role in this activity, Claude and Joyce took the lead in organizing a massive hunger march. As the march proceeded, Claude was seized by local deputies and thrown in jail on a charge of barratry. Joyce protested, "If you take him, take me too!" but was persuaded by Claude to go back to take care of the children. The experience was indicative of the quality of class struggle in Arkansas. While Joyce remained outside with the children, ostracized by neighbors and harassed by local notables, Horace Bryan and Claude were thrown into a cell with a motley array of social outcasts—thieves, drunks, male prostitutes—and were periodically besieged by mobs which threatened to pull them out of jail and lynch them. Ill, deprived of food and proper sanitary facilities, dismayed by cellmates who had lost self-respect, they spent their hours discussing

political strategy, Marxism, and the shape of the revolutionary future. Through Horace Bryan, Claude received his first in-depth acquaintance with Marxist ideas, and, Claude says, "the most profound presentation of Marxist thinking he had received to this day."

When he was finally released after a month's imprisonment, Claude and Joyce moved to the relative safety of Little Rock, Arkansas's largest city. There he was commissioned by leaders of the STFU, the Workers Alliance, and friends in the Socialist and Communist Parties to organize a "training school" for black and white leaders of the labor movement in Arkansas. The school was perhaps unique among labor education programs in the Depression because of its explicitly religious orientation: its title was "The New Era School of Social Action and Prophetic Religion." The orientation was necessitated by the strong religious background of virtually all the participants and the fact that the Bible represented virtually the only framework within which they could make sense of their struggles, their setbacks, and their aspirations. Many of the leaders of the unionization drives were "workaday" preachers—men and women who put in a full week in the field or in the factories, but led congregations on Sunday in ramshackle churches and schoolhouses—people with little or no formal schooling and no clerical certification other than their knowledge of the Bible and their call to preach. Claude's presentation of the Bible as a "continuous record of revolutionary struggle" spoke directly to their need to see their political activities in religious terms, and provided a context in which they could act creatively to overcome their followers' fear of "race mixing," physical repression, and ostracism by the local middle class. As Claude put it:

Our purpose was to give positive leadership training in the principles and practice of brotherhood to the normal and accepted leaders of the people of the rural South. These leaders were the toiling Negro and white preachers, exhorters, deacons and teachers among the mass religious movements, denominations and sects.

The school brought together black and white leaders of this background in a context where they could interact creatively, and the program helped set the stage for the unprecedented interracial unity that was to characterize Arkansas labor struggles. Perhaps the most effective program was one which brought together twenty local leaders (ten black, ten white, men and women) of the STFU, who were to become some of the most effective grassroots leaders of that organization.

The success of the program led Claude's friends in the STFU, H.L. Mitchell and J.R. Butler, to urge him to take his program "out into the field" in 1936, a year in which the union was organizing its largest cotton pickers' strike. Claude and Joyce readily accepted, although their activities had to take place in the midst of terror. Driving in the dead of night, crawling through fields and swamps, meeting in the cabins of black and white sharecroppers with the threat of lynching hanging over their heads, Claude and Joyce told people about the union and the strike, and likened the people's struggle to the Biblical figures they knew so well: Moses and the children of Israel laboring under Pharaoh's lash. The strike spread, but the risks for the Williams grew. In late 1936, Claude was caught by a group of planters, beaten and flogged, and sent out of eastern Arkansas with the warning that he would be lynched if he returned.

In 1937, Claude, still deeply involved with field organizing of the STFU, was offered the directorship of Commonwealth College. That institution, founded by utopian socialists in the 1920's, had been beset with difficulties since it began to participate actively in labor struggles in the Depression—most notably, the opposition of the Arkansas state legislature and the conservative wing (AFL) of the Arkansas labor movement. Claude hoped that he could save the college, but found that "Socialist-Communist rivalries" in Arkansas, which he had never taken very seriously, had escalated to the point where they presented almost as much a problem to the College as the opposition of the right. Although it was a non-partisan institution, Commonwealth had become the target of a growing anti-Communist attitude among socialists as well as reactionaries. It refused to purge Communists from its faculty and student body. By taking the Commonwealth directorship, Claude found himself classified in the "communist camp" by his old friends in the Socialist Party and the STFU. National leaders of the Socialist Party and moderate union leaders with whom the STFU was allied in local legislative programs warned Mitchell and Butler that Claude was "dangerous" and that his associations with Commonwealth made him someone who "could not be trusted."

These tensions came to a head when the STFU had to decide whether it wished to affiliate with the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packinghouse and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), a new CIO union aimed at coordinating agricultural and food processing workers across the country. The union was headed by an avowed Communist and former college professor, Donald Henderson, who knew little about communicating with rural workers and even less about the South. At one

point he had advocated dividing both the STFU and the Alabama Sharecroppers Union into three separate unions—one for wage workers, one for tenants, and one for small farmers—a position that had not endeared him to those organizing in southern agriculture. But in spite of Henderson's weaknesses, the UCAPAWA represented the only chance to join up with the CIO, the most dynamic radical force on the American scene, and for that reason most of the membership, including Claude, supported affiliation.

What followed was a political nightmare. The STFU affiliated, as it were, "under protest," its controlling group convinced that they were facing a Communist plot to subvert the organization. These fears were fed by national leaders of the Socialist Party, who looked upon the STFU as "their baby" and were jealous of any relationship which would diminish their influence. When the UCAPAWA moved to place the STFU under tight international control and fit it within a trade union framework, the STFU's Memphis office saw their "movement" going down the drain. The resulting power struggle succeeded in diverting enormous energies from the struggle in the field. The two union cliques spent far more time maneuvering for position than organizing strikes, developing local leadership and trying to stabilize the union organization.

During this power struggle, Claude tried to push a campaign to expand and stabilize the organization, to recruit new members, initiate new actions, and struggle for written contracts. But in the existing climate of hysteria, Claude's old friends in the Memphis office were unable to see his actions, and those of other rank and file leaders, as anything but efforts to subvert the union. Although Claude had no respect for Henderson, he was committed to maintaining a tie with the CIO, and categorically refused to "red-bait" the UCAPAWA. To the Socialist Party group which had organized the STFU and still controlled it, this was tantamount to being a communist.

The fratricidal atmosphere escalated further in 1938 when J.R. Butler, the STFU president and a close personal friend of the Williams, accidentally found a "document" in Claude's coat pocket allegedly describing plans to establish a strong Communist Party base in the STFU through Claude and Commonwealth College. Butler immediately released the document to the press and called for Claude to resign from the Executive Board of the STFU, but later changed his mind and agreed not to bring charges. However, on the insistence of Howard Kester, the union leadership decided to put Claude on public trial by the Executive Committee. At a very confused public hearing at which little if anything was clarified, Claude was

expelled, along with two other Executive Board members, E.B. McKinney and W.L. Blackstone. Claude tried to organize a resistance to the expulsions. He and McKinney took their cause to the membership, drew up a ten-point program for the reformation and democratization of the union, and won considerable support for their cause among the rank and file, most of whom were dismayed by the absence of concrete organizing activity and the defection from the CIO. But Claude was able to find little support for his efforts outside of the union membership. When the Memphis leadership organized a convention at Cotton Plant, Arkansas, to ratify the Executive Board's expulsions, Claude received no support from Henderson or any of the UCAPAWA leaders. Grieved, Claude returned to Commonwealth, where he could watch from a distance while the Memphis group and Henderson fought for control of the organization while the membership became more and more disillusioned and demoralized.

At Commonwealth, Claude found himself facing a crisis of a different kind. That institution, after 15 years of effort to provide a communal context for workers' education in the South, came under direct attack from the Arkansas legislature and local law enforcement officials. Claude had tried to give the college a non-partisan image, but the publicity accorded his expulsion from the STFU negated that effort. Equally important, the problems of administration failed to bring the kind of personal satisfaction he experienced as a preacher, a teacher and an agitator. He concluded that the position at Commonwealth required someone of a different temperament, and he remained as director only in an honorary capacity.

The setbacks that Claude experienced in the STFU and at Commonwealth were bitter, but they did not leave Claude with either a sense of political demoralization or personal defeat. Surveying his experiences from the time he left Paris to his resignation from Commonwealth, he realized that in spite of his defeats—his loss of the Paris pastorate, his expulsion from the STFU, his failure to halt the attacks on Commonwealth—his experiences with the rank and file southern worker and sharecropper had been consistently positive and inspiring. Factional conflicts and repression had not hampered his ability to communicate with people at the grassroots level in the Miners Union and the STFU; they had always stood by him no matter what political opponents said about his work. In the STFU particularly, Claude had remained close to the best rank and file organizers that the union had recruited: O.H. Whitfield, E.B. McKinney, Leon Turner, and W.L. Blackstone. When Claude was expelled, they had tried to help

him reform the organization.

Claude concluded that this effectiveness in the field was due to his ability to translate trade union and egalitarian concepts into the medium of evangelical religion. In his last days at Commonwealth, he decided to formalize this approach into an organization which would aid the CIO and civil rights groups in their efforts to organize the South. He set up the "People's Institute of Applied Religion," a non-sectarian religious organization which would train leaders of the mass religious groups to serve as labor organizers and leaders of struggles against the poll tax, racial discrimination and other repressive features of the southern social order. Claude wrote:

I realized that to preach the Good News of freedom, peace, security and personal dignity, to preach these things to the poor, an army of new preachers to the poor was needed, and that to apply the teachings of the Gospel of the Kingdom to the problems of the here and now, a truly non-sectarian, wholly independent religious movement was necessary. The People's Institute of Applied Religion was therefore developed to enlist, train, select and inspire leaders from the people to preach and practice the Gospel of the Kingdom of God on Earth.

The ideological basis for this movement lay in Claude's interpretation of the Bible as a record of an historic struggle against oppression. But Claude also sensed the necessity to make these views concrete on a non-verbal level. Although the people he was approaching responded to preaching, most of them could not read the conventional written propaganda that the organizers handed out—pamphlets, books and magazines did not reach them. Concepts of class struggle, labor solidarity, and racial brotherhood had to be presented on a symbolic level that people could see. Claude sat down with an artist friend and drew up a series of charts and posters to spell out pictorially the biblical message that he so often preached. Adorned with titles like "The Galilean and the Common People," "The Nazarene," and "The Blood of All Nations," the charts presented biblical scenes which had a revolutionary content, or presented contemporary scenes of struggle underlined by appropriate biblical passages. When he finished, Claude supplied rank and file leaders with copies of these charts. One of the most enthusiastic responses to the new program came from O.H. Whitfield, a black sharecropper-preacher who had been one of the most effective leaders of the STFU and had won national recognition for his role in the Missouri Roadside Demonstration. Whitfield used the charts in his organizing and became a member of the Board of the People's Insti-

PEOPLE'S INSTITUTE OF APPLIED RELIGION



CLAUDE WILLIAMS, Director

Abolish Hitlerism!

End Intolerance!

Establish Justice!

Go through, go through the gates, prepare ye the way of the people; cast up
cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.

— Isaiah 62:10

tute. Other preachers with whom Claude had worked displayed equal enthusiasm. He seemed to have hit upon an approach which could convert the southern workingman's religiosity—the bane of secular minded unionists and radicals—into a positive force for democracy.

To get the new organization off the ground, Claude appealed to his old friends in the Religion and Labor Foundation, Harry F. Ward and Willard Uphaus, and his old mentor Alva Taylor. Despite all the rumblings that the STFU affair had produced about Claude's communist leanings, these individuals stood by Claude and helped raise sufficient money to print up the charts and provide Claude and Joyce with living expenses.

At first the organization functioned primarily among sharecroppers and tenant farmers in eastern Arkansas and Missouri. But in 1941, Claude was asked by Donald Henderson to run a

BROTHERS IN THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM



Rev. Owen H. Whitfield (left), dynamic Negro leader was co-director with Claude Williams (right) of an Institute held in Christ Church Cathedral, St. Louis. Whitfield says:

"The PEOPLE'S INSTITUTE OF APPLIED RELIGION teaches in a manner that the poor illiterate Negro and white Sharecropper can understand, religion as Jesus taught it. Teaching in the way that the PEOPLE'S INSTITUTE does enables the unlearned workers of the South as well as the North, to understand the teaching of Jesus Christ, when he spoke to the workers and the common people saying, "I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly.

"That is the reason, and the only reason, why the Pharisee and Saducee slave-lords on the plantations don't want religion taught in this manner in the South. But I carry my charts right along with me and my Bible into my Union Locals and teach. We don't care what the planters don't allow. We teach the scripture anyhow."

11

series of institutes in Memphis to help the UCAPAWA in its organizing drive in the food processing plants of that city.

At that time Memphis was the prisoner of the notorious Boss Crump machine, which kept control of City Hall with a judicious combination of police terror, bribery and political favors. The small AFL crafts council was part of the Crump apparatus, and the CIO had been warned not to try to organize in the town.

In churches, homes and union halls, Claude and his associates held meetings with black and white workers that made prominent use of the People's Institute charts. The two main union organizers, Harry Koger, a white former YMCA secretary, and O.H. Whitfield made remarkable progress enrolling previously terrorized workers into the UCAPAWA. At meetings filled with prayers, hymns and traditional spirituals

converted into union songs, the workers revealed an unexpected determination to stick together in spite of jailings, beatings and efforts to incite racial divisions. The union campaign was hit with the full force of police repression. Claude was arrested, kept overnight, and then released, but was warned that if he didn't leave town quickly, he would be killed. He thereupon moved his family to Evansville, Indiana, at the geographic top of the "pyramid of cotton production," where he could maintain offices and a home in safety. The union campaign continued until the CIO was established in many of the city's industries. A letter from Owen Whitfield to Claude describes some of the techniques used:

WELL! I have my charts on the wall here in the hall and teach from them four times a week to four groups of workers from different plants. There are always ten [10] to fifteen [15] working preachers of different sects, and no end of church officers in the meetings. OH! if our sponsors could see how the common preachers and common people respond to what they call these "GOSPEL FEASTS" and how they rush up and shake hands and give thanks, and invite me to come to their churches. I have visited several of them.

After the success of the Institute's program in Memphis, Claude and Joyce's reputation among southern labor organizers and progressive religious leaders grew steadily. They remained in close contact with both the UCAPAWA organizers and the sharecropper preachers they had worked with in Arkansas and Missouri, but in addition organized a series of conferences which presented the Institute's program to union leaders, ministers and teachers who were involved in building the CIO and in mobilizing support for the American role in World War II. The wartime period brought together a broad "Anti-Fascist Coalition" of the left and center which saw the struggle against Hitler and the struggle for democracy in America as one and the same. To this group the South represented both the greatest obstacle to the democratization of American society and the greatest potential area for its realization. Claude's ability to reach the southern working man thus assumed a particular importance to many liberals and progressives during the war.

The significance of the Institute's work was further dramatized by the rise of proto-fascist demagogues and the consolidation of anti-New Deal forces in Congress. After Roosevelt's unsuccessful campaign to elect liberal candidates in the southern Democratic primaries of 1938, the southern Congressional delegation had allied itself with the Republicans to systematically dismantle New Deal social programs. These congressional leaders, led by such demagogues as Theodore Bilbo and

Rankin of Mississippi were often in close alliance with religious demagogues who used evangelical methods and imagery to support segregation and anti-semitism, and to oppose CIO unionization drives. Such agitators as Gerald Smith, Gerald Winrod, and J. Frank Norris used the pulpit to proclaim that the United States was a white Christian nation that had to be protected from the growing influence of Jews and Negroes. These preachers directed their greatest efforts to the ecstatic religious sects, and Claude represented virtually the only person on the left who was trying to present an alternative message to this constituency. In a pamphlet called the "Scriptural Heritage of the People," Claude presented the rationale for a campaign to appeal to the democratic elements in the religious heritage of the southern working people.

The South today is the most vulnerable section of the country. It is the largest single section where reactionary forces can effectively concentrate. . . . Historically, this section has been populated for the most part by under-fed, uneducated, small farmers, renters, sharecroppers, agricultural day laborers and by impoverished and uncritical industrial workers. . . . [Their understanding] and their reaction might be summarized as follows—

(a) *They saw the people in the towns and cities with good "store-bought" clothes. They themselves could not have good clothes. . . . Therefore good clothing came to represent style, worldliness and evil. They rationalized "I'd rather be a door-keeper in the house of the Lord than to dwell in King's palaces." (Psalms 84:10)*

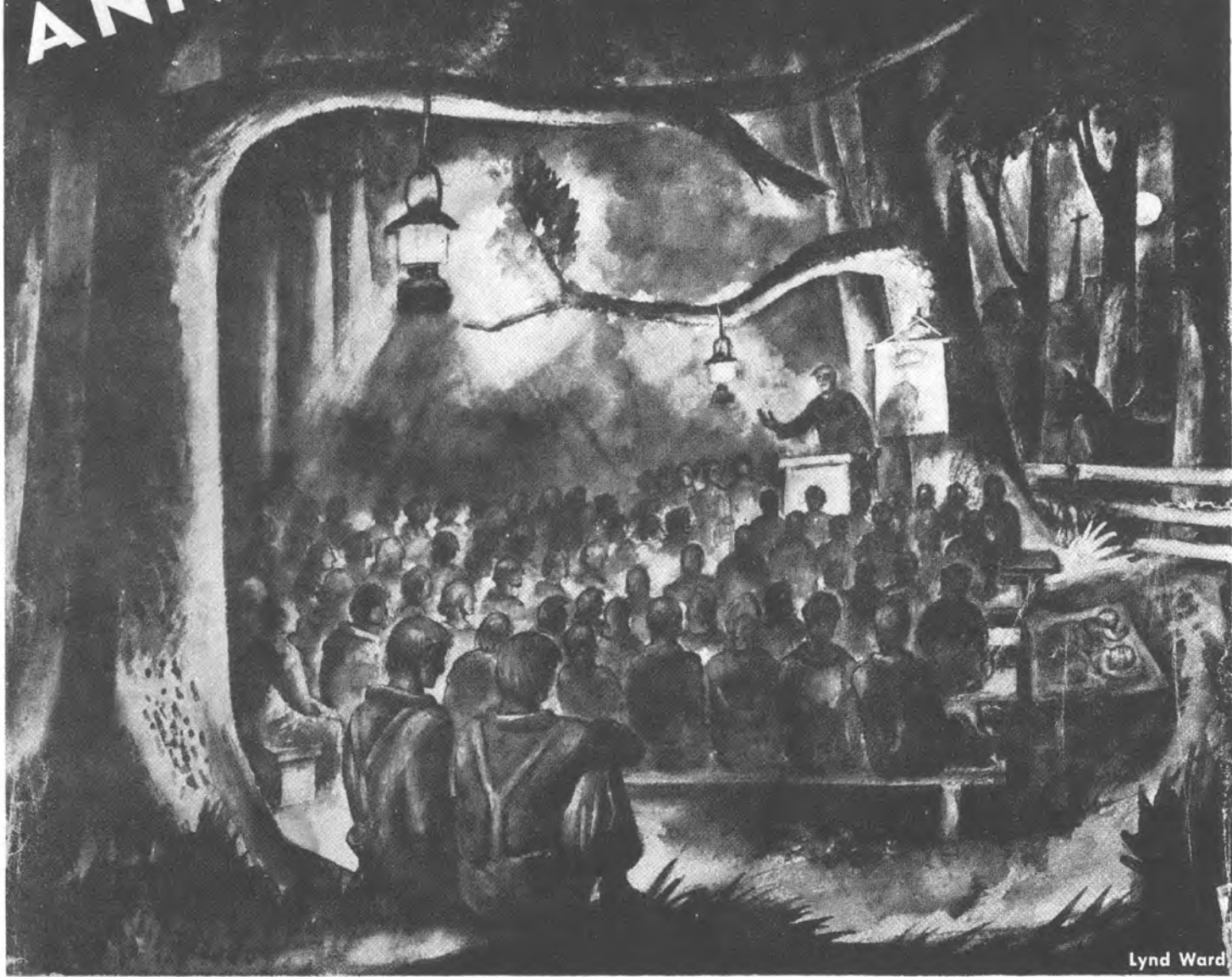
(b) *They were denied the privilege of schools. They saw the people in the towns and cities with from eighth grade to college education . . . who snubbed them, discriminated against them, exploited them and dealt shadily with them. Education became "worldly larnin'." It was man's work. The Bible was God's work. They rationalized "We'll speak where the Bible speaks and keep silent where the Bible is silent." (Romans 3:3, 4)*

(c) *They were denied medical attention. They could only heal by faith in as much as they were or were not healed. Therefore Doctors became evil. They rationalized "We'll go to the great physician, to Him who can not only heal the soul but the body also. (James 5:14-16)*

(e) *They could not enjoy civic responsibility because of the poll tax requirements. . . . Therefore, the state became evil, ruled over by the gods of this world. (Ephesians 2:2-3) They sang "We are strangers and pilgrims here seeking the city to come." (Hebrews 11:10-13)*

In the light of their economic conditions and understanding, their only hope of possessing a home was a "home above." Their only hope of a

FIRST
CALL
ANNOUNCING



Lynd Ward

The Peoples' Congress of Applied Religion

A Congress of Church, Labor, Negro and Civic Leaders and laymen, to discuss our mutual and respective responsibilities in the present world crisis and to affirm our position on the issues affecting the establishment of a peoples' world founded upon the principles of economic justice, political equality, racial brotherhood and religious freedom.

SATURDAY, SUNDAY, MONDAY, JULY TWENTY-TWO, TWENTY-THREE, TWENTY-FOUR

better world was the personal return of Jesus in the clouds. [I Thessalonians 4:16-18]

... By these prejudices and the use being made of them by native fascist demagogues, we may be warned of the menacing proto-fascist content in this movement. But on the other hand, we may be challenged, paradoxically enough, by the fact that in this mass religious movement, there is one of the most terrific mass democratic dynamics in America. It is a mass protest against all things economically and culturally unattainable. It is not as yet a conscious economic protest. But it is a conscious religious protest! By a penetrating instinct and an unsophisticated realism, they sense the emptiness, the shamness, artificiality and hypocrisy of our formal religious services. (Matthew 15:8-9) These are truly hungering and thirsting after righteousness. (Matthew 5:6) Here is the field for a new dynamic evangelism in terms of our religio-democratic heritage as contained in THE BOOK. Herein is heard the present day Macedonian call. (Acts 16:9)

With this frame of analysis, Claude and Joyce sought to expand the Institute's activities throughout the South. He asked his correspondents to report on proto-fascist agitation and, where possible, to help convert preachers in the mass religious sects to a democratic orientation. In several instances, preachers who were members of the Klan embraced the Institute's program and were able to provide continuing reports on Klan activities to the organization. The Institute continued to aid labor organization in the South as well, providing an effective complement to the union's traditional "bread and butter appeal."

In 1943, Claude and the Institute were presented with an even greater challenge, a position as "minister to labor" with the Presbytery of Detroit. Wartime Detroit, the "arsenal of democracy" was filled with recently migrated black and white Southerners who rubbed shoulders together in uneasy juxtaposition in the plants, the streetcars, the parks and recreational areas. Racial tensions in the city posed a threat both to the newly organized industrial unions and to the efficiency of war production. J. Frank Norris and Gerald L.K. Smith drew huge crowds in the white neighborhoods, and nationalist organizations such as the Pacific League flourished among the blacks. The divisions were encouraged by industrial leaders such as Henry Ford, who hired preachers from the ecstatic sects to work in his plants in the hope that they would discourage loyalty to the unions and support the company's position in negotiations.

Arriving in Detroit, Claude and Joyce brought together a group of union leaders and ministers to make plans to combat the "offensive" of proto-

fascist leaders and company officials—publicizing the plans and programs of the agitators and exposing their disruptive impact on war production and morale. An equally important part of the program was enlisting preachers in the plants and training them in the Institute's methods to counter the anti-union and anti-black propaganda. A team of "shop preachers," led by John Miles and Virgil Vandenburg, coordinated the program

The research work of Claude and his associates enabled them to virtually "predict" the Detroit riot of 1943—where it would start, who would participate, and what course it would take. Their understanding of the social dynamics in the white and black neighborhoods enabled them to move quickly into action after the riot to prevent the antagonisms from destroying the unions. With the strong support of labor leaders, educators, clergymen and liberal politicians, the Institute was able to significantly contribute to the narrow thread of racial tolerance that held Detroit together through the rest of the War.

EPILOGUE

My story of the Williams' work must abruptly end here. This piece is part of an introduction to a proposed book of documents and taped interviews dealing with the Williams' work in the southern movement, and there is much more to speak about than I am now prepared to describe. The Williams returned to the South after World War II to continue the work of the People's Institute and were able to function openly until the early 50's when the Institute, like most progressive organizations in the Deep South, was driven underground. Throughout the Fifties, the Williams' activities were confined to community service programs among their neighbors in Shelby County, Alabama, and they narrowly escaped assassination several times.

The civil rights movement gave the Williams a new opportunity to do open political work. They were active in voter registration drives in Bessemer and Birmingham, the Mississippi Freedom Summer, the formation of the New Democratic Party of Alabama, and the emergence of the peace movement and the student movement in the South. They are still active politically in Birmingham, and remain convinced that the "Scriptural Heritage of the People" can be made into a force for democracy rather than reaction.

history: white, negro & black



by Vincent Harding

I am going to speak about the approaches of White, Negro and Black History to the American experience, especially to the experiences of the children of Africa in America. I want to propose some ways in which we can look at the way in which the American experience is recorded and dealt with as a result of these three types of sensitivities, methodologies, conceptualizations, and at the politics connected with these approaches to history. My assumption is that intellectual work is connected to politics—whether the politics of reaction, the politics of the status quo, or politics of some kind of forward movement, whether it might be on a kind of liberal reformism or a radical fundamental movement into a new era of the experience.

White History

When I speak about White History, it should be very clear that I am not talking about simply the history that white people write. I am talking about a history that has deluded and encompassed us all. Many blacks, as well as whites, teach and write and live as if White History were the only history, the only approach to the definition of the American experience. White History is the mainstream history. White History is essentially the history of affirmation of the society. If you go through almost any textbook, you will see that the history is leading toward affirmation; it is political. White History is the history of justification, whether religious or secular. It is the history that finds basic justification and basic goodness in the very nature of American society.

White History is also the history of exclusion and ethnocentrism. It is a history that assumes that this is a white man's world/civilization/universe. Note any course you can think of on world civilization and see what it is that it actually teaches. In coming to our particular nation, it assumes that this is a white man's country. Then it also assumes, either explicitly or implicitly, that only white people have the right and the capacity to define the nature of this country, the nature of its past, and therefore, of course, the nature of its present and its future, because those who have the right to name the past also have the right to name the present and the future.

White History is a history that includes anybody else only in small smatterings, and when others are included in small smatterings, that is considered to be a special favor over which there should be great rejoicing and book parties. The attitude of White History is an attitude of tremendous

arrogance. It is a history that assumes that this nation began, indeed, as a gift of God. This is a kind of history that can make it possible for American leaders to feel that they have a special mission in the world, whether it be in Vietnam or in Haiti. Of course the tragic thing, and the thing that we must be dealing with, is that White History is the history that is taught in almost all of the public schools, and all of the colleges and universities of this land. Therefore, White History is deeply in you and me, whether we like it or not.

Let me give you an example of White History. I take an example from one of the best known of the American chroniclers, a man by the name of Thomas Bailey, whose book, **The American Pageant**, is widely used and read, especially in the American colleges and in some high schools. It was first published in 1965, and has been reprinted many times. In the introduction to his work, Bailey gives a very succinct introduction to what White History is all about: *The American Republic, which is still relatively young, was from the outset, singularly favored.* He introduces that whole theme of how we came into a very special kind of situation—we meaning white America of course—and there was a favoring from the outset. He doesn't say favoring from whom or by what, but it was favored. It means by God, by nature, and by everybody who has any power in the universe. *It started from scratch on a vast and virgin continent, which was so sparsely peopled by Indians that they could be eliminated or pushed aside. Such a magnificent opportunity for a great democratic experiment.* There are no ellipses in between these two sentences that follow right after one another. The Indians could be eliminated and pushed aside; such a magnificent opportunity for a great democratic experiment may never come again. Thank the Lord! For no other

Vincent Harding, former professor of history and sociology at Spelman College, former lay minister of the Menoite Church, former advisor and speech writer for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is the founder and director of the Institute of the Black World in Atlanta. He has authored sundry articles and poems and is currently putting the finishing touches on his book on the history of black radicalism in America to be published by Howard University Press.

This article is an edited version of a lecture-seminar given to black students during the Summer, 1971, Research Symposium of the I.B.W. Vincent says he would write it differently today, and therefore allows its publication with reservation. He is critical of the fact that he has given only passing reference to white radical history, especially since the 1960's, and is now working on a piece that deals with that question more fully. Drawings are from *Negroes in American History: A Freedom Primer*, by Frank Ciociorka (Atlanta: SNCC, The Student Voice, Inc., 1966).



huge, fertile and uninhabited areas are left in the temperate zones of this crowded planet. On to the moon. *The US, despite its marvelous development, will one day reach its peak as Greece and Rome did. It may ultimately fall upon evil days as they did, but whatever the uncertainties the future may hold, the past is at least secure.* This is White History. The certainty that they hold the past in their hands, that is the past, at least, that they know and can hold onto, the past of special favoredness. If anything else, with all those colored people going wild around the world, is insecure, we have this white past in our hands. We hold these truths. That is White History.

Essentially, the politics of that history is a reactionary politics at worst, and a conservative or mildly moderate-change politics at best. And why is

that to be expected? If your basic perception of the past is that you started out with the best nation in the world, then there is no essential impetus to move forward for radical change. Indeed, the major impetus is to move toward the good ole days. Can we not recapture and recover the great wisdom of the forefathers? There are an increasing number of reports and articles in which American college students are reported to be into a deeply nostalgic kind of thing, because they have no sense of the future, and for them the past is the golden days. This is White History—a politics of reaction, of conservatism, of mildly moderate change at best to alter certain kinds of things so that we can keep on the road we have started on.

There are some interesting and important variations that are breaking off, and have consistently broken off, from the mainstream on the part of white historians. There is the Marxist, and there is the pseudo-Marxist White History, like Genovese's new book, which he has the nerve to call *The Red and the Black*. In his case that is not an authentic variation at all. I think that perhaps Staughton Lynd, Jesse Lemisch, and George Rawick are examples of white historians who try to raise the consciousness, particularly of white people, to all of the class issues that are basically subjugated in mainstream White American History. They represent one group; I think that we can learn something profitably from them. My own sense is that we must always be totally attentive to the points in which we can learn something from especially these non-mainstream white historians.

There are other kinds of white historians who are now talking about white America as Black History has talked about white America up to now. They probably will play some kind of function as far as the education of white America is concerned. I am not sure how much, because I am not sure how much of a readership they reach, because most of what they do will *not* get into the mainstream educational channels at all. So I am not quite sure what their function is.

Now there are others, of course, who will come out of these sociologizing schools and who are unable to deal with the structural realities of racism in American society. They deal much more with the 1940's, 1950's version of racial prejudice—as an individualistic kind of thing and cannot deal with the issues of the powers of the society that have to do with institutional racism.

Then, of course, there are the justifiers of America who do it in new ways, who talk about, for instance, the new great trust in young America, in America's white youth. Basically, they still reveal a hope and faith in that which is intrinsically white American; you can always tell the varieties of

White History by that final point.

The last variety is what I would call the new traditionalists—those who really are talking about going back to the virtues of the earlier periods of American society, going back to the kind of basic revolutionary tendencies of the American society and building anew on the groundwork of the Fathers. Again, these kinds of liberal white historians are constantly in conflict, and we are constantly in conflict with them from the point of view of Black History, because they are still standing on white American ground. They feel that some grounds in white America are more possible than other grounds. What we are saying is that the whole ground has to be upset, that there is no point of hope as far as white American systems and points of view and historical understanding are concerned.

Negro History

Now Negro History. First, let me say that I personally, and many of us who have moved away from Negro History, owe a tremendous debt to Negro History. It introduced us for the first time to the nature of some of the struggles and experiences of black people that we simply had not been aware of, living in the midst of White History. I cut my teeth on John Franklin's **From Slavery to Freedom**, one of the prime examples of Negro History. It should be clear at the outset that I speak about Negro History not as a put-down, but as a recognition of, first, the debt that is owed, and, second, the fact that we cannot live on debts, but move forward toward the future.

Negro History accepts much, indeed most, of the basic white assumptions about the nature of society. This is its greatest burden. The overall picture is a picture of America as a great nation. Negro History sees some flaws, sees some blood, sees some pain, but essentially these are apparitions. Negro History continues to talk about the great ideas and the high moral purposes of American society. Fundamentally, it says as history, as methodology, as approach: Include us in. Include us in the basic, good story. Learn a bit more about us. Teach a bit more about us. Buy some more of our books. Educate your children some more about what we have been and done, especially about our great men, and all will be well. Hence, Negro History Week. The politics that goes along with Negro History is naturally a politics that is quite in keeping with that point of view—the politics of the leap into the mainstream.

Let me give you some examples of Negro History that I discussed in **Beyond Chaos**. One of the most influential of Negro History books was a

volume for secondary schools called **The Story of the Negro Retold**, written by Carter G. Woodson, the man who has rightly been called the father of the Negro History movement, a major scholar, one of the most significant men in our intellectual history, or in our struggle. First published in 1935, it contained segments of his earlier works. Woodson speaks about the kind of history he feels must be dealt with in relation to White History, and notice the kinds of binds that he comes to. Under the subtitle "Truth Not to be Neglected," he says: *In our own particular history we should not dim one bit the luster of any star in our firmament.* Now those two possessive pronouns themselves are very, very important. *Our* and *our*, because there are two different references there. When he says "our" in "our own particular history," he means Negro History. In "we should not dim one bit the luster of any star in our firmament," he means "our" white Americans' firmament. Very interesting, that same kind of two-ness that DuBois was always speaking about, "our" and "our" referring to two different identities and realities. So Woodson is saying that history should not in any way dim any star that's in the white historical firmament. Peaceful co-existence. *Let no one be so thoughtless as to decry the record of the makers of the United States of America.* We black people can be included in your history without threatening



your story. That is a second major thrust of Negro History. Think about the kind of politics that would naturally go along with that.

We should not learn less of George Washington, First in war, First in peace, and First in the hearts of his countrymen, but we should learn something also of the three thousand Negro soldiers of the American Revolution, who helped to make this "father of our Country" possible. Here again is the emphasis on how we helped to make America great, on our "contributions" to America. Here you also find this tragic kind of dependence upon the history of black fighting men so prevalent in Negro History. It tries to plead the cause of justice for black people by saying: Look at how we fought in your wars for your causes, for this great democracy. Don't we deserve the rights that all other people have? That is not just an historical matter of methodology. It is one of the major realities of black life. Somehow there is a belief that America will accept us more fully if we fight their battles. And, of course, that is not confined to America. It is a typical colonial approach to the problems of the mercenary forces. Whether they be the Senegalese or the Jamaicans, or whoever, blacks prove their worthiness by fighting at the orders of their masters.

Woodson continues: *We should not fail to appreciate the unusual contribution of Thomas Jefferson to freedom and democracy, but we should invite attention also to one of his outstanding contemporaries, Benjamin Banneker, the mathematician and astronomer.* Two other aspects of Negro History emerge here: (1) the acceptance of the idea that individuals are the important story, great, talented, gifted individuals who can meet the standards of white society; and (2) the adoption of white people's standards to prove that we are good because we have some folks who can stand by their standards as well. There is a tremendous problem involved here. Take even C.L.R. James, for instance, a brother who has spent so much of his life in the struggle. He legitimizes African art through Picasso. The measure of how great African art is, is that Picasso uses it. Therefore, African art is not legitimate in its own sense, by its own standards, but because of the contribution that it has made to the Western world. Of course, CLR does not get into this in terms of his major thrust, but it is interesting to see it cropping up at various kinds of places.

We should in no way whatever (and notice this little bit here that tells you this was originally written prior to the US entry into World War I) withhold assistance from the effort to make the world safe for democracy, but we should teach our citizenry history rather than propaganda and thus make this country safe for all elements of the popu-

lation at home. A very tragic kind of thing. What it is saying, of course, is: Don't listen to A. Phillip Randolph talking about "Don't go and support; don't fight for freedom and democracy if you can't have it at home." On the other hand it says: A. Phillip Randolph is right, we don't have it at home. This two-ness is constantly there: we've got to support the government, but we wish the government would change things.

My final example of Negro History is from Benjamin Quarles' **The Negro in the Making of America**. Of course the title itself is an interesting one. It is a very well-written book. If you want a brief summary history of this particular brand of the telling of the black story, there is almost no place else that you can find something in 175 pages or so like Quarles' narrative story. He wrote, and this was in 1963, *A proper perspective of Negro history would be of value to those well-meaning persons who believe that the colored man has an unworthy past and, hence, has no strong claim to all the rights of other Americans.* I am reminded here of when Mrs. DuBois talked about how much of a gentleman W.E.B. DuBois was, and how she felt that so many white people in today's world would just love to have DuBois back around because he was so polite in his condemnation of the Western world, and he didn't use the kind of language that some of our contemporaries use. That's another hallmark of Negro History: tremendous politeness and given to euphemism. "Those well-meaning persons" is another term for white folks, particularly white liberals ". . . who believe that the colored man has an unworthy past, and hence has no strong claim to all the rights of other Americans" evinces another theme: if we can prove that we have a past, then we, too, are worthy. You become worthy of American democracy by proving that you have a past as good as white people. Thus the whole emphasis on black pride becomes a very tricky matter, because the issue is pride for what? Pride towards what? *Books, Quarles continues, which seek to present an accurate picture of the Negro's past are, in effect, bridges to inter-group harmony.* (What are bridges to inter-group harmony?) *The Negro would be more readily accepted into the full promise of American life if his role in our history were better known.* Here is another theme of Negro History: it's like that story about how the Russian peasant really felt that if the tsar only knew the troubles that they were in, he would change things. Well, in this sense the American public at large becomes a tsar. Then you say: if only well-meaning white people really knew about the American Negro, they would change their attitude. Once I asked Ben Quarles about that, and he confirmed what I had specu-



lated on in that essay, i.e., that many Negro historians believed that because they didn't know what else to believe. They believed and wrote out of belief because they had come so far through "clanking chains and melting prayers" that they could not afford to consider unbelief as a live option. And if they did not believe, there was a great abyss ahead of them which they weren't quite ready to face.

This is Negro History, and it obviously carries with it implicitly and explicitly the politics of integration. It is essentially a history that comes out of the assumption that we belong in the story. We can be fitted in without the story crumbling apart. The kind of story that Negro History wanted white people to know was essentially a portfolio of credentials, and not the deepest accusations that the history of the masses of black people would put to white people. If white people read most of Negro History, it would simply be these portfolios. Whites still wouldn't know about themselves, because they wouldn't know us. They would know that perhaps they had a lot of talented Negroes around who perhaps they were not giving enough chances. But Negro History would not prepare them for understanding a William Calley.

Black History

Black History moving out of the whole Negro History movement and experience is a history that is an explosion of the white assumptions concerning American society. Where White History, and to a large degree Negro History, affirms white society, Black History says that we cannot possibly affirm our mommies and daddies and affirm White History too. There is no way we can do both, and since we do not mean to give up on our mommies and daddies, then we must not affirm White History. Black History looks at the justification of White History and says that there is no way in which you can justify the society. If God indeed ordained the society, then we can do without that God. Black History moves out of the context of the experiences of black people in America and judges America on the basis of our experiences. That is the only way in which the society can be judged by black people. Even other people are now learning that the proper way to judge the nature of the American experience is by the way in which the most downtrodden of the society have been treated. When White History says America has been a land of goodness from the beginning, Black History obviously rejects this and tells another story. When White History says that only whites have the right to define this society, Black History says that there is no American history, because white people have written without

dealing with the black and red experience. Therefore, they have no history. A history filled with errors and gaps is no history.

Black History is not just about black people; Black History is not just about black things. Black History speaks about seeing all of America through black eyes, about placing our definition not only on the black experience, but on the entire experience. If you do that, then a totally different picture of America emerges, because black history says our experience, our history, our story *cannot be assimilated* into the mainstream American story. It is an organism that is totally at war with the mainstream story. Either it must be rejected, or a whole new experience has to be created to bring it in.

The politics of Black History flows very naturally. It is a politics that goes counter to the mainstream politics. It is a politics that says the mainstream, indeed, is polluted and befouled and what is necessary for black people is to move to new rivers of life, to create them ourselves. So, Black History cannot deal with either the kind of patronage of White History or the kind of integrationism of Negro History. It calls for a new move. A new move by which we define not only what the past has been, but what the future will be.

Now let us view the way in which these three different approaches to history would deal with certain key events in the American experience.

The Origins Question

Let us take—as if we were in the usual American history course, beginning with the origins—American society with our forefathers and the land from which they came. Now when any American history course starts out with the origins of the society, it starts out with Europe and with England in particular, since that is where we started. It starts out with Western culture, since that's what we are. Basically, until very recently, that was all there was in terms of origins. We learned more about Pilgrims than we knew about Sundiata, which is, of course, deeply tragic. We were learning about other people's fathers and calling them our own, making ourselves the bastards of the world. This is the natural result of colonization.

Negro history moved in on this scene and brought out Africa for the first time. We must give praise where praise is due. But Africa is brought out in a very ambiguous way. Africa is brought out again to prove that we, too, have a heritage, that we, too, have something that will make us worthy to move into the society. If you people have



England and France and Germany and Italy, we, we've got Africa. Ain't that as good as what you all got? Of course, J.A. Rogers would carry it someplace else. He is a particular maverick in that whole area. But there is still a kind of ambivalence, saying, "Yes, it was great then, but you know we're sort of glad that we are here now."

Note Shirley Graham's marvelous novelistic advocacy of Frederick Douglass' life, **There Once Was A Slave**. It's a very good piece, written for a so-called youth audience. She has a very interesting segment where Frederick Douglass, before he runs from Maryland, comes in touch with a conjurer, a man who was born in Africa. Just before he leaves, Sandy the Conjurer comes to him and brings him a little bag. Sandy empties the bag out in his hand and begins to give the things to Frederick Douglass, and says, *Look now, soil of Africa. Come across the sea close to my mother's breast; and here seaweed flowered on far off waters. A thousand years of dust on one hand. Dust of men long gone. Men who lived so that you can live. Your*

dust. He handed Frederick the little bag, and she says Frederick took it reverently. Suddenly Frederick knew that his life was important, and Frederick never mentions this again. This is in a way a part of that whole ambiguity of the Negro History movement and the African origins. There is something important, something great, but not as it impinges now upon the immediate American scene. It is only there to prove that we have a past as good as their past.

Black History is seeking to do something else, and there is still struggling among us to understand what it is that we are seeking to do. But Africa, for Black History, is no longer something that you compare with the white Western world. Africa, in Black History, is an absolute challenge to the white Western world. Indeed, it claims to be mother and shaper of human society. It claims to have insight toward the nature of human existence that is far more authentic than that which has been found in the truncated experience of the white Western world. When Lerone Bennett speaks about blackness being the truth of the world, he reflects this point of view.

The Settlement Question

Take the stories of the settlement of this country. The white story, the White History, is that white people were sent here by God, either secular Gods or religious Gods, but that somehow through historical forces or divine forces, whites were sent to this continent by God. The story continues as how they fulfill all of the marvelous things that they are supposed to do. That's what Thomas Bailey's **The American Pageant** is all about: being wonderfully favored and being able to get rid of all those people who are populating the virgin land.

On the settlement question Negro History essentially does not challenge the white presence, the white purpose, the white deeds, the white action, but simply says that if you were here early, we were here early also, and indeed some of us were here before you were here. *Estevanico!* It becomes a kind of game as it were. On certain levels it is a very important matter of establishing black presence on this land, if it is used for the purpose of establishing black presence and the right of black presence. If it is used again, as it has been used so much in Negro History, simply to prove that we are those who were here, and therefore who ought not be put out of the land, then that is another matter.

Black History is not particularly concerned about proving when we got here, but certainly challenges the white interpretation of what white people were doing here. This is a very crucial matter. Black History essentially says: if there was in-

deed a God that sent anybody here called pilgrims or anybody else to these shores, then the moment they touched these shores they corrupted their essential mission. Black History says, there can be no society that on the one hand eliminates the original inhabitants, subjugates those who are brought from another continent, and then calls itself a democracy. It is impossible to have a democracy and the slaughter of the Indians and the subjugation of black people. Black History, then, raises questions about the origins of the society itself, about the basic beginnings of the society.



The Founding Fathers

Take the revolutionary period, the period of the Constitution and someone's founding fathers. White History says this was the period of greatness, this was the period when the basic institutions of democracy were founded, when victory was won for revolution, when men of great stature and wisdom walked the land. And Negro History by and large agrees, but adds that we were also present. We will not dim the luster of one star. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, yes, they will all stand, but we were present. Benjamin Banneker was planning Washington. We fought and we died. Crispus Attucks!

Black History raises different kinds of questions. Black History looks at 1776 and it asks: how can there be a revolution that leaves 750,000 people in slavery? Black History moves to the challenging of the very basic myths, in the best sense of that word, of the American society, the creative rememberings of the American society, a challenge at their heart. People talk about the Constitution as one of the great documents of Western society. But the Constitution of 1789 up to the Civil War was a constitution in which slavery was so deeply embedded that war indeed had to be fought in order to write it out of the Constitution. What kind of document must that be? And, of course, no one need say anything about the founding fathers, for what kind of society can men found who, on the one hand, are slave traders and, on the other hand, are slave owners? What is the future of that society? Black History, then, raises the crucial questions about the past, as well as the present and the future.

Slavery

On the question of slavery, the same kind of spectrum appears. White History essentially justifies slavery—in terms of economics, in terms of rescuing black people from savagery. In the more



liberal White History sometimes there is a passing condemnation of slavery. Nevertheless, White History deals with slavery through white eyes. In its methodology it follows the records of slavery through the records of the masters—looking at what white people said and did about slavery and about slaves.

Negro History interestingly enough, does very little studying of slavery itself. If you go through the **Journal of Negro History** you will find that only a small minority of the articles there deal with slavery, and of that small minority, the vast majority are written by white people—a very interesting phenomenon. Instead of dealing with slavery, Negro History by and large says that yes, there was slavery and we were in degradation, but look at the special Negro accomplishments that were made both in the North and the South during the time of slavery. Look at our inventors. Look at our writers. Look at our poets. Look at our special pulpit men. Look at the Abolitionist movement. Look at all the things that we did in spite of the fact that slavery was going on. We shall push it behind us for the time being. Indeed, some strands of Negro history say, let's not even deal with slavery. Slavery was too agonizing an experience for us to look at.

Black History says that these people were not slaves. Black History says these were our fathers and mothers who were held in bondage. It is a different kind of thing. We must know about their life during slavery. We must know about the way in which they struggled against the bonds of slavery, how they endured slavery, how they constructed their life to deal with that particular aspect of white power upon them. We must know these things for our own good and for the vindication of our fathers. We must know the very creativity that they brought in the midst of that agonizing experience. The story of slavery must not ever become simply the story of what white people did to us. If that is all it is, then it is nothing else but White History painted black. Black History must start from the ground of where black people are, of what they are doing and what the nature of their experience and their relationship is with a larger society.

Manifest Destiny

Let me skip over the Civil War and Reconstruction for now, but I do want to say something about the whole idea of Manifest Destiny because this again has something to do with the politics of history. White History talks about something called Manifest Destiny. It talks about something called the winning of the West. Consistently, White History speaks about that whole experience, especial-



ly that post-Civil War experience, as the fulfilling of the destiny of the nation to rise to a world power status, which means to a status of world exploiter, world dominator, and racist imperialist nation.

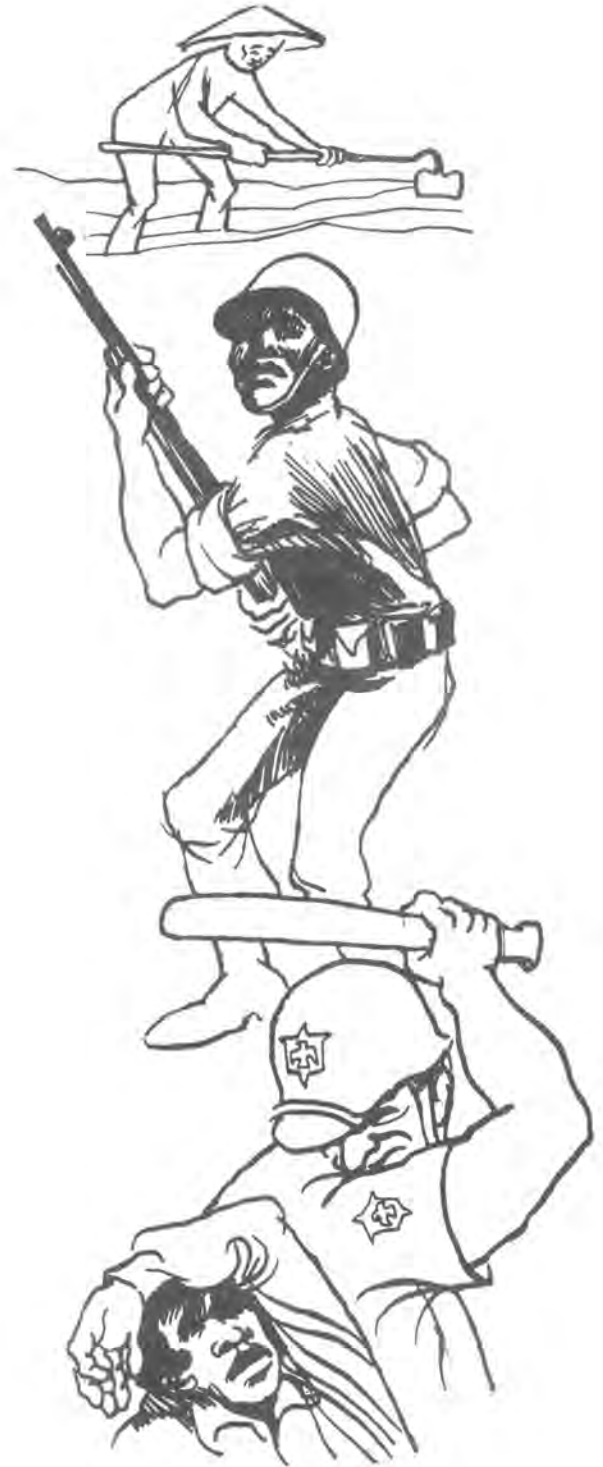
Negro History is perhaps most tragic of all in that whole experience, because Negro History comes in on westward expansion by talking about black cowboys and by talking about how we were there too, and how we played our role in the winning of the West. Negro History tells us about the Negro soldiers who were with Teddy Roosevelt going up San Juan Hill, in spite of what Teddy Roosevelt had to say about those Negro soldiers. Negro History affirms the great expansion of American society.

Black History asks the question: What did this expansion mean? What did it mean for the non-white peoples over whom the expansion took place? What did it mean for the non-white people in the United States of America? More recently, what did it mean for the people of Vietnam? How did it ever get out there in the Pacific, and what does that

have to do with Manifest Destiny, and American racism, and the experience of our people?

Civil Rights Movement

Now let's look at the civil rights movement. Take the origins of the civil rights movement. White History interprets the coming of the civil rights movement primarily in terms of the 1954 Supreme Court school decision, which means that the civil rights movement was created by nine white men. Here again is that particular assumption in the methodology of White History that anything that is good is created somehow by white people. White History sees the 1954 decision as the emerging of a new liberalism in American society after World War II, and a whole lot of Negroes see it that way too. One of the most important contributions that Negro History made is to keep us in touch with the legal and other kinds of struggles that organizations like the NAACP were waging which led to the Supreme Court decision. So Negro History does begin to tie us into the movement of black people in a very important way. Black History, again, goes beyond that. Black History say that while Negro History indeed is right in calling our attention to the black struggle going on in this country all along—which simply surfaced during this period in 1954 and beyond—one still cannot possibly understand either the Supreme Court decision or the movement since 1955 unless placing it into the international context of the struggles of non-white peoples across the globe. Black History suggests that it is more than coincidence that the Bandung Conference of colonized people and the Montgomery bus boycott began in the same month, in the same year. It is certainly coincidental that they happen to come at that same time, but their coming was not coincidental at all. Black History demands that we see the larger context of our movement. Certainly, Black History says, don't look at that Supreme Court unless you see the specter of Soviet Russia looking over their shoulders, for what America was involved in was proving to the non-white world how much they loved colored people, because Russia was telling everybody how much they loved colored people and revolutionary movements. And, of course, Black History says, none of this can be understood without a sense of the movement of the African States that were the beginning to rush at this particular time. Everything that we do in this land must be seen, Black History says, in the context of the larger Pan-African situation.



The Viet Nam War

It is in the telling of the story of the Vietnam

War that we find for the first time, really since the Depression, a basic cracking apart of the views of White History and some deep questioning about the nature of the society. A marvelous study would be to read the various media as they responded to the **Pentagon Papers**. What you find again and again (still White History) is My God, this is terrible stuff! Wow! They sure did do that! Oh Lord, did they really? But, of course, we have to support the President. This was simply an aberration. If we can get this straightened up, if we can do the right things and elect the right people, then we will be well again. Now this is basic concept that one must always catch: an expectation in White History that whatever goes wrong, the nation is so essentially healthy that it can be righted, and we will be healed again.

Negro History has found itself in a very interesting bind during this Vietnam period. Negro History began in this period by again recounting the role of the black soldier. But then, tragically, it counted so well that it said, "Lord, look at how many black soldiers there are indeed in front-line combat duty. What does all that mean?" Negro History then began having to deal, not only with black combat soldiers and black casualties, but with what the Vietnam War meant in the midst of the bursting of the cities that began to take place. Negro History ends up in many of the same kinds of difficulties that White History is in, largely because of the deep connection between the two. But Negro History now begins, in some of the older and certainly some of the more middle-aged, late forties or early fifties persons, more questioning of the basic nature of the American society than one has ever seen in that movement.

Black History, on the other hand, cannot talk about America becoming whole again. Black History sees Vietnam as a continuation of America's basic wound, of America's basic illness, of America's basic role as an enemy of the liberation movements of non-white peoples of the world, starting with its own. Anybody who looks at what happened to Indians and who looks at what happened to black people can almost predict what it is that America is going to be up to next where non-white people are concerned. Black History sees Vietnam as simply another move on the downward path of the society, not an aberration, but a part of a consistent movement of the society. Further, Black History notes with great interest that this is the first war in which the masses of black people made no great economic strides, not even a temporary one. And it is during this war, we note from the perspective of Black History, that the first large-scale questioning of whether we want to be a part of this kind of society emerges.

Now I close with some comments about the implications of this black understanding of society. If you take the position of looking at America from this black position, you take a very dangerous position. What are you going to do when this society calls on you to defend it in Vietnam or any place else? What can you say other than, "What is there to defend as far as black people are concerned?" Very dangerous. But more dangerous is that you recognize that there are no grounds for trust in the mainstream, in those who set the directions of this country now, in those who are the children of the children of those who set the direction of this country for the last 350 years, who are the poisoners of the land, the poisoners of the sea and the poisoners of the air. And you recognize that what you are tied to is a tragic story. The question, therefore, becomes how do you break with this? Then one is tempted to many kinds of romanticism. But, of course, the only implications that are possible are totally new and dangerous directions, whether they be in education, in politics, or in one's own personal life. All of this must be created anew by black hands, out of the black vision of what the society is all about. It cannot be a copy. Now if we can't copy it, and if this is what we have been tied into, and if this is indeed the vision that we have from Black History, what indeed is the way ahead? I think that these are the kinds of questions that we are forced into if we move from White History to Negro History to Black History, indeed, on to a Pan-African understanding of the very nature of this society.





UAW Sit-down Strike

ATLANTA, 1936

by Neill Herring and Sue Thrasher

The drive to organize the employees of the mighty General Motors Corporation culminated in the historic Flint sit-down of early 1937, but it began in a small branch assembly plant on the outskirts of Atlanta on November 18, 1936. Organization had rooted in the Lakewood plant in 1933 in the form of an AF of L "federal" local, but in common with so many of those hybrid unions which accompanied the National Recovery Act, the organization seemed doomed to impotence by its structure. As economic conditions worsened during Roosevelt's lackluster year of 1936, the forces which had spurred unionization multiplied. The speed-up, determined by the demands of investors, was intensified while wage levels were unimproved. The seasonal character of the work militated against any job security, and the continued intransigence of management to any form of independent organization all contributed to the strike wave, both nationally and in Georgia.

While the AF of L local had disappeared when its fatal insistence on craft division had rendered it inoperative, the conditions which spawned it had not. The need for organization remained, the form presented itself in the creation of the CIO by dissident AF of L unions in 1935. Centered around John L. Lewis' United Mine Workers, a variety of fledgling unions quickly spread tender organizational roots throughout the country, and Atlanta's Lakewood plant joined the United Automobile Workers (UAW) as Local 34. In truth, only a handful of union faithfuls had joined the Local before November, 1936; but the participation of the entire work force in the strike showed that hearts, if not wallets, were in the right place. Holding out for over three months in the snowy winter of 1936-37, the mettle of the organization was well tested and gained rather than lost strength.

Why Atlanta, with no appreciable organized influence in the auto plant, should precede the industrial capitals to the north in precipitating the strike wave has been something of a mystery.

Sidney Fine, in his "standard" work on the General Motors strikes of 1936-37, Sit-Down, gives credit to UAW General Executive Board member Fred Pieper for having called the workers in Atlanta out on strike. The following interviews reveal that the decision to stop work was a collective one and the influence of the national union was peripheral to both the call and the conduct of the strike. Fine seems to think that Atlanta was travelling under the illusion that a nationwide strike was imminent and that was the conclusive factor in their decision. While Local 34's president at that time, Charlie Gillman, acknowledges that they thought the rest of the plants would come out soon, the local conditions were the dominant factor in the move to strike. This is underscored by the wide support the strike enjoyed among the work force even though union membership was miniscule in the plant. Push coming to shove was a far more decisive factor in Atlanta than Executive strategy.

Fine's position is based on his source, the papers of Fred Pieper. His unfortunate reliance on the single account of a figure who seems to have been somewhat removed from the center of action during the Lakewood sit-down and subsequent picket is typical of the errors which have contributed to making academic history what it is today: an ideological commodity, bagged with apologetics and bloodless inaccuracies.

But the labor movement, perhaps more than any other institution in our society, is a thing of flesh and bones, demanding a history of people, not individual leaders. This is particularly true in the initial stages of development, in that period when solidarity is not just a curious word, but a culmination of human values galvanized into action. It is in this interest that Southern Exposure presents these interviews—history from the bottom up.

Photographs of the 1936 strike are from the personal collections of Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Gillman and Mr. and Mrs. W.A. Cowan.



We were very proud of the accomplishments we made for people out there in that shop, and we don't apologize for anything we did. Anything that we put in building that union was worth it. All the people that worked there during that time will tell you now that there was no greater thing ever happened to them as far as work was concerned.

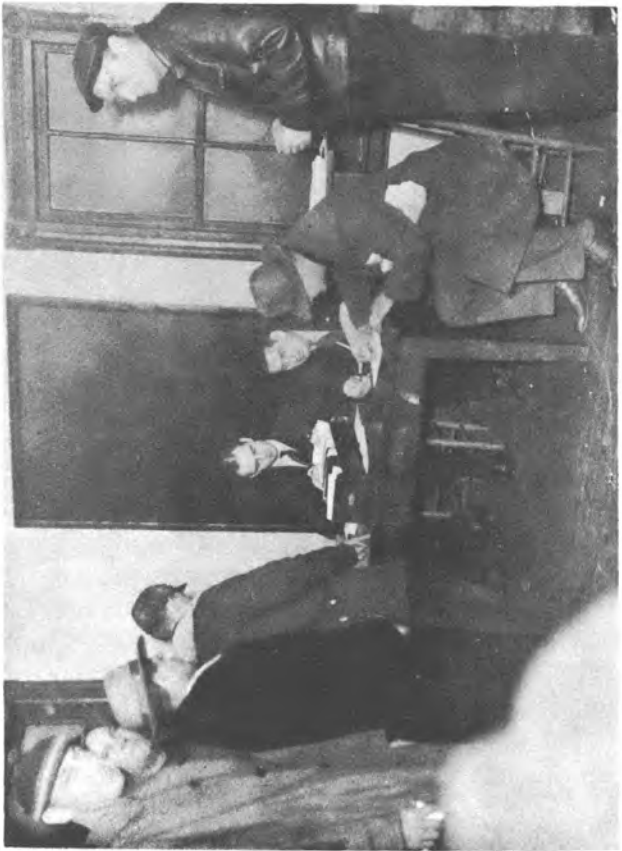
—Charlie Gillman





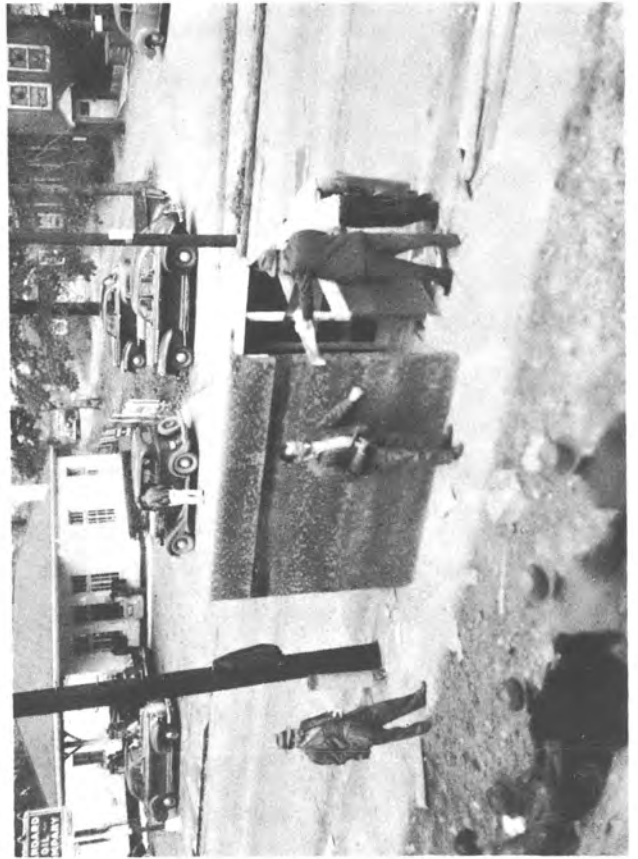
It was a difficult time to picket because there was snow and ice on the ground the three months we were out. It was rough. That's the reason I said that carload of coal saved the day. It was a great day. It was a fine experience.

—Charlie Gillman



We never had any problem of manning the picket line as long as we were on strike, all these places were filled up every day, and that is kind of remarkable that people were that much interested, and willing to fight for the union that they went out every day. Sunday included.

—Charlie Gillman



Mr. Charlie Gillman was President of the UAW Local 34 at the time of the sit-down strike in 1936. A few years later, he went to work full time with the CIO to build a regional office and stayed with the AFL-CIO until his retirement in 1968. Mrs. Gillman is a staunch union supporter, and for almost fifty years has actively supported and conspired with her husband to build a trade union movement in the South.*

Here they talk about some of the conditons that led to the strike in the winter of 1936 and the significance of the strike in building the union.

Mr. Gillman: I was born in Birmingham, Alabama. We lived in Columbus and Augusta. We were married in Augusta, and then we came up here—during the Depression, wasn't it, honey? Dad was a custom tailor, and mother, well, she was a housekeeper, but she would assist him in rough going.

What did you do when you first moved to Atlanta?

Mr. Gillman: Worked in the Fisher Body plant. As I remember it, it had been operating only a few months.

Mrs. Gillman: You know, it's interesting how he got his job. They had a line of men out there looking for work, and the foreman—or whoever it was that hired people—came out and asked for somebody who could spit tacks. So he holds up his hand. He didn't have any more idea of what they meant by spitting tacks than a cat did. But they took him in, and handed him one of these little magnetic hammers and tacks. They had to show him how to do it, and the man told him that anybody who wanted a job that bad could have it.

How many people were working in the plant when you started? How big was it then?

Mr. Gillman: I guess we had close to 900 people in the Fisher Body side, and about the same, maybe a few less, in Chevrolet. They were divided, you see. Fisher Body would build the bodies, and they would go over on one of these chain things through the wall to Chevrolet and they would put the motor in and finish them up. . . .

We just got kicked around. We formed a union out there because in those days when a fellow went to work, he had no security of any kind. He didn't know if he would be working one day or the next, and as soon as the foreman had some member of his family out of work, why he would fire you and

bring this family member in so he wouldn't have to keep him up. It didn't make any difference if you had a half dozen children, or a dozen, or none at all as far as they were concerned. They would just as soon fire you if you didn't work as fast as they thought you should. The people just finally got tired of it, and the lack of security, I suppose, was the thing that really organized our plant. The fact that people just got tired of being pushed around.

See, what they would do, when they changed models, they would bring the people in and work twelve to eighteen hours a day, getting the new models ready. They would pay an hourly rate; I think at that time it was 45 cents an hour or something like that. Then when they had the dealers stocked up with new cars, they would put us on piece rates, and of course then we would only work two or three days a week.

I suppose we would rock along through the spring, until the spring season was over, working three days a week or usually less than that. But at any rate, we would work short hours like that until we got in debt again. And they always kept you in debt. They figured if you were in debt and owed everybody that you could owe, why then you couldn't quit, or you couldn't strike, or you couldn't do anything to better your life. So it was pretty rough out there at those times.

You remember, under Roosevelt they had the NRA days, and they were supposed to have had the right to organize in those days under that statute and under that declaration. So we didn't have any better sense than to think that they meant it, and we organized our union. We were ready then—we had built a good union about that time—and when things got so rough there, and they started kicking the people around, getting them to work faster, speeding up the line, we just quit. We pushed the button up in the trim department and shut the whole plant down. We just quit and stayed in there. Of course, we didn't go out. We appointed caretakers from among the people to see that there was no damage or any violation of fire regulations or any security as far as the plant was concerned, and we had no problem at all.

We finally got an agreement out of Roach, and Gallaher—we brought him in too, from the other side, from Chevrolet—that there would be no effort made to try to operate the plant; if we would go out of the plant, they would shut it down. So we agreed, and we went out. The union hall was right across the street from the plant, and we set up a picket line and built tent houses there on the sidewalk and all around the plant, and our pickets just practically stayed out there. We put stoves in the tents; it was in the cold weather, and we just set there, that's all.

* The interview with the Gillmans was conducted in October, 1973, at their home, by Neill Herring and Sue Thrasher.

The thing rocked along, of course, until the other plants shut down in the General Motors system. Ours was the first plant that went on strike. Of course, we were crazy. We thought at the time, we had been advised that some of the other plants were organized, but none of them were. The national union didn't have any money. It was new, young then, and they didn't have anything, so we had to get by the best we could. It was getting pretty rough too, after we had been out a few weeks, didn't have anything to eat, didn't have any money in the treasury or anything. So we set up what we called the food squad, the begging squad, and these fellows went out to the city market out here, and those farmers would give us bags of potatoes and onions and peas. I ate so many peas and onions I didn't want to see any more for a while after we got through. I'm telling you what's a fact, but they were good then. And we sent a couple of men throughout the automobile industry up north and chiseled some money out of them. Finally, when John Lewis moved in to run the national union, we was able to get some money out of them, and send around. We had a little bit.

One thing I remember, it was cold that winter too; it was right in the middle of it, January or February, ice all over the place, and we got ahold of Lewis and he had the miners ship us a carload of coal over from Birmingham. And that just about saved our day, I'm telling you, people were running low and our credit was about used up. The utilities were very cooperative, they didn't shut off any lights or gas or anything. Most of the real estate agents let us back up the rent. And they were very nice too. We didn't suffer any that way. The biggest trouble was we just didn't have enough to eat.

Mrs. Gillman: You know, one thing that always stuck in my mind about that whole difficult period was that some of those people had seven, eight and nine children. We were more fortunate, we only had one. And you can imagine what a terrible thing it must have been for them not to have food for those children and milk was out of the question. And if you got hold of a quart of milk, you felt that you were rich. It was really a very difficult time, and I was often amazed that we stuck it out as long as we did, it was a long strike.

How did you relate to the national UAW once the plant went down and you began to see that other plants weren't going to go down with you?

Mr. Gillman: Well, there wasn't anything we could do but stay down. They kept promising—Homer Martin, what a faker he was—he kept promising, "Ah, we're organizing, we're ready to go, we'll be ready, we'll join you," and they kept fooling around. They were organizing all the time, of course, but they had no semblance of an organi-

zation at all when we came down and struck the plant; we didn't have sense enough to know that. It was like one little old plant here trying to shut down General Motors. But it didn't take them long after we had started the thing down here. Most of the plants—Norwood, Ohio, Kansas City, and Buffalo—they all started and got right in the works, and very shortly we had all the plants organized. Of course the strike was over quite a while before we finished the organization in General Motors—the shops, parts departments, and all that—but it finally was done, and there is no relationship between the working conditions and the lives of the people who work for GM now and what used to prevail in these plants.

I was going to ask you if you wanted to say anything about the UAW leadership when you went out on strike here.

Mr. Gillman: Oh yeh, Ed Hall, George Addes, Wyndham Mortimer, although he was a Communist they claimed, he was a smart one. He was the one that actually held the union together, to tell you the truth. He was the one that did the negotiating, he and Ed Hall. National contracts, and I believe that Addes and Hall and Mortimer did more to build this union after Lewis turned it over as a national union than anybody in the organization. Mortimer was a Communist, there is no doubt about it, in my opinion. But the thing is, Communists in those days were useful to the labor movement if you would let them do their job of organizing and get them out. But if you left them in they would tear it up again, too. But Mortimer was an exception. Because they used him to negotiate on the contracts, he was very seldom around in the plant. His job was primarily to negotiate the grievances, and he did a good job of it. Ed Hall, of course, was a big old blustery fellow, and he would holler and hoop; well, they would work together. Hall would pound the table and holler, and Mortimer would sit back and say let's quiet down. Then the two working together would intimidate the management and then Mortimer would get the thing done. He was a good man. I liked Mortimer very much and always did while he was in the office.

Those three men, and Germer, Adolph Germer. He was an old miner, and he came with the CIO when John L. set it up. He saved our union down here, because we couldn't get anybody to come down here. Martin was always busy flying back somewhere, and the rest of them had their own problems. So they sent Germer down here and he stayed around a month at the worst time, 'cause we had been on strike for two or two-and-a-half months or something like that, and he came in and stayed with us. He was a smart fellow, and people loved him. He died, of course, not long ago.

With the exception of Homer Martin, you had faith in the national UAW leadership, and felt they helped the strike?

Mr. Gillman: Yes, they were adequate, and Reuther came along a little bit after that. Reuther was a smart fellow, too. Didn't agree with him all the time, but he was a smart person anyhow. His two brothers were smart, too. We had some very capable leadership at the top of the organization after they kicked Martin and his group out of there. Of course Martin got in by default 'cause we didn't know anything about him. He was a preacher and he could make a good speech, and so they elected him at the convention at Pontiac. But the others—R.J. Thomas, Addes, Mortimer and Ed Hall—very capable people. . . .

The strike lasted about three or four months. The thing about it is, with the conditions we had, if we didn't accomplish anything else, we established bargaining rights with the company. The first little contract we had just says that they will bargain for the members alone. And, of course, that didn't work very well. As we organized over in the other plant, why of course we changed the contract. But if we didn't do anything else, it brought those people together, and there wasn't a single man in that whole 1200, or whatever it was he had in the plant at that time, made any effort to go back to work that entire time. And we were able through that strike to bargain for decent wages. One of the best provisions of the contract was that we had a committee of workers that was able to go into the plant and time-watch jobs, to regulate the speed that the people were working and to take some of the

work off of them.

The first year of so of our contract, the committee had to handle grievances after they got through working eight or nine hours a day. They would have to go in at night with the management and negotiate the grievances. That was the first union, I suppose, in the city of Atlanta, that had to get out and fight to build an organization. There were unions here such as the Clothing Workers, but their contracts were negotiated at their headquarters: they was more or less from the top down. And the power company—the linemen were organized, and a few of the buildings and trades—but other than that, the people in our section here had very little knowledge about labor unions and all. That is true pretty well today, too, in many sections where the people are just absolutely afraid to talk to a labor person, afraid they will be fired from their jobs.

The union tended to bring the people together and give them a little pride. You know, so many people were just barely existing and not making enough to even eat on. They were losing some of their pride—the pride that people usually have to do better for their family, to have security, and to know that they will come in the next morning and go to work. That alone was worth the strike, if nothing else had been accomplished.

We were very proud of the accomplishments we made for the people out there in that shop, and we don't apologize for anything that we did. Anything that we put in building that union was well worth it. All the people that worked there during that time will tell you now that there was no greater thing ever happened to them as far as work was concerned.

Mrs. Gillman: I think one thing that many people tend to forget is the part that Roosevelt played in all of this, because I have always believed firmly that had we had another president other than Roosevelt, we would never have gotten as far as we have today. Because he made it possible for people in our level to do better for themselves by placing the Acts of Congress necessary to allow us to do the things that needed to be done, and of course, the person directly responsible for that was his wife, Eleanor.

Mr. Gillman: Yeh, she was smarter than he was.

Mrs. Gillman: She was much smarter than he was. And she was the one that put these little ideas in his head. And then, of course,

after he saw the value of it he went through with it, and I guess we just grew up with Roosevelt.

Mr. Gillman: Well, you had another you've forgotten, I think, that was instrumental in a great deal of the welfare legislation, the welfare of the people at the time anyhow—Ma Perkins, Secretary of Labor Perkins. Wonderful person, holy cow, and she and Mrs. Roosevelt they did the social work, the laws. I think the two of them together were fantastic. Ah, she was something. And we had no trouble getting on WPA down here during the strike. And she set up training schools to teach welding to our fellows who were on strike here, we had them all over the place.



That was one of the tents we had on the street, out there on the sidewalk. We had a little old old pot-bellied stove out there burning coal.

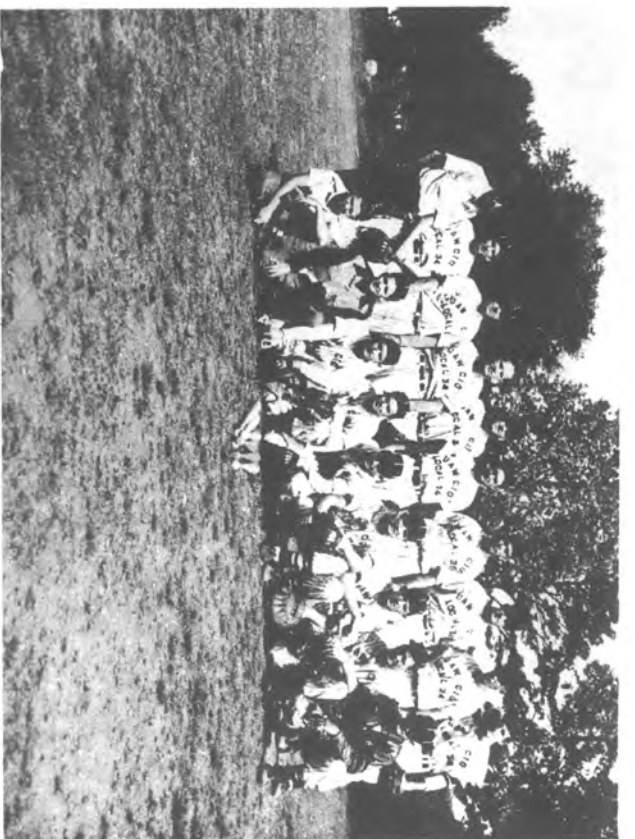
—W. A. Cowan





Here's some pictures in the kitchen of our wives. At that time, me and my wife, we didn't have no children, so on holiday nights and Christmas such as that, I would be where I could work the picket line and my wife would work in the kitchen, let them go home that had children.

—W.A. Cowan



Anybody that hasn't been through a strike hasn't lived. It does so much for you, makes you appreciate your union, that's all.

—Charlie Gillman





Left to right: Harvey Pike, Tom Starling, Mark Waldrop, and Claude Smith.

Photo by Sue Thrasher

Mr. W. A. Cowan went to work for the General Motors Lakewood Assembly plant [at that time, in the Fisher Body Division] in 1932, and retired in 1967. Harvey Pike began working for Fisher Body in February, 1929, and left the "last day of February in 1966." Between 1946 and 1950, he worked full-time for the regional CIO Southern Organizing Committee. Claude Smith first worked for General Motors in Norwood, Ohio in 1926, "built the first cushion" in the Atlanta plant, and retired in 1967. Tom Starling began working for Fisher Body in April, 1928. From 1941 until his retirement in 1968, he was on leave of absence from the plant to work full-time for the UAW, serving twelve years on the International Executive Board and fifteen years as international representative. Mark Waldrop came to work for Fisher Body in 1928 and worked there for five years, then quit and went into the grocery business "til Hoover came along and taken everything I had but my shirt, and I had to go back to work somewhere." He returned to Chevrolet for one year, and then moved to Ford where he worked for twenty-seven years. All five men were members of the fledgling UAW local at the time the sit-down strike occurred in November, 1936, and played key roles in the subsequent long, hard winter months of sustaining the strike and building a strong union.†



W.A. Cowan/Photo by Sue Thrasher

† The interview with W.A. Cowan, Harvey Pike, Claude Smith, Tom Starling, and Mark Waldrop was conducted by Sue Thrasher at the union hall of UAW Local 34 in September, 1973, and was arranged through the courtesy of W.A. Cowan, current president of the Retirees' Local.

Could you give us some of the background leading up to the strike?

Mr. Starling: In August of 1929, there was a lot of dissatisfaction over working hours. What happened was we were supposedly on piece work, but you could barely make day work on piece work. We had no overtime provisions then, and you didn't get paid a premium for working long hours. Where I worked in the Fisher Body paint department, they would run the line for ten or eleven hours a day and then there would be a lot of repair work to do on the bodies to finish them up. Quite a big group of workers would have to stay then, until 11 or 12 o'clock at night, to finish up that work. They were paid 35 cents an hour for overtime. They would have to be back to work the next morning at 7 o'clock, so it just went from bad to worse. We decided then, just the employees talking among ourselves, that we were not going to work beyond nine hours a day. I don't remember the date, but it was early August. We decided that we would go home after nine hours at 4:30. We went to work at seven o'clock and got thirty minutes for lunch; 4:30 would be a regular day's work. The company wanted the time to run until 6:30—eleven hours that was. Then they came back just before 4:30, and said they would agree to shut the line down at 5:30, just work ten hours. We said no, we were not going to work over nine hours, so at 4:30 we quit and went home. When we come back the next morning, the management had pulled the cards of the leaders and fired them, so the employees refused to go to work. They went in the plant, but they wouldn't go to work.

This was in August, 1929. We had a meeting in the plant and decided then that we would organize and we painted some signs of different types—one of them was demanding a dollar an hour and overtime. Then we formed a parade and paraded down to the labor temple. We had some speakers and set up a semblance of an organization. Had different departments to elect a spokesman from each department.

The AFL set up a committee among the AFL people and they met with management. The second day we were out, we all went back down to the labor temple to get a report. They reported to us that night that we would have to go back to work, that they were not prepared to take us into the union. The management had agreed that everybody could return to work with the exception of thirty people who they considered leaders in the movement, and those people would be fired. So the AFL advised us to go back to work the next morning.

When they named the people on the list to be fired, I was on the list. But I had worked with my

foreman in Pontiac, Michigan, so he got ahold of me and told me not to come in, that he would notify me when to come to work. Then he reported me out absent because of a death in the family. A few days later he told me to come in, and told me what he had told them and that he would substantiate my story. So that's the way I got back to work, and that was the end of the strike.

In 1933 a local union of the AFL was organized. We didn't have very many members, but we had a local union. Then in 1935, the Chevrolet transmission plant in Toledo went on strike, which was the only Chevrolet transmission plant General Motors had, which naturally would shut down all the other plants. But we got together and decided that we would strike in sympathy with the Toledo plant. So we shut the plant down. I don't remember the day, but it was in the spring of 1935. We were out for a month then, and when they ended the strike in Toledo, then we went back to work.

Mr. Pike: I'd like to point out since we brought in the old AFL, now we was under them in 1933, along in June of '33, until about October of '35. We left the AFL when the CIO was formed.

How strong was your union when it was an AFL union?

Mr. Pike: It was fairly strong. Like he said, we won the strike.

Mr. Starling: We continued under those conditions up until November 18, 1936. Actually our first incident happened on the 17th when they told the employees they couldn't wear union buttons.

Mr. Smith: I'm the guy that went and got permission to close the line down. The foreman, he walked up to the line and said, "Smith, if you push that button you're gonna lose your seniority." I said "To hell with it." I pushed the button, and that stopped the line, the first line that was stopped, General Motors Strike, 1936-37.

That was in the cushion department. I was steward in the cushion department. The issue was over the union button. My foreman told two of the boys that was wearing buttons, Fred Tyson and Fred Morgan, that if they didn't pull the buttons off they would have to go to the office and be fired. They came to me and asked me what to do about it. I told them I don't know, I will be back in a minute. So, I went over on the main line to see the president, Charlie Gillman. I said, "Charlie, they are after two of my boys over in the cushion department about the buttons. What do you want me to tell them?" He said, "You tell them, by god, to wear them." I went back over there, and that's when I reached up to push the button, and he said you're gonna lose your seniority. I told him it wasn't worth a damn nohow, so I pushed the button. So after I

pushed the button, my foreman said, "You're going to the office." And by that time all the people that I was steward over, just ganged around me and said he's not going anyplace.

After I got permission from Mr. Gillman to go back to tell the guys to wear the buttons, I went by and told Mr. Rawls, the vice-president of the local what the score was, and he jumped over out of the paint department into the cushion department and jumped up on the table—he had great big old feet, and he weighed about 200 pounds. He stamped his feet about four times, and waved his hands like that and everything in there went just like you could hear a pin drop. Every line stopped; every man except one, Zinc, he kept working. Somebody slapped him up the side of the head with a metal finisher. He stopped working then.

We stayed in the plant that night, all night, and we left the next morning about 9 or 10 o'clock. Our wives had formed an auxiliary and brought breakfast to us. We formed two lines for their protection—they was going to keep them out—so we just went down and made a walkway for them to bring food in.

How long had you been working in the plant then?

Mr. Smith: I built the first cushion that was ever built over there. I transferred from Norwood, Ohio, to the Atlanta plant. That was in '36; I had been working for General Motors ten years then. I went to work for them in 1926 in Norwood.

We all spent the night in there. Somebody slipped in and raised the skylight on us trying to freeze us out. But we pulled all the seat covers, cotton bats, and everything else. We made beds. (Laughing.) I guess we did \$10,000 worth of damage to the materials.

Mr. Cowan: I doubt that.

How many people were inside the plant?

Mr. Smith: Oh, I don't know. There was a full shift in there, just about it. There wasn't many people went home.

Mr. Pike: I'd say 95 percent stayed in.

Mr. Cowan: We sent some out to bring in tubs of coffee.

When those people went out to bring food back in, did they have any trouble getting back into the plant?

Mr. Smith: No, we formed a line.

Mr. Cowan: We made it easy. We told the guards that if they didn't open the door, we were going to open it for them, one way or the other. . .so they backed out, and let them open it.

Mr. Starling: One incident about the food that I remember, they said they couldn't bring food into the plant. Fred Pieper was outside, you know. He

had been appointed by the president of the international union, Homer Martin, to supervise this area. Fred told them, "Well, if we can't bring the food in, we will mail it in. You can't stop the mails." So then, they finally let them bring it in.

I think the point that really should be made is why did we leave the plant. Now most of the sit-down strikers stayed in the plant. But the committee met with management and Fisher Body—that is where the strike started—and they agreed that if we would vacate the plant that they would not attempt to operate the plant or move any of the plant equipment out until the strike was finally settled. And under those circumstances, we come on the outside the next morning and formed a picket line?

And how long did the strike last after that? That was the beginning of a long strike, wasn't it?

Mr. Pike: Three months and three days.

Mr. Waldrop: Ninety-seven days.

And the strike was settled nationally after the Flint sit-down strike?

Mr. Starling: Yeah, in organizational techniques, they had led us to believe that all the plants were organized, well organized, better organized than ours, and we were holding up the organization. We found out that after we struck this plant that we were the only plant that could strike. They were not able to shut any of the rest of them down.

You were the very first plant to shut down, is that right?

Mr. Starling: Yes. Later, and I don't remember in what order, but finally the Norwood plant went down, then the St. Louis plant went down, then the plant in Kansas City went down. So actually what happened in that strike that started in '36, all the plants. . .the only plants that went down in '36 were plants outside of Michigan. None of the Michigan plants went down until January of '37. That was when they had the sit-down strike in Flint. Turned out that southern plants went down before any of the plants in the north were able to shut down. There was negotiations then. Course I wasn't, none of us here participated in the national negotiations. National negotiations were handled principally by John L. Lewis, and the Vice President of the UAW, Mortimer. We were just looking at the original contract earlier and of course it was signed by William Knudsen, the president of General Motors. He had said less than a month before the contract was signed that he would never sign a union contract. But he did. I believe the contract was finally signed in February, 1937.

Did you have any trouble in the plant after you went back to work?

Mr. Smith: Oh no. They wasn't looking for no more. They had had all they wanted.



As fast as I could go around and tell the boys what was happening, they began to pile out and it wasn't long until every line in the plant was shut down.

—Mark Waldrop

Mr. Starling: After we went back, they made most of our stewards foremen. I assume they thought if they could make our stewards foremen, they could control the union. But they did attempt to organize a company union at Fisher Body, known as Fisher Body Employees Association which they set up, but it never did materialize into anything substantial. For instance, the plant manager, a guy by the name of Gleason, headed the union. He attended all the meetings and was the union advisor, so you can imagine what kind of a set up it was—strictly a company union set up.

Mr. Smith: Shank, in the maintenance department, was the head of it.

Mr. Pike: They also fired him [Shank] after we went back to work.

Mr. Smith: There was too many catcalls whenever he would come in to work. Why, it sounded like a fox chase from the time he would come in the front door until he would get to the pen they built for him back there in the back.

Mr. Waldrop: You asked if we had any trouble in the plant after we went back. I suspect about the biggest trouble was unexplainable accidents. A lot of times heavy hammers would fall off the top of the job on somebody's poor head.

Would that be somebody who hadn't gone out during the strike?

Mr. Waldrop: That'd be right. That would be somebody we were having trouble with.

Mr. Starling: Oh, we had some trouble after we went back with some of them that didn't want to

join the union, but we were successful in convincing them that they should join the union, so we had a very strong union after we went back. The only thing that made the strike successful was the fact that people who were not members of the union supported it, and after we went back, those people joined the union, paid their dues and all. The few exceptions, why their jobs were not too desirable for them in the plant under those circumstances, so most of them either joined the union or quit and left.

Mr. Smith: Tom King. He was a company union man, one of the officials of the company union. They sent him to Detroit. But after we went down and talked to him at his house that night and convinced him that he was on the wrong side of the fence, he brought the majority of the company union boys into the union.

Mr. Waldrop: Yeah, when he got converted, well, it didn't take long to convert the rest of them.

Mr. Starling: Yeah, Tom King turned out to be a very strong union man.

Mr. Waldrop, what department were you in? What were you doing at the time the strike started?

Mr. Waldrop: I was in the trim department. I would say in that department there were at least 250 men. I was putting windhose on the panel. That is that little roll that goes around the door. It was a rubber tube covered with fabric. I was working on the tables—I wasn't directly on the line. There was me and six girls working together. So, whenever I heard that the rest of them across the cushion room had set down, I went down the line telling them that

the boys had set down, and for them to get out of their jobs and quit. So, as fast as I could go around and tell the boys what was happening they began to pile out and it wasn't long until every line in the plant was shut down.

Did the women stay in the plant or did they go out?

Mr. Smith: No, we let them go out, and they brought back in food.

Do any of you know how big the plant was at the time the strike began?

Mr. Starling: The total employment in the plant, now this included the management, the office and all, was right around 1800.

Mr. Pike: About 1300 actual production workers.

Mr. Starling: I was in the paint department. The bodies were started in what we called a set up, the set up in the body shop. The frames were built there and they were actually built with wood in the body shop, then they were put on the line and the metal was put on them, and the finishing, you know. You see, the difference between the body today and then, all the metal now is stamped out; then it was put on in pieces and welded by hand.

How about you, Mr. Pike, what department were you in?

Mr. Pike: Body shop, where it started off. I was a paneler. I was nailing a metal panel over the wood frame above the end of the roof and on each side of the windshield opening.

When the strike started, everybody just sat down and walked around and played checkers and so forth. Nobody went out at all during the day. Later on in the afternoon, we got together and agreed who would go out and so forth. But nobody—nobody, period—went out during the day time until this decision was made to let certain persons go.

Now during that morning when we sat down, some fifteen or twenty minutes prior to time for the regular after-lunch whistle to blow—I don't know why they picked this one superintendent. See you'll have superintendents of trim, superintendents of paints, superintendents of body—this guy was superintendent of the body shop—he went all over the plant telling the men, "We are going to start the line at twelve o'clock. Those who want their jobs had better go to work. Those that don't go to work are going out, they are fired." Charlie Gillman, our president, was five foot behind him telling them, "He's a-lying to you, nobody will get fired; nobody will get run out, everybody keep their seat." So twelve o'clock, they blew the whistle and started the line and run it about ten seconds and stopped it. Nobody worked.

What department were you in, Mr. Cowan; what did you do?

Mr. Cowan: Trim department. I was in final assembly for about two years, put in glass and c.v.'s—you know that little bitty glass that you roll out to let the air come in—I was putting them in, then I got transferred to headliner. That's upholstery overhead, you know.

I was working all the time for the union. I tell you when we got really active in that union was when President Roosevelt came on the radio one night and said you laboring people get busy and get organized and pay a dollar a month and join the union, because these companies are paying more than that to get together just to keep y'all from having one. So we got strung out in there, and this gentleman Fred Pieper brought us four or five buttons that he had in his pocket, and we put them on. First thing you know, here comes the foreman or superintendent behind us wanting to see what it was, and then they would take off to the office. Well, the foreman came back in a little while and said, "You'll have ten minutes to pull them off or get fired." Now this happened in our department. We didn't have but about eight or ten buttons in there at most. We all got our heads together and said let's pull them off until lunch time, and then at lunch time, we all went out and several of us came back with pocketsful. Everybody came running to us wanting buttons. They went down the line like a fire was after them or something. So we put them all on then after lunch. They didn't run us out then; we had too big a thing going, I reckon. And the men were getting the buttons, just grabbing them and running. Here put this button on! Just tearing out down through there! A lot of men who hadn't even joined the union put them buttons on.

Mr. Smith: They all was give out from working overtime and just being—I mean we was horse-whipped over there. They would tell you if you can't get it, there is a barefooted s.o.b. out front that wants your job.

Mr. Cowan: Yeah, they wouldn't mind telling you there's a one-armed man or a one-legged man out there wanting your job.

And so you had to work overtime if you wanted to keep the job? How much were you getting paid per hour, do you remember?

Mr. Cowan: Thirty-five cents an hour.

Mr. Waldrop: There was no overtime provisions whatsoever at that time. The only promise you got out of overtime was that if you didn't work it, you was fired.

Mr. Cowan: Before we even got a contract—excuse me, y'all correct me if I'm wrong—after we had started organizing, they raised it from 35 cents

to 60 cents an hour, trying to get us to break it up then, you know. And we all got our heads together and said, well, if it's that much just trying to organize, we're going to get more than that.

How much did you get per hour after the contract was signed?

Mr. Smith: It was on piece work then; but we were guaranteed 35 cents an hour after that.

Mr. Waldrop: You had a guaranteed wage of what you made at piece work plus overtime, and you didn't get much over your standard salary even at piece work.

Mr. Starling: After we were organized they raised the day rate, that is what you were paid when you didn't make out on piece work, they raised it from 35 to 65 cents an hour.

The most effective thing, I think, we were able to use was the statement that Roosevelt made. I don't remember now when it was or under what circumstances, but the statement that we always quoted in the leaflets that we put out said, "If I was a factory worker, I would join the union."

We used that very effectively.

Mr. Smith: That is some contrast to what we've got now!

Mr. Pike: Some of the unpleasant conditions at the plant before this sit-down: we changed models each year and each year we would be off a week to three weeks to three months even, and when they would first start taking someone in the body shop back in—maybe they would take three today, the next day they might not take any more, the next day they would take thirty or forty. There were about 225 employees in the body shop alone. All body shop employees had to come right out in front of the plant and they had rails around the platform where you would enter. We called it setting on the rail, you see. You would have to come out there and set on that rail from 7 o'clock in the morning all day long, and if they didn't call you, then you would go back the next day. Maybe you would go for 30 to 60 days like that each working day in the week. You would never know whether you were going to get to go in the plant, and a lot of them never did get back in the plant when the model change went down. And those was the conditions we had to stay employed.

And was that condition done away with under the new contract that was signed in 1937?

Mr. Pike: Absolutely. They notified us by mail when to come in.

Mr. Smith: Now another thing was if we had a breakdown, then they would knock you off. If it was ten o'clock in the morning they would knock you off, and you would have to go out and sit on this rail, and wait until they got it fixed, and if they got it fixed, they would call you. If you wasn't there, you

would be fired. Well, if they called, and it was four o'clock you had to go in. Didn't get any pay for the time you was sitting out there.

Mr. Starling: Yeah, then you would work overtime to make it up. I think, of course you can get a copy of the original agreement and look it over, it is just a one-page thing. Now actually in the signed agreement we didn't get anything except recognition for our members only. We were not permitted to bargain for anyone but our members. But, I think, following the settlement of the strike we had some of the most effective bargaining in the plant that I think we ever had, because of the way we handled it. The company wanted to bargain with the people individually, so they adopted what they called an open door policy. The manager's door was always open. Any employee could come in and discuss any problems he had with them at any time. And what we did, in the departments, one employee had a problem, we all had a problem, and so we would all go down to the office to discuss our problem with them. Now that shut the whole plant down. And so we really got some effective collective bargaining because they had to settle the department's problem before they could get the plant to operate, and we used that very effectively after we signed the first agreement.

What gave you the idea to stay in the plant and sit down rather than going out and picketing?

Mr. Starling: We knew that we didn't have enough members. If we just took our members out of the plant they wouldn't miss us, but we knew that if we could get the people to stay in the plant that they couldn't operate it. Fortunately, although the people were not members of the union—not very many of them—they all stayed with us. Then that gave the people a boost to see that they could be effective if they stuck together, and then when they came outside they stuck together. Oh, we had some dissidents outside that tried to get petitions signed; they would go around and try to get employees to sign petitions to go back to work. The company was able to get some people to do that, some people in the bargaining unit, the production unit. But we kept pretty close check on them and the company didn't get those petitions, we got them. We would catch them out with a petition and we would take the petition away from them, and tell them they better not show up around here any more, and they wouldn't, they wouldn't come back.

Mr. Pike: Then we would go have a talk with those people whose name was on that petition, we'd explain to them that that was totally ineffective.

Was the company behind those petitions?

Mr. Waldrop: Sure they were, yeah. Naturally it was a company union.

Mr. Starling: Some of them were foremen that was taking the petitions around.

Later on, before I left the plant in '41 to go on the Executive Board, we got strong enough that if you had a person in your department that didn't pay his dues, none of the other employees would cooperate with him, and working on a moving line you have got to have the cooperation of employees or you can't do your job. We had to collect our dues. We had a steward in each department that collected the dues, and sometimes there would be a person who had joined the union, but didn't want to pay his dues. I know there was one in my department that we had to do that to almost every month, but we would make it so hard on him he couldn't do his job. The superintendent would come along then and he would just eat that foreman out because he wasn't getting the job done. That foreman would go to this individual and say, "Now listen, I know why you can't get your job done, because you haven't paid your union dues. Now, I'm not going to lose my job because you haven't paid your dues. If you don't pay your dues, I am going to fire you. If I don't fire you, I'm going to get fired myself." And he would pay his union dues.

Mr. Waldrop: That was along about the time that I said there was too many unexplainable accidents happening to those guys that didn't pay their dues.

Mr. Starling: As good a friend I guess as I had in the plant afterwards was a fellow that didn't like to pay his dues. I was riding him one day, and he invited me outside after the line went down, so, we went outside, started fighting out in front of the plant there and got over on company property and the guards came over and made us leave. Then we went down across the railroad track where the parking lot is now, and we went down there and finished it off. He paid his dues up, and he was as good a friend as I guess I had in that union afterward. I mean a real friend; I don't mean that he was just a fair weather friend. He never got behind in his dues again. He said that he realized that if he wanted to work in the plant he would have to pay his dues, and he said later after we got some more benefits that I did him a favor. He appreciated it.

The company hired a lot of policemen and put them in the plant during the strike. And they tried to operate their company union too during the strike but they were not successful in having any meetings at all. They tried to bring the president of the company union in the plant there one day and we wouldn't let them bring him in. Sturdevant was chief of police here then, and he tried to take him into the plant, but he wasn't able to get him in.

Mr. Pike: In other words, the chief got fired himself. Chief of Police of the City of Atlanta. He had no jurisdiction out here, it was in the county at that time. But he started in the plant with two fifths of whiskey. See, his son was one of the policemen inside the plant hired by the company. He got his whiskey busted out in front of the plant and turned back. The county police made a case against him. The city of Atlanta fired him shortly after that.

Mr. Smith: He told the county police when they came to us, "You don't know who I am do you?" and they said, "Yeh, we know who you are, you are Chief of Police of the City of Atlanta, and we are just little old county police but you are under arrest."

Mr. Waldrop: You made mention a minute ago of who worked in the plant while we were out. Well, now, they had received quite a quantity of materials, motors especially, before we came out, and after a certain period of time they had the foreman loading these motors back in to . . . they had 26 cars on the siding, and they had the foremen loading those motors back in the cars and they was going to send them back north, but when they got them loaded, and they called the railroad to come and pull those cars out, somehow or another, that phone call would wind up in the union office. By the time the engineer would get out here, we would have about a hundred men sitting over there on the railroad track and he would turn around and go back. They couldn't get in there to pull the cars, and that happened daily for a couple of months.

Mr. Cowan: Yeh, when the train would pull up there some of the colored boys that was working there would lay right down across the track and wouldn't move, and they would just come easing on up right close to them and stop and back out again.

Were people arrested during the time that you were picketing and out on strike?

Mr. Cowan: There was some arrested, but they never did get to jail with them. We had somebody there to get us out when they got down there; we never did go inside the jail.

You were all working almost full time during that three month period to keep the strike going? Did you maintain a picket line all the time?

Mr. Smith: Oh yeh, there wasn't nobody laying down on the job.

Mr. Starling: Oh, yeh, we had a picket line all the time, 24 hours a day.

And nobody worked in the plant during that three months, they couldn't get anybody to come in and do any work?

Mr. Cowan: Well, we had a few scabs. But it was hard to tell how many. They couldn't stay long.

Mr. Waldrop: They couldn't turn out any production.

Were you getting any kind of strike pay or any assistance during the time you were out?

Mr. Smith: I want to say this. I think this should be said, the womenfolk really stuck with us. They set up a soup kitchen and fed us, and we got a little help. John L. Lewis sent us a carload of coal, and we got a little help from other sources. Then finally we run out of money and didn't have nothing, and there was an old man Haverty here that owned Haverty furniture store who loaned us money.

Mr. Cowan: He got our business after that.

Mr. Smith: I was on the fund committee collecting funds. I went to Augusta, Savannah, and we hit all the banks for different contributions. They wouldn't give us any money; they would write us a check—me and Bob Geison on Chevrolet side went together. Ah, I wore out an automobile during that strike.

Mr. Waldrop: We did have a few good friends in Florida; all the truck drivers were really good about bringing up fruits and vegetables and stuff like that that went good in the soup kitchen. It was my job, there were three or four more, we knocked on places downtown, went from place to place, and asked for donations, especially in wholesale groceries. And our ladies, they manned the kitchen

day and night from the time the strike started.

Mr. Cowan: The farmers' market, the stuff that they couldn't sell, they would give it to us by the bushel, and we would come right back out here and eat it. And a lot of local merchants, grocery men and all, gave us food. We got a lot of support.

Mr. Starling: I think there is another thing we should mention; we did have good cooperation from our creditors. We all owed money. We set up a committee to go around and talk to people you know on behalf of the workers that owed money for different things, automobiles and different things, and they deferred payment in most cases until after the strike was over. We had good cooperation there, and with water and light bills and things like that. And we had good cooperation from the railroad. Now, they're the ones that would notify the local union whenever they had an order to take anything in and out so we could be prepared to stop them. We run that strike, though, for over three months, and the total money that was spent on that strike though was between seventeen and eighteen thousand dollars for three months for 1300 people. We didn't have much. We always had black-eyed peas and cornbread, and we ate a lot of it.

I think one thing that entered into it was the concept of the whole plant being organized as a union, and not sections as it used to be under the AFL. And the idea of solidarity—that was their work, solidarity. I can remember so well the slogans that I saw. SOLIDARITY. And that was what it meant. And it meant that to all of us. Being one, as a unit, working for the same thing. Knowing that what one got, the other one would also get. And to be able to do that really is what I think won the whole thing. If we had to go in as sections, it never would have worked. John L. Lewis is, of course, responsible for that whole concept of being one union. And that is what won the strike for us.

But it was a terrible period with the Depression and everything coming in all at the same time. People today have no conception of what it was like, and if they have to go through something like that—and I'm very much afraid that they may have to—they will certainly get the idea of just exactly what the people in those days went through. When you see your child not having enough to eat, it is enough to put a fight in anybody. It certainly did in us.

Mrs. Charlie Gillman

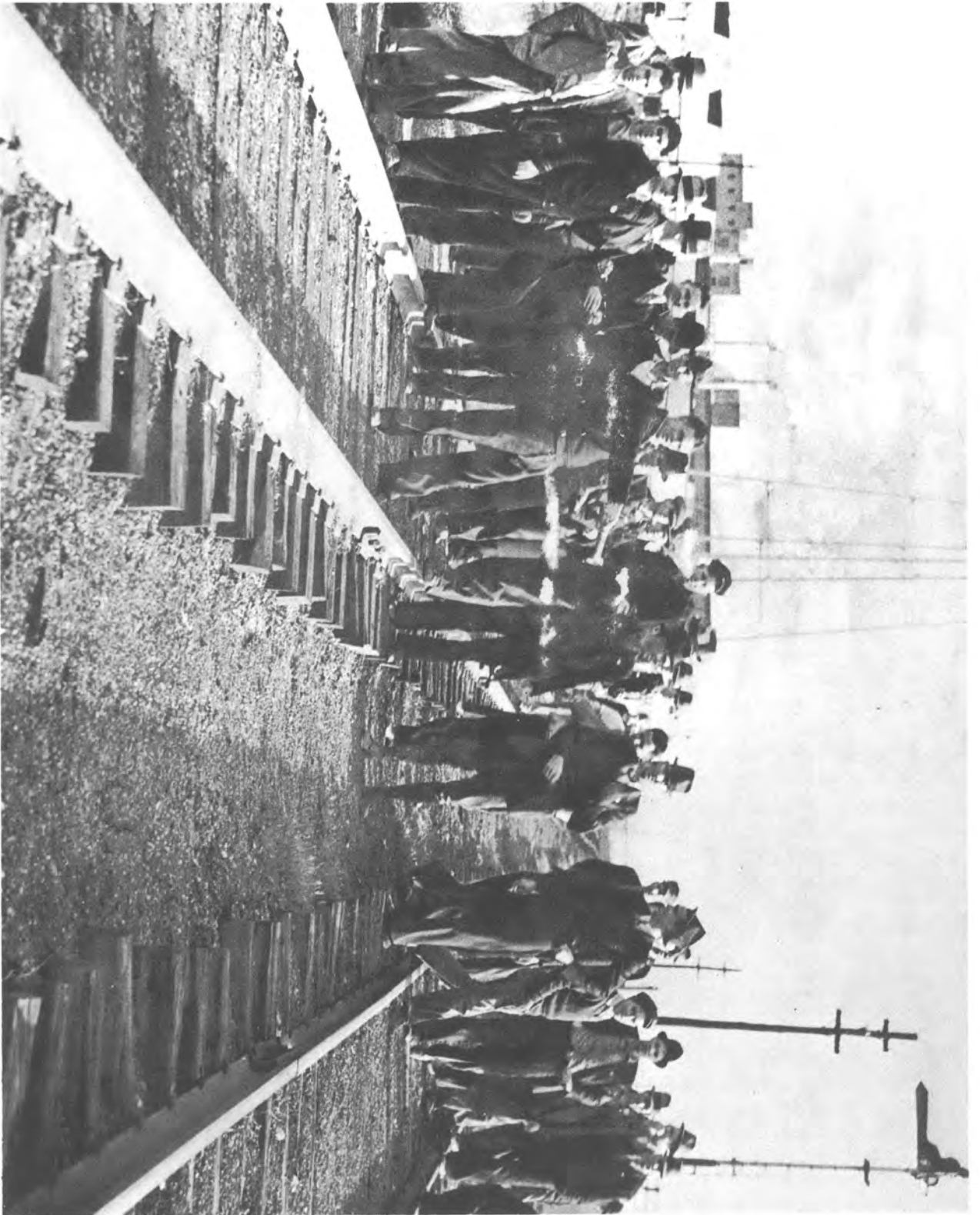




If we didn't do anything else, it brought those people together, and there wasn't a single man in the plant at that time that made any effort to go back to work that entire time. . . . You know, so many people were just barely existing and not making enough to even eat on, they kind of lose some of their pride. . . to know that they will come in the next morning and go to work, that alone was worth the strike, if nothing else had been accomplished.

—Charlie Gillman





I think the only thing that they ever did that was strictly against the rules was the time that they stopped the train that went behind the plant over there. Of course, the engineer, he got out and said he wasn't going through there. They recognized the union.

—Mrs. Charlie Gillman

When we interviewed Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Gillman, the subject matter ranged far beyond the particulars of the strike in 1936. Mr. Gillman worked for the C.I.O. as an organizer from 1940 until his retirement in 1967, and he has a fairly developed perspective on the labor movement and the working class in the South. Likewise, Mrs. Gillman's views are valuable since the lot of a trade-unionist and his family has been less than perfect in this region of open shops and "right to work."

While to the average reader history is the exposition of factual matter, to folks like the Gillmans, it is the substance of their lives. Their understanding of events is drawn more from their experience than abstract learning, and that experience has been one of hardship relieved only by collective action. Their views are thus critical; but a critical spirit motivated not by malice so much as a deep affection for their class, a spirit explained by Mrs. Gillman in the word *Solidarity*.

While space prohibits our presenting the full range of the Gillman's comments on the working class, present and past, we are publishing this sample that we think is representative of their views, feelings, and outlook.

Charlie Gillman: There's one thing that's different today among people, working people, than it was then. Back in those days after we formed the union, anything that happened in the plant that was an infringement on the rights of any worker, we represented them, although some of them did not belong to the union. If it affected one person then it was a problem for the whole shop, for everybody in that plant. Whereas today, practically anybody that works for a living, even members of the union, don't want anyone to bother them. If something is done that affects Joe over here, so long as it doesn't affect Jim here, well, that is all right. That feeling has gone through the whole community, not just the labor unions. That feeling is prevalent in nine out of ten people who work for a living that you talk to. They don't want to upset the apple cart today—just don't care if there is a depression over here for this group of people, or if they close the plant down over here and go out of business, and start up somewhere else. Don't bother me because I'm doing all right today.

Do you suppose it is prosperity that brings out that attitude?

Mr. Gillman: Yeh, there is no doubt about it, I think it is going to take a depression—well, we have been in a depression for some time—but it is going to take a real depression to get people to realize

that their neighbors are human beings the same as they are. And that is an awful price to pay. The only salvation of the thing is to work together instead of being so darn selfish, and being concerned with themselves always.

As I say, people are getting too complacent. There is a good danger that the unions may weaken; they'll get weak too if they don't watch themselves. I think this country is in for a real fall one of these days, because the credit now in force is the greatest it has ever been by far in this country before. And if some kind of recession starts—it got started here a few months ago, when the unemployment figures jumped way up, and it is only 5 percent now. If the unemployment gets serious, this country is going to be in some position.

Did you notice much difference in how strong a local was as to how hard it was for them to get started, like if they had to strike to get started, were they generally stronger than one that didn't?

Mr. Gillman: It's the only thing that ever builds a union. I've always said a union is absolutely no good without a strike, because the people don't get together. A strike draws them together, they suffer a little bit, and it teaches them that they have to work together and try to help each other. There are very few good strong unions that haven't been through a few strikes before. If the union is not strong enough to strike, they are not going to have much of a contract either. I don't care who they are. Preachers, doctors, or whatnot. The whole rubber industry was tough to organize, about like the auto industry. They had to fight to build their union; the contract wasn't handed to them at all.

There's been a lot of good unions in this part of the country, and it's actually a matter of leadership. A lot of people these days who belong to a union and get elected to office, all they want out of that office is the recognition. They don't want to do any work while they are in there. They just want to be called the Secretary or the President or something. You just simply don't have the leadership that you used to have, and you haven't got the people who are interested in developing the benefits that the people need anymore. I think that, more than anything else, worries me about the working people, because when times get tough they are the ones who are going to suffer. There is no if, and, and but's about it. They are the ones who will be thrown out of their jobs, and they're gonna be on short time. But when times are good, you just simply can't make them understand that, and you can't make them talk to you about it. They say, oh, it can't happen to me. But I've seen it happen.

What do you suppose happened in the union that caused them to allow the grievances to pile up the way they have?

Mr. Gillman: It's because they have such a contract now. The contract is so bulky it takes them months to get through the thing. Back then we would go one place and that was it. If it wasn't settled there we would appeal it to the committee right away in Detroit, and we would go up there, and sit down and settle it with the top men in the company. Now, you've got to go through this procedure and that procedure, and if that doesn't work you have got to have somebody come down and meet with them, and if that doesn't work you go somewhere else. The bargaining relations are not as good as they used to be because the union has allowed the company to get by with so many little things because people are making pretty good money and they didn't want to be bothered with all these little problems themselves.

What kind of future do you see for the labor movement in the South.

Mr. Gillman: Oh, I think we are going to organize; it's going to have to come. There is one thing that is helping more than anything else, and that is that organized industry is moving into the South. Practically all the corporations that have moved their plants here or built plants here are organized up the country. Our membership is growing pretty good. We've got, I suppose, better than 200,000 members in Georgia now. And they estimate the number in Florida at 350,000 down there. So there are a lot of people moving down here that are from organized plants. Alabama has a good organization.

It's growing, but it is awfully slow. The main thing that has kept the unions out of the South . . . well, there are two things. One is that the people didn't know anything about unions at all, and the other is the textile plants. Textiles, whether you think so or not, established the living conditions in practically all small communities and areas in the South. Up until recently they owned the houses that the people rented from them, and they had restrictions: you couldn't do this, or that or the other in the community, and the supervision in the textile mill were actual dictators of the people who worked, you know, "the hands." They could fire you with no reason, just kick you right out, and if your wife worked there, they could kick her out, too. People don't believe it, you can tell them about these things, but they look at you like you've got jaundice or something, but it is true, because I was in those places, and I know, and we tried to work where those people today are scared to death to talk to union people.

Mrs. Gillman: A lot of that is because in these little small towns, particularly in South Georgia, they are church-oriented towns, and the preachers are definitely against unions.

Mr. Gillman: They are on the payroll of the company.

Mrs. Gillman: And they preach against it; they visit their people and they talk against it, and to many people in small towns what the preacher says is the thing that goes. Now you can take a city like Atlanta, Decatur, and parts of DeKalb County that are close to Atlanta and Decatur, that doesn't hold true at all, because the people are more educated, and their lifestyle is entirely different to that in small towns. I think a lot of it you can attribute directly to preachers and I don't say that with any disrespect to them or anything like that, but having been through so many years of this, you are a fool not to recognize just exactly what it is they are doing.

Mr. Gillman: It was a great life. Lot of hard work, discouragement, and a lot of pleasure. And I think that the satisfaction that you get out of what has been accomplished by the union is worth everything you put into it. It's just criminal almost that the young fellows who go to work now have no appreciation of what a union has done to their job for them, because their jobs that they are on now wasn't always that kind of a job. It was built to where they had the benefits that other people worked for, which is the way it ought to be, but they ought to know about it anyhow. Well, it's a great life.



It's just criminal that the young fellows who go to work now have no appreciation of what a union has done for their job . . . It was built to where they had the benefits that other people worked for, which is the way it ought to be, but they ought to know about it anyhow.

—Charlie Gillman

Oral History Of Slavery



Photo by David Doggett

One of the recurring themes in the genesis of racism in the United States is that contributions to American civilization and culture pioneered by black people are appropriated by white society. Often the development is further distorted by crediting individual whites with the particular gifts or discoveries.

One example of this is the case of oral history. The techniques which are today known as oral history were originally developed and refined in the late 1920's by historians at Southern University and Fisk University in order to study the largely illiterate population of former slaves—American slavery from the viewpoint of its victims.

Their original work was further advanced and developed when a project of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration collected interviews with 250 ex-slaves in Kentucky and Indiana in 1934, and when the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Projects Administration (WPA) collected over 2,000 interviews with ex-slaves from 1936 to 1938.

Despite these massive projects by hundreds of historical workers over most of a decade, credit for the existence of today's oral history "movement" is most frequently assigned to two white historians associated with Columbia University, even by commentators who know better, despite the fact that the Columbia project did not begin until 1948.

The record is gradually being set straight, largely due to the recent appearance of popular editions of books (including some old ones) based upon the slave narratives. These include Benjamin Botkin's **Lay My Burden Down, A Folk History of Slavery**; the Georgia Writers' Project's **Drums and Shadows, Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes**; Julius Les-

ter's **To Be a Slave**; and Norman R. Yetman's **Voices From Slavery**.

The most massive and complete product of these early oral history collections is **The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography** by George P. Rawick. So far nineteen volumes have appeared, and more are expected. Sixteen of these contain the Federal Writers' Project Slave Narratives, and two are reprints of the Fisk University collections, **Unwritten History of Slavery** and **God Struck Me Dead**.

Rawick's introductory volume, **From Sundown to Sunup, The Making of the Black Community**, has been called "the most valuable book I know of by a white man about slave life in the United States" by Eugene D. Genovese, himself a prominent historian of slavery. It is a challenge to almost all previous histories that were based primarily on accounts of slavery written by slaveholders and journalists.

Rawick says that historians have been aware of the existence of slave autobiographies and narratives for a long time. But in almost every case white historians have chosen to believe the account of white oppressors or casual observers, rather than to rely on slaves' descriptions of their own lives.

Ken Lawrence is a staff writer for the *Southern Patriot*, the monthly newspaper published by the Southern Conference Education Fund (SCEF), Louisville, Kentucky. "The Roots of Class Struggle in the South," a paper on labor history presented in May, 1973, to a SCEF Labor Workshop, and a bibliography on southern labor history can be obtained from him at P.O. Box 5174, Jackson, Mississippi 39216.

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Not only does Rawick challenge the openly racist view presented by Stanley M. Elkins in **Slavery, A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life**; he also uses the evidence of the narratives to repudiate the liberalism of Kenneth M. Stampp, whose book, **The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South**, views black people as "only white men with black skins."

In the past, the strongest challenges to the racist histories of slavery were **Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880**, by W.E.B. DuBois, and Herbert Aptheker's **American Negro Slave Revolts**. Rawick's work supplements these by showing that the struggles waged by slaves in their daily lives provided the groundwork for the pitched battles described by Aptheker, and the revolutionary overthrow of slavery documented by DuBois.

During a trip to Mississippi last year, Rawick challenged audiences on several campuses to advance this work by locating the lost narratives. He pointed out that his source, the material microfilmed by the Library of Congress, provided only 174 pages of Mississippi narratives, and that there must have been a great deal more collected by the WPA. He was correct. A careful search of WPA materials by the staff of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History turned up nearly 2,000 additional pages, apparently unused by scholars.

In addition to the obvious value of this material as a rich new source for historians of slavery in Mississippi, the collection reveals a lot about the narrative collection as a whole, particularly the ways in which the racism of the WPA interviewers and editors (mostly white women) intervenes in the collection. For example, this particular collection includes several different versions of some narratives, making it possible to see how dialect changes were added to later versions of some, apparently to match an editor's idea of vintage Uncle Remus. (This fact may suggest needed modifications of language studies based on the narratives. For example, J.L. Dillard's book, **Black English, Its History and Usage in the United States**, relies heavily on the narrative selections in Botkin's **Lay My Burden Down**.) One file even contains a note by an interviewer complaining that "my darkies" don't say things according to "Washington's idee."

Another example of this problem is deleted material. One of the narratives in Rawick's collection (**The American Slave**, volume 7, Oklahoma and Mississippi Narratives) is Pet Franks' story, told to Mrs. Richard Kolb. The Library of Congress copy, reproduced by Rawick, is similar to the version in the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, but leaves out the following text:

I recollect one time when dere was snow on de groun' and it was freezin' cold and in de middle of de night we heared somebody a knockin' at de door and

when my pappy got up dere was a nigger man out in de cold without no shoes on and with mighty few other clothes on. He said he was freezin' to death. My mammy got up and did all she could to help him but his feet was froze and two of his toes dropped off when dey thawed. Next mawnin' we called de mistress out to see him and she jest natchally cried when she look at him. When she found out whar he come from she made de marster hitch up de surry and go carry him back and de marster say he was gwine turn that owner over to de law or know de reason why. But 'fore he got there de nigger had done died.

"I member 'nother time but dat was durin' de war when I was ridin' on my horse over to Columbus to carry some clothes to de soldiers. On de way back I heared a bell ringin' and I think it must be a cow strayed off but when I look I sees a nigger man with his hands in a iron halter up 'bove his head and a bell strung 'tween them. He say his marster had beat him and den for two days had kept his hands and feet nailed to a board, you could see de nail holes too, and den had put his arms in dat halter and turn him loose. He say it was all cause he marster heared tell dat he say he would be glad if de Yankees won de war so's he could be free."

In another WPA file, one editor wrote to another, "It seems that the story of the Negro uprising should give more testimony in favor of the white men—from merely reading the story it might give some damn Yankee, even to-day, a good excuse to complain of the treatment accorded to the Negroes in those days. The gory details of the execution are given but the untold horror of a possible Negro rule, as people saw it in those days, should be made clearer for the benefit of readers whose grandfathers did not take part in all this." The note refers to a manuscript of Civil War and Reconstruction folk tales by Mississippi writer Hubert Creekmore.

Following is the narrative of Lizzie Williams, an ex-slave interviewed by Vera Butts in Calhoun City, Mississippi, in 1937. As a selection, it is not typical of the collection as a whole. Rather, it is archetypical—that is, many of the things she speaks about are similar to selections to dozens of other narratives in the collection: her description of the slave quarters, how children were fed, the clothes worn by slaves, the duration and amount of labor, the method of whipping a pregnant woman, and so on—regarding the treatment of slaves. This is one of the many "lost" narratives in the Mississippi Department of Archives and History collection. Introductory comments are by the interviewer:

LIZZIE WILLIAMS, ex-slave. Age 88 years, height 5 feet 2 inches, weight 110 lbs., health bad; almost blind, general coloring black. Apparently an honest up-right negro who has always worked hard and once was

financially able to enjoy the necessities of life but today, due to misfortunes of various kinds, is without means of actual necessities. No children able to give her sufficient support.

"I was 88 years old de furst day o' dis past June. Was born in Grenada county, five miles dis side [east] o' Graysport.

"My Mammy was Mary [Pass] Williams an' I had fourteen brothers an' sisters but deys all dead now 'cept me.

"My Marsa was Capt. Jack Williams an Capt. Jacks Mammy, Miss Lourena Williams, was my Missus. Capt. Jack, he never did marry. He owned 'bout 1400 acres land, ten or fifteen grown nigger men what was called de plowhands an' lots o' fifteen an' sixteen year old boys 'sides de women an chillun.

"Back in dem days we lived in little log houses dlobbered with mud an' had dirt floors. Dey was covered with boards an' waited down with plank to keep 'em from blowin' off. We slept on a quilt spread on de ground fo' our bed.

"My job back in dem days was to weave, spin thread, run de loom, an durin crop time I plowed an' hoed in de field. My mammy was a regular field hand.

"Marsa he was good to us niggers, he never would whip us. De overseers was a Mr. Gentry, Vanvoosa an' Hamilton an' dey would sho get holt o' us if we didn't work to suit em.

"Dey didn't give us nothin much to eat. Dey was a trough out in de yard what dey pured de mush an milk in an us chillun an de dogs would all crowd 'round it an eat together. Us chillun had homemade wooden paddles to eat with an we sho' had to be in a hurry 'bout it cause de dogs would get it all if we didn't. Heep o' times we'd eat coffee grounds fo' bread. Sometimes we'd have biscuits made out o' what was called de 2nd's. De white folks allus got de 1st's. De slaves didn't have no gardens but ole Missus gave us onion tops out o' her garden.

"We sho didn't have 'nuff clothes to wear back in slavery days neither. De ole shoe maker on de place made every nigger one pair shoes a year an' if he wore 'em out he didn't get no more. I's been to de field many a frosty mornin' with rags tied 'round my feet.

"De overseer sent us to de field every mornin' by 4:00 o'clock an we stayed 'till after dark. By de time cotton was weighed up an supper cooked an et, it was midnight when we'd get to bed heep o' times. Dese overseers saw dat every nigger got his 'mount o' cotton. De grown ones had to pick 600, 700 an 800 pounds a day an' de 14 an 15 year old ones had to pick 400 an 500 pounds.

"Twasn't much sickness back in slavery days 'cept when de women was confined an' ole Missus an a nigger woman on de place tended to such cases. I 'member once my Mamma had to wash standin' in sleet an' snow knee deep when her baby was just three days old. It made her sick an she almost died. Dats de only

time dey ever was a doctor at any us nigger houses. Ole missus generally got Jerusalem weed out o' de woods an' made syrup out o' it to get rid o' de worms in de chillun. She'd give calomel in 'lasses when we needed cleanin' out.

"I's seen heep o' niggers sold. De white folks would put pieces o' quilts in de mens britches to make em look like big fine niggers an' bring lots of money.

"I seed one woman named Nancy durin' de war what could read an 'rite. When her master, Oliver Perry, found dis out he made her pull off naked, whipped her an den slapped hot irons to her all over. Believe me dat nigger didn't want to read an 'rite no more.

"Peepde dese days is in Hebben now to what we was in dem times.

"I's seen nigger women dat was fixin' to be confined do somethin' de white folks didn't like. Dey would dig a hole in de ground just big 'nuff fo' her stomach, make her lie face down an whip her on de back to keep from hurtin' de child. Lots o' times de women in dat condition would be plowin', hit a stump, de plow jump an' hurt de child to where dey would loose it an law me, such a whippin as dey would get!

"We went to preachin' at de white folks church. De preacher would preach to de white folks furst den he'd call de niggers in an preach to us. He wouldn't read de Bible he'd say: 'Obey yo' Missus an' yo Master.' One ole nigger didn't have no better sense dan to shout on it once.

"When niggers died you could hear someone goin' on de road singin': 'Hark From de Tomb de Mournful Sound.'

"I's seen de patrollers whip niggers an dey would allus put his head under de rail fence an whip him from de back. We used to sing a song like dis: 'Run nigger run de Patrollers will catch you 'tis almost day.'

"When de war was over Marsa come told us niggers we was free but said if we'd stay on with him de cotton money would be divided out between us niggers. Shore 'nuff Marsa sold dat cotton an 'fore he could divide it out his sister, Miss Bitha, stole it. Finally he got a little o' it an' give it to de niggers. Some o' em took it an aint been back since. We stayed on there three years. Finally Capt. Jack give his niggers land an dey just stayed on with him.

"My furst husband was Bob Pittman an our only child died. My next one was George Jean an our only child died. Den I married Hiliard Williams an we had 14 chillun an' raised em on Capt. Jacks place. Only four livin' now. Dey is day laborers, a preacher an a farmer. Me an my ole man lived together 50 years. He died in 1927. We was de founders of de colored Methodist church at Big Creek."

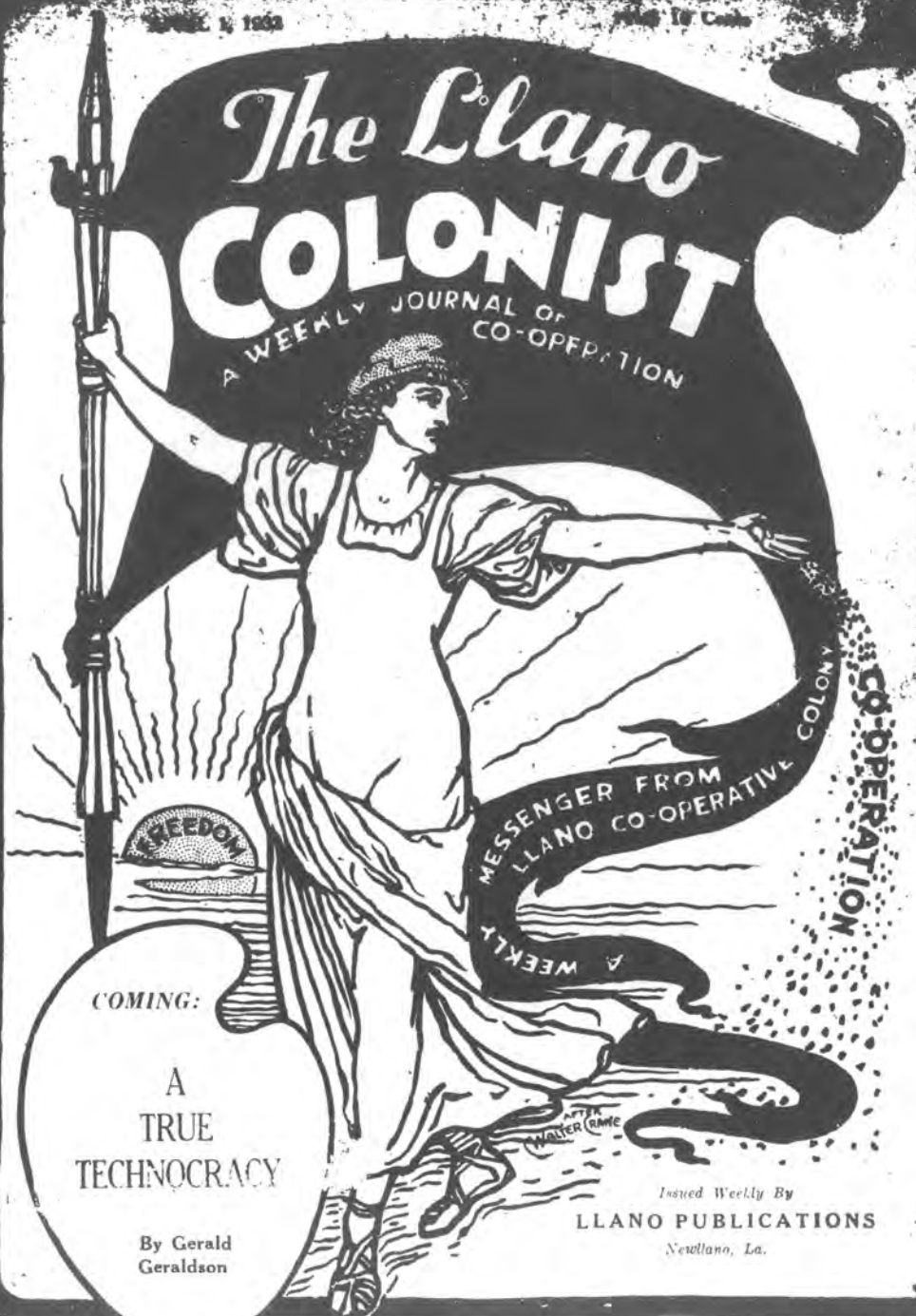


APRIL 1, 1933

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The Llano COLONIST

A WEEKLY JOURNAL OF CO-OPERATION



COMING:
A
TRUE
TECHNOCRACY
By Gerald
Geraldson

A WEEKLY
MESSENGER FROM
LLANO CO-OPERATIVE
COLONY

CO-OPERATION

AFTER
WALTER RAME

Issued Weekly By
LLANO PUBLICATIONS
New Llano, La.

I didn't leave Illinois because I was a coward. I've never been where I couldn't ply my trade as an electrician. This cooperative idea took me over and I said, "The heck with it. Why stay up here in so much uncertainty. I could go down there and whatever house they got, I would take it. They'll furnish me a house, they'll furnish me the electricity, they'll furnish the ice and so on, and they'll furnish money to buy groceries as much as they can." What we wanted to get at the store, if they got it, we could get it. I didn't have no money to buy anything when we got here, and we didn't use any in the colony after we got there.

I've known all my life that the capitalist system, as Karl Marx made the remark, that it contains the seeds of its own destruction. It would be the one to destroy itself.

Chester Peecher, former colonist

For a small percentage you could buy stuff cheaper at the colony than you could anywhere else, out of their store. Then people like myself began to like their way of life, and way of work. There's nothing wrong with it although I didn't live there. It wasn't a-doing anybody any harm, so why discourage them.

In other words, if your back itched, I'd scratch it, and if mine itched, you'd scratch it. you've got the general picture. That's exactly what the whole picture of what the colony was. Usually it's not human nature just to go a-running over people, you know.

I had in mind living there. I'd think, as a boy, if my daddy was to die, and no way for me to make a living, I could move in there. I'd have to work, but I'm used to that anyhow. Yeh, I've thought about it. It's occurred to me. Sure has.

Henry Killian, Vernon Parish farmer

The Llano Cooperative Colony is a community of demonstration and experimentation where American workers are engaged in creating new ideals and reducing them to a practical working basis, where the most complete form of cooperation is being organized to function without friction, and where theory is discarded as soon as it is found impractical . . . Llano Colony without a church is also without a saloon, bootlegger, immoral section, jail, or peace officer.

E. S. Wooster, colony leader in
The Nation, 1923

Llano Cooperative Colony, Louisiana

by Bill Murray

A socialist town in Louisiana? Neither I nor anyone I knew had ever heard of it. Could it be true that "by far the largest of the colonies inspired by the dream of cooperative commonwealth," "the most successful American attempt at secular communitarianism," a town once having 600 people surrounded by 20,000 acres, containing factories, presses, sawmills, etc., existed for 22 years (1917-1939) in the piney woods of Louisiana and no one even knows about it?

I first learned of Llano Colony when I stumbled upon an article entitled "Llano: An Experiment in Communism" in an old 1920's publication, *The Libertarian*, from Greenville, South Carolina. I had picked up the magazine for a nickel at a flea market in Houston, where I lived at the time. After doing more reading at the library, my appetite was whetted and I decided to drive from Houston into Louisiana in hopes of finding either physical traces or some people's memories which would help me gain some sense of what the old colony had been like.

I found both. Not only were there a number of old buildings (one with "Llano Co-op Colony Warehouse" barely visible on the front), but I was able to talk to four people still living in the area who once lived in the colony. From these people, and from others in the village of Newllano (population about 300) and the nearby town of Leesville, a picture of the colony emerged.



Llano gives us a working model of a New Cooperative Society, a model which may be actualized on a universal scale.

Information from six people now living in or near the village of Newllano, Louisiana, was invaluable in reconstructing a picture of Llano Colony. These individuals, all quoted in the article, are:

Chester and Mrs. Peecher: She works in their home; he is an electrician. They came to Llano from Illinois in 1930 and were there when it closed.

Blair Pickett: Son of the long-time leader of Llano Colony, George Pickett. Retired from the Army, presently night-watchman at a paper mill.

Albert Kapotsy: A plumber by trade, came to the U.S. from Hungary and to Llano about 1920. From that time until now, he has been a critic of George Pickett.

Bill Brough: Came to Llano from Massachusetts with his family about 1930 at age ten. Lived there when the colony folded.

Henry Killian: Farmer, reared near the colony in Vernon Parish. Never a colony member, but a frequent visitor.

The roots of Llano Colony reach back in time and to another state, for the colony was first begun by leading socialists and labor leaders in California in 1914. It grew out of an awareness of the inhumanity and oppression of the developing industrial economic system and from frustration with trying to get any change through the use of elections and the political system in general. In California, as in the rest of the country, the time just before and after the turn of the century saw a great growth of industrial capitalism. Monopolies began to spread their power over the nation and big capitalists began to amass huge family fortunes. The number of industrial workers increased from 1,310,000 in 1860 to 4,713,000 in 1900. Cities grew, with shanty towns, mill towns, and slums, as people moved to urban centers in order to get work. Labor was cheap and with workers unorganized, bad conditions went unchallenged, such as children working 14 hours a day for pennies, and immigrants in the sweat shops and miners in the mines never seeing the light of day.

Though the injustices of the economic system were clear, there was still a general optimistic belief in the possibility of the perfection of people and society either through radical change or a gradual evolutionary process. Critiques and protests began to arise from the people as urban and agrarian radicals as well as religionists from every background leveled their fire at the oppressive system. This optimism was being expressed through such diverse modes as revivalism, US expansionism, belief in Anglo-Saxon supremacy, social gospel preaching about the coming of God's Kingdom, and confidence that the capitalist system would soon collapse to be replaced by an economic and political system run by the workers.

It was in this setting that working people first began to organize on a large scale. They realized that the only way to deal with the absolute control of the owners was in exercising their own collective power as the actual producers of the nation's wealth. The struggle was a difficult one at best and was often dangerous, even fatal to many. Owners of mines and mills teamed with their counterparts in government to suppress this threat to their absolute control. A government report in 1914 showed that 80 percent of the country's wealth was controlled by 2 percent of the people and they wanted it to continue that way. New anti-union laws were made; other laws were either bent or forgotten, whichever was most convenient, and militia, police, and courts were used in an effort to smash the organizing drives.

Working people began dreaming of and struggling for a new economic system, a way of work where the labor of many was not exploited for the profits of a few; where production was controlled by the producers; where the products were made mainly for people, not profit; and where all that wealth controlled by the owners could be more equalized so that the people who actually produced the wealth did not have to live in shacks and worry about feeding hungry children. It was many of these people who began to look toward socialism as an answer to the dilemma. They began to join together with other workers, with professionals, farmers and university people to try to work for a socialist, worker-run government and economy.

Because of the growing numbers of socialists, they began to run candidates for office in an attempt to change the system gradually by election. One such candidate was Job Harriman, who was the principle figure in the founding of Llano Colony. Harriman was a lawyer and though at first a Democrat, by 1890 he had become a socialist. He joined a Nationalist Club in the early 1890's, one of 158 such groups which were working to achieve Edward Bellamy's vision (in his popular novel

Application for Membership in the **Llano Del Rio Co-operative Colony**

Application form for Colony membership

Looking Backward) of a fully nationalized cooperative state. With a group of these Nationalists he formed a local branch of the Socialist Labor Party in San Francisco about 1893. He became a leader of the party there and in 1898 was the socialist candidate for governor of the state, though he received only 5,143 of 287,064 votes cast. He then became the party's state organizer.

A debate developed in the party between people who wanted to focus on continued activity through the political system and others who felt that they should concentrate on founding socialist colonies which would develop into an economic base. Harriman was able to straddle the fence in the debate. He joined with a New York socialist, Morris Hillquit, in a revolt against what they considered to be the authoritarian national leadership of Daniel DeLeon, and Harriman was then put up as the presidential candidate of the Socialist Laborites. Due to negotiations for merger forming the Socialist Party, however, he was dropped to the vice-presidential candidacy in deference to Eugene Debs, the new Socialist Party's presidential candidate.

After the campaign of 1900, Harriman went to Los Angeles and continued his legal profession. He became involved in the labor movement and began to advocate such requirements for membership in the Socialist Party as previous enrollment in a labor union. During the Metal Workers' strike in 1910 on the Pacific Coast, the socialists of Los Angeles gave aid to labor, and Harriman considered such cooperation as an excellent economic base for socialist political activity. In 1911 both labor and the city's socialists united once again in order to support Harriman as the socialist candidate for mayor of Los Angeles.

The big issue in the campaign was the guilt or innocence of the McNamara brothers who had been charged with the bombing of the Los Angeles

Times building that killed twenty persons. These two men were leaders of the AFL Ironworkers and they found socialist and labor leaders around the country, Harriman among them, flocking to their support. Clarence Darrow accepted the defense and Harriman, who was already working on the case, continued to help the well-known lawyer. Unfortunately, though Harriman had a better-than-even chance to win the election, five days before the polling the McNamara brothers changed their plea to guilty and Harriman's campaign was seriously damaged. He received 51,243 votes of 136,915, but he never again was a political nominee.

His defeat convinced him that the best way to further the spread of socialism was through practical economic activity and not through politics. And, even though the concept had been repudiated by the large majority of American socialists, he began to make plans for a new colony based on cooperation and the equality of wages and ownership. Harriman wrote in 1924 about his reasons for working to found the colony in the introduction to *Communities of the Past and Present* by E.S. Wooster. He said that he had accepted fully the economic theories of Karl Marx concerning economic determinism and the materialistic and mechanistic theory of life. He had hopes, therefore, that by providing for equality in ownership, wages and social opportunities for all members, "in a comparatively short time" all people would react in harmony with that environment. He wrote: *It became apparent to me that a people would never abandon their means of livelihood, good or bad, capitalist or otherwise, until other*

methods were developed which would promise advantages at least as good as those by which they were living.

Another socialist writing years later in the 1933 Llano newspaper spelled out clearly the interests of those who worked to build Llano colony and others like it:

What hope can there be to change this system and save it through political means, as many well-meaning socialists believe they can do? The roots of society are economic not political. We must, therefore, create an economic change before we can hope to produce a political change. This economic change should consist in the shifting of the fulcrum of social activity from a competitive to a cooperative pivot. This means the formation of cooperative units everywhere, each exchanging its products with the others. The network of the new social fabric will thus be gradually woven, until finally a new garment will be ready to cover the back of advancing humanity after the old and torn one of capitalism has been discarded. Llano gives us a working model of a New Cooperative Society, a model which may be actualized on a universal scale.¹

Finally, Harriman and some socialist friends bought 9,000 acres of land in Antelope Valley, approximately 45 miles north of Los Angeles. They founded the Llano del Rio Company (chartered in Nevada), organizing the colony as a corporation. They began to sell stock in the fall of 1913, with plans to issue one million shares at one dollar each, and set a membership requirement of two thousand shares which entitled the colonist the use of colony facilities. Llano Colony was officially opened on



Even though the streets were never paved, they knew they were doing something very new and for a while succeeded.



During the early 20's, hard times made it necessary to pull plows by hand.

May 1 (May Day), 1914 with only a handful of colonists. Working people began to be attracted to the promise of a place where their labor wouldn't merely be used for profit-making, but where they would really be productive in building a new society. By 1917 the colony reached its maximum population of 1000.

Llano began as a concrete experiment in the use of socialist principles in forming a society at a time when there was not yet one socialist country. It was still three and one-half years before the Russian October Revolution, an experiment which colonists felt was the dawn of a new day. Slogans and phrases used by the colony in advertising itself to workers and socialists of the time describe their intent. "Production for use instead of profit" was most popular. Others were: "Things socially used and socially needed must be socially owned;" "All men are brothers regardless of race, creed, or color;" "Interdependence instead of independence;" and, "Land monopoly, equipment monopoly, and money monopoly are all anti-social and they are wrecking civilization."

Harriman purchased the *Western Comrade* in 1914 and used it to spread the message of the cooperative commonwealth. Its editor, Franklin Wolfe, was among the group of radicals (including W.A. Engle, chairman of the Central Labor Council of Los Angeles, and Frank P. McMahon, former official of the Brick Layers Union) which provided the colony with leadership.

The colony achieved success with its agricultural efforts and at one time had two thousand acres in cultivation. By 1917 there was an

impressive number of small industries, several warehouses, and a hotel. Slowly canvas homes were replaced by more substantial adobe ones. Yet, there were always organizational problems, constant bickering over physical inconveniences, and difficulty in getting the agricultural products to market. In addition, it was difficult for the colony to pay the four dollar daily wage promised the colonists; Llano was criticized by many socialists for its corporate organization, its wage system, and its middle-class orientation. To top it all, the colonists had extreme problems getting water into their land, which had only ten inches or so annual rainfall. Because of these and other problems, Harriman began to look elsewhere for a new site for Llano Colony.

In October, 1917, the two hundred most dedicated colonists moved to the old lumber town of Stables, Louisiana, two miles south of Leesville in Vernon Parish, and renamed the town "Newllano." The twenty thousand acres of land there had been cut-over by the Gulf Lumber Company before being sold to the colony for \$125,000. The community grew steadily and in January, 1918, there were three hundred colonists, including a group of 25 socialist families from Texas. But hard times soon came, the Texas families went back to Texas taking a share of the property including most of the farm implements, and the colony was left with only the most dedicated fifteen families by the fall of 1918. Times were so hard and the people were so determined, that the big wooden plows were pulled by the men while women and boys did the plowing.

During the period from 1918 to 1924, a time of hardship followed by gradual growth, there were constant efforts to develop a method for directing the workings of the colony. At the same time there were struggles between individuals for leadership. The outcome of these struggles, which established one strong figure as the director and decision-maker of the colony, has been interpreted both as the reason for the success of the colony and as the cause for its eventual failure.

According to Ernest Wooster, manager of the colony in Louisiana for a time while Harriman was president, there was a General Assembly for a while.

It met twice a month. On the face of it, this seemed to be a genuine democracy. In practice it soon degenerated into a cruel mass dictatorship, without conscience or even a high degree of intelligence as a group. . . . It was a sinister organization that became a veritable Frankenstein, an irresponsible, fickle body ideally constituted for the purpose of scheming politicians, hired spies, volunteer trouble makers, and too voluble, though well-intentioned visionaries. It permitted the widest range of free speech, which omitted nothing of a personal nature and spared none. It was a prolific legislative body, but lacked respect for its own laws.²

After this and other experiments, "an industrial government composed of heads of departments began meeting in the interest of efficiency and order." It was a temporary measure, but at least enabled the colony to function while problems of decision making and leadership were ironed out.

Gradually, there began to develop two factions which vied for the leadership of the colony. One group coalesced around Job Harriman whose health was rapidly failing him. This included Ernest S. Wooster, Dr. William Zeuch, founder of Commonwealth College, and Frank and Kate Richards O'Hare, publisher of the *American Vanguard* (see below). The other was led by George T. Pickett, a man who had gradually gained influence as Harri-

man's health waned and as the colony met with hardship. In June of 1924, a special election was held on important colony matters which decided two to one in favor of Pickett's position. Members of the other faction withdrew, taking about one-third of the membership and the same proportion of moveable property. The total value of this property loss, which also included a deed to some land on Cuba's Isle of Pines, was about \$100,000.

Pickett emerged as the leader of the colony. A. James MacDonald, a man who became a strong opponent to Pickett, once wrote:

A number of members had confidence enough in him and his business judgement, and were strongly enough imbued with the cooperative ideal and the desire to work it out in practice, to lend their money to the colony and thus enable it to continue. . . .

I had been in the Louisiana colony nearly two years before I first learned the circumstances and conditions under which Mr. Pickett accepted the management. He demanded that he be given absolute authority in all matters pertaining to the colony's activities; not only the management of the corporation as such and the general business policies, but the management of the farming and industrial parts, and even educational and social matters. As an exaggerated industrial democracy had been tried for a while in California, and it had been found that it resulted in dissension and consequently in inefficiency, the board of directors gave Mr. Pickett the authority he asked for. While the board of directors continued to function, it was simply carrying out Mr. Pickett's ideas and wishes.³

MacDonald's account apparently is accurate. George Pickett's son, Blair, a retired army man who is now a night watchman at a paper company, was not yet born, but now has clear impressions from his father of his power at the time.

George was an organizer and he told me several times that he believed in a dictatorship, but a benevolent dictatorship. I can see the need for it today. Have you ever been to a PTA meeting? I



have never seen anything so confusing in my life. Because this group wanted to do this, and this group wanted to do that, and this group wanted to do the other. Well, what happened? They don't get anything done because they were too busy fighting amongst themselves to get anything done. All right, to me, this is the idea of why George took dictatorial powers. Because you get a set plan and you follow it, no deviation, no arguments or anything. Do a job and get it done.

They had these meetings all the time, I think they called it a "psychological" meeting. They used to have them in the cafeteria part of the hotel every week or two. I remember going to some, but of course I didn't know what the heck was going on. But they took votes on this issue and that issue, whatever it happened to be. But I think George just kept them informed of what was going on, see. And to me all the confusion is over with if you have somebody that's directing things.

George was born in Iowa in 1875. He used to tell me the reason he was so short—he was only about 5' 5" or so—his growth was stunted by the trip by covered wagon in 1880 out to Oregon and Washington. Small as he was, he was a semi-professional football and baseball player. Also, he could play every instrument but the violin that he had ever tried.

Well, first he went to barbering up in Washington. Much later he bought two pieces of property in Kansas. He made a sort of a killing on the property, see, and he says he got to thinking about it at one time and he said if everybody did this to everybody else, it would be a hell of a world to live in.

Well, I guess he got interested in non-profit dealings and things like that. So he sold insurance in California and I think that's where he got mixed up with Job Harriman. And he used to travel all over for the colony. I guess he was a sort of agent for them when the colony was in California. He showed me a picture one time of their automobile. They called it the Green Bug. It was an old Ford. Well, then they moved to Louisiana. Then when Job Harriman left he just took over as president.

Dad kept contact with socialists around the country, but he always used to tell me, he said, "Well, I'm not a socialist, I'm just a radical." Yeah, he didn't claim to be a socialist. He was always a labor union man, I mean he was for the union. To him the labor union was for the working man to see that he wasn't tromped on by management. Of course, I disagreed with him on a great many things. But I think he was a great man myself. Sort of an ideal to live up to. Of course, I don't think that I will ever reach the stature that he reached, but I'm not worried about it. I guess I'm too much of an

individualist to worry about it. I can make it on my own if I have to.

The colony finally began to build slowly. By 1920 there were 165 colonists. A brick kiln and sawmill were begun in 1920 and the weekly newspaper, *The Llano Colonist*, began again in 1921, after having shut down during the hard times. It was the principal medium for spreading the word about the colony and was read in every major country. The paper used different phrases with the masthead, such as "The Voice of the Self-Employed," and "A Weekly Messenger from the Llano Cooperative Colony and Exponent of Integral Cooperation." One was a bit different: "...And in the dim chaos of a restless and joyless life, like a glittering, cheerful star. Like a guiding flame of the future there shimmered a simple word. Deep as the heart: Comrades!"

In the '20's, most of the colonists were at least mild socialists. A straw vote in 1928 showed colonists overwhelmingly behind Norman Thomas for President. With the depression, however, there was an influx of people interested in the colony for economic survival and the political radicalism was diluted. In 1932 a straw vote showed Thomas with 55 votes, Roosevelt with 13, and Hoover with 3, but by 1935 both Roosevelt (79) and Huey Long (38) had more votes than Thomas (28). Another reason for the decline in those considering themselves socialist was that the colony carried on little socialist education and began to emphasize cooperation as the idea and de-emphasized socialism. Even though the colony began to dilute its socialist orientation, there was a Workers' Study Club organized as late as 1933 to discuss Marxism and Soviet socialism. In addition, a conscientious objectors' union, with 115 members, organized at the colony in 1928, and the Llano press was a center for publication of pacifist literature.

The press was a valuable tool for the community. By the mid-twenties they began taking in job work for people in the area and then began to publish a local parish weekly, soon to be the leading newspaper in Vernon Parish.

A Vernon Parish farmer, Harry Killian, never lived in the colony, but he was always impressed with what they built there. "If you were just coming to live, and wanted to join, and you was willing to work for a living, you could just join in. You see they built after they came to Newllano; they built hotels, rooming houses, dwelling houses, ice plant, sawmill, funeral home, peanut butter factory, canning factory. They had stores, they had their own doctors, and Mr. Pickett told me that the highest funeral they ever had cost \$7.50."

Bill Brough came with his father from Massachusetts in 1930 at age 10. He lived there



Left to right: Depot, Office, Commissary. The latter two were still standing in 1972.

until the colony folded in 1939 and he still lives in the town of Newllano. He says that they didn't have to use money because all the colony industries and farms furnished what was needed.

See, we even had our own berries. We had our timber industry. We had a sawmill. We had our own laundry, our bakery, our canning factory, a peanut butter factory. We had our own broom factory, plumbing shop, electrical shop, machine shop, sheet metal shop.

A lot of those industries did work for outsiders and they was either compensated in money or in goods. Let's say you're an outsider, what we called outsiders. You didn't have to live but a half a mile out of here to be an outsider. Let's say you raise corn and you don't have no way to grind it. You'd bring it in to the grist mill in the colony.

Now say somebody had some timber out here and they wanted the land cleared up. Well, we'd go out there, cut it, and haul it in, for a fair percentage of it. We'd saw it. They'd get lumber sawed and planed and we'd get lumber sawed and planed. No money exchanged hands. How could you lose?

In the front of that building with the faded lettering on it was the grist mill and in the back of it was the canning factory, the peanut butter factory, the bakery and all combined in that one building. Well, that was the industrial complex across the highway. Right back to the left here a little bit was the old ice plant. It sat there for years and it was tore down. And this old two-story brown building that you see across there, that was the hotel building. People lived there, but they used it. They had a sewing room at the back of it. They'd send their laundry to be washed, send it to the mending

room, mended, back, if necessary, to be ironed. I worked at the laundry when I was just a little shaver. I run every machine in it. We had a washing machine, an extractor that dried the clothes out. And I would carry the clothes out and the women would hang them up. And in rainy and bad weather we usually used the dry kiln which we used to dry the wheat crates in.

We had a diesel engine and a steam engine. And we had boilers in behind that and when the sawmill was running we hauled in slabs and used the sawdust to fire the boilers. I've done more than a man's work when I was a child. Me and another boy, Bill Brown, were about 15. We had to be over there at five or six o'clock in the morning to fire that thing. We'd eat and come back and stoke them up at 7:00, getting close to a hundred pounds of steam, we'd blow the whistle and open the main valve.

It wasn't no problem, really, to us because we had a shower deal, a homemade shower right there next to it. So we always come back and took a shower anyway, or a steam bath. We could take a shower bath. Yes sir.

The two most impressive buildings in the colony were a large eighty-foot square concrete drying shed which was converted into three lower sections—a theatre, a cabinet shop, and a drying kiln—and the ice plant which not only served the colony families daily but also delivered to nearby Leesville and surrounding areas. There were street lights, some board sidewalks, and dirt streets. The houses were very plain, but each had electricity and water. There was a library building containing 5,000 volumes including the breadth of literary

classics as well as radical literature. Further west from the village could be found Kid Kolony, Pickett's favorite project, which was built for the education of the children.

Henry Killian, the nearby farmer, says: "Their school program was one of the finest programs that I ever knew of. One bunch would work in the morning, and another bunch would go to school. And then in the afternoon, this bunch that went to school in the morning would work, and the bunch that worked in the morning would go to school. Every scholar that they turned out knew how to do something, how to put them to use. They had a trade when they turned them loose. Mr. Pickett told me that a fellow came over and checked into their system. The fellow was from Russia and he carried it back and put it to use. He said that's where Russia got their school system, from that colony. Now I don't know if that's a fact, but that's what he told me.

Blair Pickett tells that all the children went to Kid Kolony for the day, thus taking some burden off the mothers who themselves had jobs.

It was a day-care center, long before its day. The things they are trying for today, they already had it in the colony and it was destroyed.

Blair also remembers being told about the Russians visiting:

Dad told me one time that during the early '30's, I guess it was, that some Russians came over and they came to the colony and they studied the educational system they had there and they took it back with them. I don't know what the Russian educational system is but they were supposedly modeling their education system after the one they had at the colony.

Documented verification of this would, of course, be a very valuable addition to the history of Llano colony.

Kid Kolony helped somewhat to allow women more free time, but according to one colonist, Albert Kapotsy, now age 90:

Women had a double burden in the colony. Now, they could take clothes to the community laundry, the food was fixed for everybody in the hotel and a woman could have all the family's sewing done in the sewing room. But, they had eight-hour jobs, same as men, and then they had to come home to housework. They had it a little rough, but still had a lot of free time.

According to a 1923 article in the *American Vanguard* by Kate Richards O'Hare, the tension



It was a day care center, long before its day.

between men and women was one of the main problems in the colony, partially because of the extra work load of women and also because colony affairs were run by men, though women did as much work for the colony as a whole.

One of the aspects of colony life which was directed by the women was the preparation and serving of food. Bill Brough points out:

Here, this old building that is just about torn down was a hotel. Everybody went there to eat. They had a big dining room downstairs. Now, if they wanted to, people with families could carry their food home to eat. They had containers and would go through the line. If they had six people in the family, they allowed them so much bread, so much of whatever they had, to carry home.

Mrs. Peecher worked there and in the sewing room, another responsibility of the women.

We had a commissary where you could go to get your clothes which were very few because a lot of clothes were donated from places outside. There would be big boxes of clothes come in, and then of course we made all of the overalls and things that the men wore, and shirts. And sometimes people would send in materials and we'd make dresses for the women. But, if you come in here with no money, you didn't have no money, you just depended on what you could through the colony, that's all.

Reading through literature from and about the colony and talking with ex-colonists, a person gets the impression that the people were proud of the work they did there. They worked hard and though Newllano never was a showcase of splendor and the streets never were even paved, much less with gold, they knew they were doing something very new, and for a while succeeded. Perhaps people were proud of their labor there because they lived and worked at the colony out of choice, not because they were forced to be there. They were working for something they believed in and their labor belonged to them and to the colony, not to the boss or to an owner of a factory. It was only when they began to feel that it was mainly Pickett's colony, not theirs, that resentment was felt.

Colony life was not all work, however, for there was time for discussion groups, for the theatre, and, most important of all, for the dances on Saturday night. "We had a roof garden on top of one of the buildings, and there we had a dance floor. It was one of the best in Louisiana at one time, solid oak," told Chester Peecher as he plucked around on the fiddle he used to saw every weekend.

On a Saturday night we would have a couple of hundred people. We had round dances and square dances and had an orchestra down there that must have had twelve or fifteen people in it, maybe more



than that. Even after the colony broke up we had dances at our place and at other places, like Bill Brough's. You'd roll back the rug if you had one, and sometimes you didn't have one.

Says Bill Brough:

It was something to see and people came from all over to it. We did the Paul Jones and the waltz and what have you. And we had some pretty girls back in those days and we could really dance; we hugged them up tight. Mr. Pickett, he was a little sawed-off rascal, he would come up and stick a broom sideways between us. We were supposed to stay that far apart, but we wouldn't.

One of the important aspects of the colony was the way it related to people in the surrounding area. The colony offered the services for outsiders of sawing and dressing lumber, canning meat, and making peanut butter for a fair share of the goods. Also, they delivered ice and published the parish paper as well as having the popular Saturday night dances for all people of the area. Farmers, working people, and poor people could see clearly what the colony people were doing and even today most Vernon Parish people speak fondly, even proudly, of the colony that was in their midst for twenty-two

years. They should also be proud of themselves, for radicals elsewhere were suppressed and imprisoned at the same time the colony was growing. The common people of Vernon Parish knew colony people were radicals, some Communists and Socialists, but unlike elsewhere, they did not let these labels blind them. They could see that the colonists were hard-working people, a lot like themselves in that way, but working hard for a dream. Mr. Killian saw it clearly:

Well, yeah, I would go around amongst them. You see, I was always kinda like you; I called it more or less curious. You know, a lot was a-going on and really, you see, I was raised up poor, and really I thought it was a good thing. In other words, if people happened to run out of a home, that would be an ideal place. One time the sheriff told Mr. Pickett that "if everybody conducted themselves as you people do, we wouldn't have any use for a sheriff."

But, the upper class of Leesville never was proud of the colony, and always sought to destroy it. They were eventually successful. Talking of those kind of people, Mr. Killian continued:

Some people wanted to destroy it. But there's a certain percent of the people that wants to grab everything they can get. They'll get a little hold, they'll keep a-pulling until they pull you in. For a profit big enough, there's people that will destroy almost anything. But it wasn't the people in general all over the country here that wanted to destroy the colony.

While working people and farmers benefitted from the colony, the Leesville upper class had nothing to gain. The colony was a threat to them economically as working people and farmers turned to the colony for services and goods. The colony ice plant even eventually caused the Leesville plant to shut down. During the life of the colony and afterward, the upper class used the courts as their tool for harassment. Blair Pickett tells that colony people had trouble with the Leesville group which took them into court several times.

They had this old guy in the colony from Chicago, originally from Germany, by the name of Dad Gleaser. He was editor of the Llano Colonist. Well, they hauled the colony up there for being a free-love colony. So the prosecuting attorney asked Dad Gleaser, "Do you believe in free love?" And Gleaser said, "Yes." But he said, "Let me clarify this. How much did you have to pay for your wife?" That stopped the judge cold right there.

The reputation of the colony spread not only around Vernon Parish, but further. By word of mouth, by Pickett's travels, and by glowing reports in the *Llano Colonist*, word of the colony reached across the US and even to other countries. A lot of people liked what they heard, though reports were exaggerated at times, and a lot of them decided to come down to Louisiana and give it a try. What were these people like? Who was a good example of the "typical colonist"? It would be difficult to say, and a few examples will show the diversity of people who came.



Llano Colony Junior Orchestra



George D. Coleman published a booklet at the colony about his particular speciality entitled "Making Fertilizer At Home."

There was Cuno, the colony philosopher who had met Marx and Engels and who walked around the colony in a white robe. He gave talks using Bertrand Russell as a text and felt that love was the powerful, positive force in the universe. Ester Allen was the colony nurse and had a devotion to the colony that was nun-like. There was Harry Weatherwax, a former Communist Party organizer who, when he was married, asked for a divorce coupon at the same time he bought his license and wrote "red" for his color. And, there was Ivy Young, an accomplished artist, who came from England to the colony. He did a bust of Pickett while there.

George D. Coleman published a booklet at the colony about his particular specialty entitled "Making Fertilizer at Home." He had travelled the world and had observed fertilizing techniques everywhere he went, then devised his own method. Ole Synoground was Swedish and a socialist. He was a worker "like a big mule" and devoted to the colony. Chester and Mrs. Peecher, now living in Leesville, are still strong socialists. They came from Illinois to the colony and he remembers that when a small boy, his father took him to hear Gene Debs campaigning for President from the back of a train painted a bright red (the "Red Special"). There were a few Jewish people who came to the colony, but no blacks. According to Mr. Peecher, the colony people knew and discussed that exclusion of blacks was in direct contradiction to what the colony stood for. Yet, they all feared that the colony would be attacked and destroyed if blacks were included.

Albert Kapotsy, who now lives in Leesville, came to the colony in the early twenties.

I came out from Hungary, I ran away from the army. I didn't want to serve under military rule. I came here as a red card Party member, had a red card from the old country. As soon as I arrived, some fellows took me from Ellis Island to a place on Fourth Street in New York that was the headquarters for the socialists. From there, I wrote for their magazine which in English would mean "The People's Voice." I grew up with Marxism. In Budapest I had gone to school with a boy whose father was a very great agitator. The people had the guts to demand from the government and if the government didn't come across, they'd organize a big parade. The whole population developed a socialist understanding by being educated to it. They were just more advanced to see the point.

I was the first organizer that called meetings together in New Haven, Connecticut. The Socialist Party was very active then. It was very active. The workers felt kind of an obligation to get a move on.

I had a little argument with the people there and then I saw this advertising about the colony building their own community. I said, "That's the place where I'm gonna go," and I came down with my five children to join the colony. I didn't stay there long because Pickett ruled with an iron fist. He made me sit down in the meeting when I tried to put in my two cents worth. I felt that I had been in too responsible of a position in the movement for him to make me sit down. So, I soon moved to Leesville and went back and forth whenever they would have a meeting.

Kapotsy was a plumber and began to ply his trade in Leesville. He still carries a great deal of bitterness toward Pickett but believes in the colony ideals. One important part of his life is his close tie

to his native Hungary. In the summer of 1972 he visited there and made an arrangement with state libraries for them to receive the mounds of colony and leftist literature he has collected through the decades. He and his wife spoke Hungarian to one another as we ate together in their kitchen.

Probably the colony participants who were then and later the best known nationally were William Edward Zeuch and Kate Richards O'Hare. O'Hare had been a lecturer, an executive with the IWW, and had published the *Ripsaw* along with her husband Frank. The two O'Hares had been closely connected in their work with the militant labor and socialist leader, Eugene Debs. At the colony she published the *American Vanguard*, producing fifteen monthly issues while there. Later, after leaving Llano, she was convicted under the sedition law and served fourteen months in the Missouri State Penitentiary. In 1927 she led a children's crusade to Washington on behalf of amnesty for all political prisoners.

Zeuch had served in World War I, afterward helped establish cooperative stores in Illinois and later taught at the University of Illinois. He and the O'Hares had a vision of creating a new type of school, described by one of the former teachers there as being "aimed to recruit and train leaders for unconventional roles in a new and radically different society—one in which workers would have power and would need responsible leadership." He writes about Commonwealth College in a new book, *Educational Commune*, by Charlotte and Raymond Koch.

The colony deeded forty acres to the school in return for free tuition for the colonists. Students, then, were to have schooling for half a day and work in the colony for the other half. It was begun on April 2, 1923, with three trustees, Kate O'Hare, A. James MacDonald, and William E. Zeuch.

Covington Hall, who had a volume of poetry [*Rhymes of a Rebel*] published by the colony press, was one of the college's elders. He is quoted in *Educational Commune*, "Dr. Zeuch and General Manager Pickett were strong personalities, with fixed ideas as to how the New World should be blue-printed. . . . The lovefeast of Founders' Day was hardly over before the struggle to control the community began. It lasted for over a year. Then the two conflicting groups, unable to agree, agreed to disagree."

Zeuch wrote before he died in 1968, "The students from without the colony could not adjust to the limited and frugal fare provided at the colony dining room. There was a serious division within the colony of which those representing the college had not known. . . . Dissidents in the colony were

looking to the college to help them in their struggle against what they called the dishonest and inefficient management."

A recollection of Mrs. Viola Gilbert, still living near Mena, Arkansas, close to the eventual site of Commonwealth, tells of part of the conflict. "After a while many of the colony group were not pleased with their agreement to give maintenance to Commonwealth students for a half day's labor, claiming that it cost more to train a student than their services were worth. . . . We received settlements in lumber, farm machinery, shingles, horses, mules, cattle, and shop equipment," and left.⁵

According to Kapotsy, some colonists criticized Pickett for the arrangement with the Commonwealth people and with O'Hare for use of the press. "The colonists had to work on the outside, in the garden, and in the shop and in the woods and in the fields. There was a misunderstanding on their part about the value of the work in the office."

The result was that Zeuch, the O'Hares, about 50 Commonwealth people, the *American Vanguard* and the College all withdrew from Llano, along with their share of materials. By January, 1925, they all had left and they later formed a new Commonwealth College near Mena, Arkansas, which lasted until 1940. Job Harriman, in ill health and living in California, returned for part of the conflict, and withdrew with the Arkansas group. He died in California in 1925.

During the Depression many people were attracted to the colony and the population rose to 600. According to Mr. Peecher, "You were supposed to buy stock to join, but you could just bring in your worldly goods and turn them in. And that was part of your membership. You would work off the rest. You didn't have to have any money. Because they'd take in guys right off the highway down there and they wouldn't have a penny. And they'd take them in and they'd stay there until they got filled up real good and take off."

In one way or another, Llano was related to almost every other cooperative effort in the first part of the Twentieth Century. The pacifist Doukhobors of British Columbia sent regular letters to the *Colonist*; the paper described at length the Amana colony in Iowa; Sherwood Eddy of the Delta Cooperative Plantation in Mississippi contributed long articles about the colony there; and the unsuccessful Jewish colony at Sunrise, Michigan, issued regular reports to Llano, its mother colony. Some colonists split off to form another cooperative at State Line, Mississippi; a young man attended the organic school of the single-tax colony at Fairhope, Alabama; a leading English colonist came to Llano from Sir Ebenezer Howard's Welwyn Garden City;

RHYMES of a REBEL

By Covington Hall



"The All that ever was, it is but Me "

The Strike

*Say what ye will, ye owls of night;
The strike upholds the cause of right;
The strike compels the judge to pause,
The statesmen to remold the laws.*

*Say what ye will, the strike is good,
It clears things long misunderstood;
It jolts the social mind awake;
It forces men a stand to take.*

*Say what ye will, yet without ruth,
The strike drives home the bitter truth;
The strike tears off the mask of things,
To mass the class the issue brings.*

*Say what ye will, all else above,
The strike is war for bread and love;
For raiment, shelter, freedom, all
The human race can justice call.*

and some older colonists had come to Llano from other communal experiences in the Tennessee Ruskin colony or the early commonwealths in Washington State.

Discontent with Pickett's leadership began to swell as time passed. He spoke proudly that Llano Colony was self-supporting, but its finances were always shaky and there were always debts. Many felt that Pickett should have spent more time helping place the colony on a self-supporting basis instead of travelling the country trying to raise support. A. James MacDonald, a strong critic of Pickett, mailed out a fourteen-page attack on Pickett in 1927. In it he wrote that many colonists "would rather see the colony discontinued than to see more and more people brought there through Pickett's misrepresentations and caused to lose money that many of them could ill afford to lose."

"The idea was right. The colony proved that the idea was right. It's the individual leaders, they put themselves forward too much. They are the ones that killed the colony," says Kapotsy. "Pickett had a wonderful gut. Where a lot of people wouldn't dare to step, he would go. But he was not a builder, he was not an engineer, he was a propagandist."

According to Mrs. Peecher, "He tried to expand. He bought the rice ranch down here in Elton [Louisiana]. Then he goes out to [Gila,] New Mexico and tried to buy or does buy another place. Well, they weren't making enough here in this colony to take care of the people here without all this expansion, you see. If he had stayed here and took care of this one until he got it going and then go out and buy another one, then okay, but he didn't do that." Pickett also attempted to expand with another branch at Premont, Texas, had a dream of some sort for Cuba's Isle of Pines, and talked of a working people's resort on Estero Island off the coast of Florida. Money sunk into these efforts which never succeeded only compounded the debt problems. These ventures, combined with the loss of a great deal of money in the drilling of three dry oil wells at Newllano, left the colony in an increasingly precarious situation.

Finally in 1935, Mr. Peecher remembers, "Pickett got up there one night and said that unless there was something done and done soon, this colony wasn't going to last much longer. It wasn't going to be able to stand. And he was very sincere."

This sparked what was called by colony people "The Revolution." It was mainly younger colonists aligned against Pickett and the old colonists, some of whom had been figurehead leaders on the colony board for years. Peecher continues, "We got to talking, you know, and said, 'Well, if Pickett says this place is going to bust up, that we're going to go

to the dogs, why, then it's about time we started something.' Then we got to talking around here about just taking the bull by the horns and put Pickett out. He was on a speaking tour when we had an election down there and we elected Gene Carl as general manager. We thought it was our duty after what he said up there. He didn't offer no remedy."

The colony was fragmented then and began to break apart. The new leadership turned out to be too weak to pull it together. There was some shooting exchanged between the factions, and the colony school was discontinued. Pickett tried to challenge the takeover in the courts, based on the fact that it was not legal according to the corporation's charter. But his efforts were in vain, for though he had legal grounds, the local courts were glad for the opportunity to play a role in destroying the colony. Finally, the rebel leadership put the colony into receivership in 1938 in hopes of clearing up the debts. The Leesville power structure seized the opportunity and sold the entire colony supposedly in order to settle debts. For all the colony lands, the factories, machinery, and the entire town, the receiver obtained \$60,000. The entire ice plant went for \$400, and one man, a Mr. Kildare, bought the whole town of Newllano for a few hundred dollars and later became its mayor. The action was almost without doubt illegal, but the local power structure reacted like scavengers, and expediency shoved legality to the rear. "It seems to me it was the big fish swallowing the little one," says Killian.

Pickett and other colonists continued for decades to attempt a court challenge, but the odds were overwhelming. No Louisiana lawyer would touch the case. Today, there is still a board of directors of Llano Colony and they still hope to challenge in the courts for land that was taken illegally by the court. Vernon Parish courthouse records now show that only forty acres remain in Llano's name of the thousands that were once there.

After the collapse of the colony, most colony people dispersed throughout the country. Pickett and a few others stayed in Vernon Parish, he to continue with a relentless struggle for the colony until his death in 1959. For a while he worked for an economic plan called the Townsend National Recovery Plan, all the while living in near poverty in a very simple house near the old colony. In the 40's he began to print a small leaflet entitled, of course, "The Llano Colonist," in order to build support for the court cases.

"GET THIS STRAIGHT," he wrote, "Llano Colony was the only group of people in the whole WESTERN HEMISPHERE that was daring enough to try and learn the basic laws that govern a better

system of COOPERATIVE ECONOMICS. We people of LLANO COLONY, compared to many other communities of a like size, were MORE PEACEABLE, MORE INDUSTRIOUS, MORE ATTENTIVE TO OUR OWN BUSINESS, LESS MEDDLESOME WITH OTHER PEOPLE'S AFFAIRS, MORE KINDLY DISPOSED TOWARD OUR NEIGHBORS, than many others, and WE WERE, ON THE AVERAGE, BETTER CITIZENS IN EVERY WAY. Our greatest fault was, WE WERE TOO KINDHEARTED. We could not believe that people who were neighbors could be induced to participate in CRIMINAL and MALICIOUS acts toward us. We have been cruelly wronged. WE ARE MAD. THERE ARE A LOT OF US."

Pickett remains the center of discussion pro and con of those who lived in the colony. Without his strong, charismatic, single-handed leadership, there is a good possibility that the colony would have collapsed long before it did. Yet, it was the weakness of that "dictatorial" leadership, combined with the hostile outside forces which led eventually to the collapse. The centralization of power in Pickett's hands was always in direct contradiction to the principles of socialist cooperation on which the colony was founded.

"Would you do it again now, Ms. Peecher, after what you went through there?"

"No, if I had to go through what I did the first time I wouldn't. Not with just one guy telling you what you could do and what you couldn't do. I think if things were run properly I'd go back into another colony. It would have to be run with the people being the heart of it, you know."

Let's demand a year of Jubilee to make all people free,

Money slavery abolish for all eternity

*The Golden Rule be practice of all humanity,
For Llano's marching on.*

—verse of old colony song



Board of Directors, Llano Colony, May 5, 1925



Photo by Cam Duncan

Chester Peecher standing in front of his small electrician's shop, Leesville, Louisiana

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1. Dr. Walter Siegmeister, "The Downfall of Capitalism and the Birth of the New Cooperative System," *The Llano Colonist*, April 1, 1933.

2. Ernest S. Wooster, *The Nation*, October 10, 1923.

3. A. James McDonald, in a letter dated April 18, 1927, and sent out as a mass mailing, outlining his opposition to Pickett.

4. In *Educational Commune*, by Charlotte and Raymond Koch.

the knoxville race riot

"TO MAKE PEOPLE PROUD"

by Bill Murrah

The year following the end of the first World War saw a number of major outbreaks of racial conflict in the United States. Six major conflicts occurred in Longview, Texas, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Omaha, Elaine, Arkansas, and Knoxville, Tennessee, during 1919, and there were numerous other flare-ups. Clearly, these were strikes of the black communities against the violence and oppression which had been pressed upon them for three centuries in the "land of the free."

In Tennessee, public officials boasted openly of the fine racial climate. A letter from Governor Roberts to Chicago officials, written during the trouble there and immediately before the Knoxville riot said, "We need the Negro here, and I do not fear that Tennessee will ever be the scene of such troubles as are now existing in Chicago." He welcomed black people to a state whose "perfect understanding and efforts to maintain friendly relationships for the past century" have been to its good credit. Yet, his words were tainted by the fact that in the 20 years previous to 1919, 196 black people had had their lives taken by lynch mobs in Tennessee. In a few days his words crumbled before the outbreak of violence in Knoxville.

Generally, both blacks and whites now agree that the Knoxville riot has had a favorable impact on race relations since 1919. Both say that the events of August 30-31 have contributed to further-

ing a relatively harmonious racial climate, but there are differences as to why each feels that this is true. Whites generally have said that relations between the races here are good because whites put blacks in their place once and for all in 1919. Blacks, on the other hand, say the favorable climate is due to the fact that once and for all they showed whites they would not stand for their violent racism.

Concerning the riot itself, both blacks and whites agree that though the newspapers insisted at the time that only two people were killed (even to the absurd point that one headline stated that two were killed, but stated in the body of the article that eight had been killed) many more than that actually died, maybe forty or fifty people. Blacks say there were only one or two blacks killed, but newspapers would not report the very large numbers of whites killed. Whites say that only one white was killed, but the large numbers of blacks killed were never counted.

Two things are being presented here: something of the history of the race riot itself, and perhaps more important, the work of four young white boys, ages 10-14, from a working class neighborhood in Knoxville who set out to find out something about their history.

These four boys were part of a tutoring program run by and for the people of our Knoxville neighborhood. None of them care for the schools.

no doubt because the schools do not care for them. One has already been "Pushed out" from junior high, already having had petitions against him from school authorities, and another got only D's and F's on his Fall report card. The boys who did this book, voluntarily and self-motivated, have actually been labelled as failures, as "F-people" by the school system. Tony Weaver's report card is an indictment of the school system, not of Tony. He's fine.

As their tutor, I first tried to more or less trick the boys into learning through use of different learning games. But they are too accustomed to shaping their own lives to be tricked into having something pushed onto them. For some reason, they took hold of the idea and the work of doing a book, probably because it was "active" learning, something of which depended upon them to do the work and give it shape. It was my suggestion that we talk with Mrs. Beulah Netherland, a very strong but gentle leader of the Knoxville black community, and hear her tell of the race riot. They already had a little experience, having made one book about a Mark Twain-like story told by a neighbor from his days on a river barge.

Recently, three of the boys decided they wanted to do another book. We sat down and they brainstormed a list of eight possibilities including doing a book about Knoxville area musicians (beginning with Roy Acuff), the history of the neighborhood, going on a camping trip, about old buildings in Knoxville. They took the list, arranged it in order of preference from one to eight with the first choice being a story about Charles Hunter, the father of one of the boys, who grew up in the streets and alleys of Knoxville in the '40's.

We can see the value of young people doing history themselves in the following conversation with Charles Hunter's twelve year old son, Darryl.

How did you get started doing the book?

We had sort of a school, but it's different, called "tutoring." It was part of that. We went up to people we know and asked them if they knew anything we could write a book about. We went to talk to a woman who told about the race riot. She told us how it began, how it ended, how Maurice Mays got killed. Well, then we went up to the library and read in the old newspapers about it. Used one of those things that looks like a TV, a

microfilm machine, and we put the paper in it. We kept on going there to read about it and kept on going to Mrs. Netherland's house. She was nice and had a big house, a garage, and a big car. Her story was a little different from the newspaper story. The newspaper lies a lot, and in a way I believed her.

We used a tape recorder. We played it, then listened to it, would stop it when we wanted to, and run it back and play it over. Then Tony and Mike wrote down what they'd think ought to go in there.

I did the pictures about the parts where all the excitement was happening. In those two parts, where he was taken in the jail and where they used machine guns.

Why did you do something like this book, something that took so much time?

Well, we figured that probably we'd send it out in the neighborhood and let them read it. We just wanted, well, to make people be proud of us, and stuff like that. In a way it worked, and in a way it didn't. Some people said, "Aw, that ain't nothing." It was mostly the younger people. Other people said it was pretty good.

I took it to school. They thought it was, you know, good. The teacher showed the pictures to them and showed the book, picked one to read it. They looked at the drawings, stuff like that. They asked me where did we do it at, I told 'em, stuff like that.

Wasn't it like school, doing the book?

Naw, it's different. You get to go places, find out more about what happens in other places, what happened years ago. You can't read about the race riot in 1919. They ain't got no books like that. They ain't got no real exciting books.

When you're in school, you have to sit down. And, when you want to ask somebody something, you can't. If you want to get up and stretch or something, you can't.

Well, did you learn anything doing this?

Yeah. About, well, we learned not to be on Gay Street when they're having a shoot-out.

Do you want to do another one?

Yeah, I'd like to. Maybe one about old buildings or something. I ain't really been thinking about it. If we was to do another one, I would think about it again.

I wanted to do one about my Daddy and stories he's told me about when he was a kid. I thought that was real interesting, how it was back then. Here, let me tell you this one that he told me one time. . . .

The History of THE RACE RIOT IN 1919



Told by Mrs. Beulah Netherland
Written by Chuck Hunter, Tony Weaver,
Mike Wells, and Bill Munnah
Drawings by Darryl Hunter

One day in 1919 Maurice Mays, a black man, got accused of murdering Mrs. Bertie Lindsey, a white woman. One reason he was arrested was that he had enemies on the police force. They took him down to the county jail and locked him up. Then a white mob went down to get him out and lynch him.



They busted in the jail and let all the white prisoners out. They were looking for Maurice Mays but the law had already taken him to Chattanooga.

Then the white mob went down and robbed guns from some stores on Gay Street.

At the same time this was going on the black people were forming themselves into a group. They didn't intend to let the white people get Maurice Mays out of jail and lynch him. All up and down Vine Street they gathered and some were up in the buildings.

Then they called out the National Guard.



They mostly guarded Vine Street because it was the black people's hang-out. The Guards set up machine guns all up and down Vine Street and even one on Vine and Central. One black man went out to get a machine gun to protect the black people. He got shot down in the middle of the street. One big strong black man picked up two National Guards and threw them in the creek. The man who did this owned a store at the corner of Willow and Vine.

One of the Guards got killed by their own machine gun. The Guards were afraid so they just started firing anywhere. They went crazy and started firing at anything and anybody. The black people were hiding in buildings and under bridges. They were thick as hop.

Nobody really knows how many were killed in the race riot.

This rich white man came through Vine Street bringing his black servant home. Most black people were afraid to come through there. The Guards stopped the car and searched the butler. The rich white man got mad. He cursed and said, "I'm going to get you off the street in ten minutes." He turned around and went to the court house and got the Guards moved off the street that very minute.

Maurice Mays said on the witness stand that he was innocent. He said, "You'll find it out after I'm gone. I believe this court will believe me. I am telling the truth even if I die this very moment." The court found him guilty and executed him anyway. It was all a whitewash because later they found out that he was innocent and that a white lawman really killed Bertie Lindsey. The white man and Maurice Mays both had been going with the same woman, Bertie Lindsey.

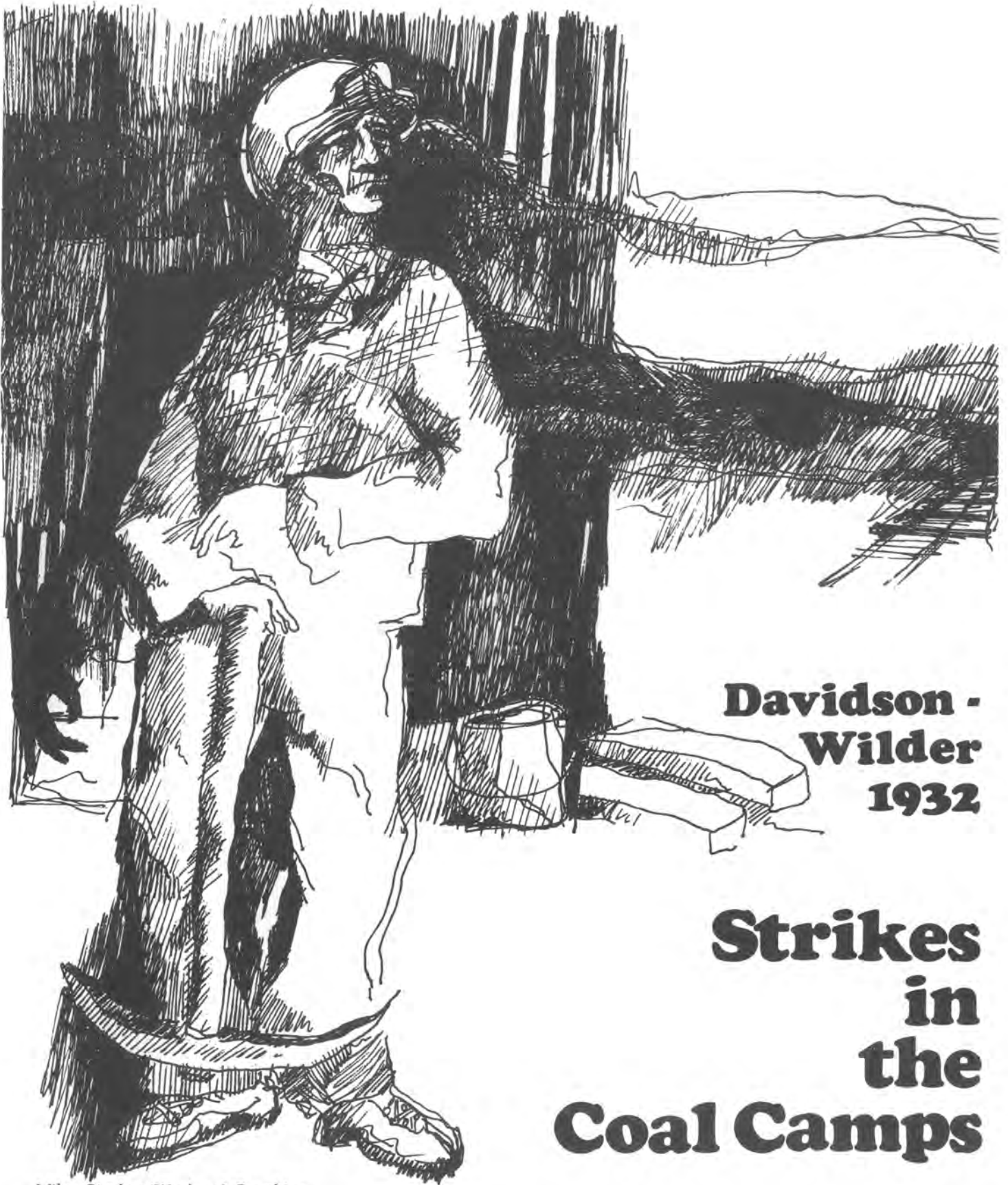
The End



Myles Stryker/Workers' Graphics

East Tennessee Coal Mining Battles





**Davidson -
Wilder
1932**

**Strikes
in
the
Coal Camps**

Miles Stryker/Workers' Graphics

by Fran Ansley and Brenda Bell

Editors' Note: The following narrative is based on interviews conducted in July and August, 1973, and is intended for use by people in the area where the events took place. It is one experiment in helping local people preserve their own history and pass it on to their neighbors and children.

FORWARD

This is the story of a coal miners' strike on the Tennessee Cumberland Plateau which began in 1932. It was a long, hard, bloody strike, fought to preserve what was at that time the only recognized coal miners' union south of the Ohio River. It ended in the defeat of the union workers in 1933.

Forty years later, several people in Knoxville became interested in finding out the story of this strike. We had been talking together about trying to learn and save some of the history of our area—not just the history of famous and powerful individuals, but the history of common people, working people.

We knew that there had been a strike at Davidson-Wilder because we had heard some songs about it on a record by Hedy West.¹ In the beginning, that was the only thing we had to go on. Since then, we have found that a few things were written about the strike.² But primarily we have talked to many people who were involved in the strike: strikers and their families, people who left at the beginning of the strike and became farmers, outsiders, and scabs.

The people we talked with have been great, taking long hours to remember what happened and to explain it to us, when they had never seen us before and had no way of knowing whether or not to trust us. As outsiders to the strike and to coal mining too, we now feel we have learned a lot: about the strike itself, about life in Appalachian coal camps during the Depression, and the strength and courage of the people who lived and survived in them.

In the pages that follow we have let the people who were involved in the strike tell the story themselves. We tape recorded our conversations with 14 people, and we made notes about talks we had with about 10 others. The following story is pieced together from things that all these people had to say. We have changed the names of the who appear in the story except for those who are recognizable anyway, from their position, or from something they did.³ This is not because anyone asked us to hide their identity. But there were so many people mentioned, we knew we could never locate them all to ask their permission and so we

decided it was best to use only a minimum of real names in the story.

In putting it together we didn't try to be "neutral." We believe that working people and poor people need to get together to gain a better living and a say over their own lives. So we felt on the side of the strikers when we began, and the things we learned since then have made us feel that way all the more. But even though we had our own point of view, we tried to get everybody's side of the story.

Sometimes, of course, people disagree on exactly what happened or what certain events meant. Especially people from Fentress County and nearby may disagree with some versions given here, or may know something else that's not told. We want to share with others what we have learned so far, as an encouragement to other people to try this way of learning history, and as a tribute to the people who shared their story with us.



Davidson and Wilder in 1932 were sizeable mining camps located in the Cumberland Plateau region of Tennessee. They were strung like beads on a string with two other camps, Crawford and Twinton, in a gorge ("the hollow") cut by the East Fork of the Obey River in Fentress and Overton Counties.

At that time three mines were being worked there, one at Twin, owned by a New York company, Brier Hill Collieries (which had already worked out an earlier mine at Crawford); a second at Davidson owned by the Patterson brothers, E.W. and Hubert; and the third and largest at Wilder, owned by the Nashville-based Fentress Coal and Coke Company, run by general manager W.D. Boyer and superintendent L.L. Shivers.

The people who lived and worked in the mining camps, almost all native mountaineers, until recently had made their living by farming in the area and working in the timber woods or sawmills of the lumbering industry. Still others had been coal miners in other places before.

We had lived at Wilder when I was just a kid. Then during World War I we left Wilder and went up to Blue Diamond, Kentucky, and then from Blue Diamond back over on the Southern Railroad, and then when the war was over with, we moved back here in May of 1919, and that's when I went to work.

Down around Dunlap, in Grundy, there was a bunch come from down there. Rockwood men, that come from down near Chattanooga, around Soddy and Dunlap.

That's right. There were mines all up and down the Southern Railroad. Most of them worked around the Rockwood mine. Most of them had been ore miners. They used to mine ore over there.

Just poured in here, these people did. A good part of the Davidson people was from down there.

Conditions in the mines and mining camps were rough, for men and women alike:

I was something around 15 year old, the first work I done in the mines. I went to work chalk-ey-ing* for another fellow for a dollar and a half a day and my board . . . worked seven months that way, then I got myself a room of my own and went to digging and getting so much a ton myself.

I went to school to the sixth grade. And then I went to carrying water up there around the tip. The war broke out . . . and the foreman come in and said, "How old are you?" I said, "I'm going on 17." I was big for my age. He took me in the mines and I mashed my fingers half off on the tailchain. I was thirteen. I stayed in there from then on. I had a big old mule and I had to get somebody to help harness it. I couldn't reach up to it.

Used to, you'd go in the mines and take a place, a room neck, and you'd widen that out to forty feet wide, and you had that, that was your place. You set the timbers and you laid your track, and pushed your car in and pushed it out. And what coal you took out of that place, why, that was your living, that was all you made. If you didn't load any, you didn't make nothing. So if you made a living, you had to get in there and work, and work hard all day. There wasn't no stopping. If you could get cars, you didn't even take time to eat. I've went many a day, the only time I took a drink of water is when I put water in my lamp. I never touched my bucket all day. But if you didn't get cars, why you'd sit there worrying because you weren't going to make nothing.

Well, it was pretty rough. They didn't know nothing about safety and didn't care. We had two or three men burned up in explosions. We had a state mine inspector, but he turned his back when he saw some of the dangers. You was just on your own when you went in there. If it was going to cave

* A "chalk-eye" helped a coal digger and usually got the lowest pay. Young boys often chalk-eyed for an older relative. We don't know the origin of the word.

in on you, go ahead and do it. Nobody cared. They'd hire farmers from round here to come in, when they first opened the mines. They didn't know anything about mining. They'd soon better learn if they lived long! The graveyard down there is full of men killed in the mines.

At the time of the strike, miners were paid every two weeks. The company kept daily records of how much each man made, and if he ran out of money before payday, he could go to the company office and draw "scrip." (If he had any credit in his account, that is.) The scrip was only good at the company store.

You see, if you had to buy groceries, you'd have to go to this office, and you'd tell them you wanted two dollars or three dollars in scrip and they'd give it. But you didn't dare overdraw, because if you did, you wouldn't get a penny. You were turned down. But if you made over that, if you had money coming to you, you could get it.

Most folks just had scrip all the time. Money, why I didn't see no money til I was 25 years old.

Before you got that money, the company had to have their take-outs on the first of every month—house rent, your coal, light bill, doctor bill. And they held that out whether or not you made anything. The miners had to buy their powder, their fuses, and everything, to shoot that coal down with.

The superintendent was the head man in town; his wife was the head woman in town. The foreman didn't have any status. It's like on a plantation, driving slaves. Everybody lived in shacks except the superintendent's family and they lived in a house. A company town.

Well, you take the company doctor back then, he would just as soon tell you coal dust was good for your lungs. And it wasn't bad for you if you got a leg broke! If he could set it, it was all right. You were just as good as you ever was. You take it at Wilder, the older kids raised there could have had black lung easy. You take sulphur smoke, over by the slate dumps and sulphur in it and it burning. You could hardly breathe in town back when I was a kid there. My wife's got a sister, and the doctors gave her medicine for black lung. She said it wasn't anything except breathing that old sulphur smoke. They lived close to the mines.

The mining camps, they didn't even have electricity. You couldn't buy a washing machine. And they washed on rub boards most of the time. No running water, you carried water.



Photo by David Bell

Abandoned Company Store, Davidson, 1973

This is a miner's workslip which was published in the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* in November, 1932. It shows some of the items which might be deducted from the miner's pay, including charges for the use of the bath house, the *Nashville Banner*, powder, rent, and the funeral fund.

FENTRESS COAL & COKE COMPANY
WILSON, TENNESSEE

No. 269 Name Arthur Stalls

Period Ending @ _____

EARNINGS	
Yards @	
Yards @	
Days (or hours) @	
<u>Cutback</u>	19 26
<u>Transfers</u>	42 27
Cash	
Car Checks toward it	
	61 53

DEDUCTIONS	
Bath	14 00
Powder	
Rent	5 00
Coal	3 50
Lights	1 25
Dinner	2 00
<u>Autumn (Bathes)</u>	80
Insurance	1 70
Miss Car Checks	
Savings	
Transfers	5 05
Overdraft	
Bath House	1 75
Cash Advanced	
Funeral	1 00
Share Loan A. C.	
Hospital Fund	1 00
	37 05
	24 48

Not Transferable Subject to All Fentress Regulations

Many mining families were large ones and the women were expected to stay home and care for them. And, although the women weren't allowed to play much of a part in the official union, they were very important to it even so.

I didn't run around much then, I mean go places or nothing. The children was all just small, and I stayed at home. They didn't get out and gossip like they do these days. They stayed at home, took care of the house and children.

I don't see how miners' widows lived at all. Because their folks didn't make enough to make a living for themselves, much less anybody else. My uncle died and he had two kids, and I don't know how she got by, she'd just come to our house for a while and go to her daddy's a while, and finally she got married again. But a woman with a big bunch of kids, I don't see how she did it.

The women, most of them, just went on about their business, and let the men do what they wanted to do, and they stayed at home. At union meetings, the men would go, and the women didn't have anything in it—they stayed at home.

Well, women had a bunch of influence in the union more and more. Now, if a woman's strong for the union, why her husband will be strong. And if she's against it, it's hard for him to do anything. My wife was behind me all the way though.

• • • • •
Miners and their families had never just sat back without trying to improve the conditions of their lives. Whenever times were good, miners tried to press for a better share. During World War I coal was in great demand and the industry was booming. The War Labor Board supported the right of defense workers to have unions. So when many southern miners went on strike in 1917, the government helped pressure the coal operators into an agreement which the *Chattanooga Labor World* called "the greatest victory ever won in any union coal field in this country." They won shorter hours, better pay, the right to a committee, and other things as well. In 1918, the United Mine Workers of America campaigned throughout Eastern Kentucky and East Tennessee, signing up more and more mines under the new agreement. Wilder, Davidson and Twinton were among them.

When we started organizing, I know the first time I joined the union, I was up in Twin City up beyond Davidson about two miles. They signed me up out under a bluff in the woods, hid out. It was in about '18, I guess.

It would crop up from somewhere or another.

You had to keep it kind of secret til you got a majority. You just signed the card and you kept your mouth shut until you got enough men together. It'd be some union organizer, but he would start with the man he thought he could trust, that could work through the men. And that one, after he'd signed the card, maybe he'd work on his best friend to get him to sign a card, and just keep working that way until they got a majority of the men and then they'd call a meeting for to talk to the company and have a committee.

This first organization didn't last long, though. As soon as the war was over, the companies started trying to cheat on their agreement and cut corners wherever they could. In 1921 and 1922 depression hit the coal fields, and the unions lost many of the gains they had made. By 1924, coal companies all over felt strong enough to make their move:

So in '24, the company just shut down. We didn't come out on strike, it was just the company shut down in order to break the union. It lasted up 'til '25. Sometime in '25 we had to go back to what they called the 1917 scale, \$3.20 a day for just ordinary labor.

I was married then and our first kid wasn't born, soon it would be. And they got an injunction against us and came and notified me we were going to have to move. And in about a month our kid would be born. I told them I wouldn't move until after we had that. And I didn't.

From 1924 til 1930 the miners in Wilder were without a union. To get a job, they had to sign a yellow-dog contract, swearing that they would never join a union or go out on strike. Conditions went from bad to worse.

If you belonged to the union, the law and the county officials and everybody was against you. There wasn't too many miners in the county, and we wasn't very popular in the county. They thought the work was good. They didn't understand the trading at the company store and not having a place for a garden. So we lost that strike.

It just kept gradually going down, down, down. The companies would keep fightin' us with West Kentucky, West Kentucky. That's all we could hear. West Kentucky would cut the prices on the coal, and they had to come cut us in order to compete with them. And so it was gettin' ridiculous.

The companies, squeezed by the depression and engaged in cut-throat competition with other coal producers, cut the Davidson and Wilder

men's pay twice during this time. Soon the mines were only running two or three days a week. The miners were destitute.

In 1930 the company tried to cut the miners' wages a third time. The men decided they had to try to organize. And incredibly enough, with no other mine anywhere in District 19 organized, they won contracts with the three companies in the hollow. This contract prevented the third cut.*

The way we got it, we struck Twin and Davidson. Wilder was the biggest. So the men come on strike at Davidson and Twin: the policy committee decided we'd strike them two, and then go in and talk to the company at Wilder. We had a policy committee of 15 men, five from each mining camp.

We worked together all over. We'd have meetings and decide on what to do. We struck them at 12 o'clock noon one day, and all the men come out. And I was the one selected to go and see the management, me and Ray Smith, another man on the committee. Ray was supposed to be the spokesman. He got in there and he couldn't talk to save his life. He agreed with the president of the company, and we come out and I told Ray, "Now we've got to face them other thirteen men up there when we go back, and you never have told him nothing." He said, "Well, you go in and tell him." I said, "All right, let's go back," because I wasn't wanting to go back up there and tell them fellows we hadn't told him nothing. I went back in and told the president we'd heard his side of the story, and that the miners had struck the two mines above there, and he'd either sign a contract with us, or we'd go on strike, one. "And if you want to do any business, then we'll talk the thing over. If you don't, why, there's nothing else to do only just close this one down."

So the president said, "We'll talk to you about the weather, and the date, but that's all." So I went back and told the committee if we'd wait a while, a week or two, maybe he would come around. So we went back to him again, and told him what we thought. It would be a good idea for him to do it; we wouldn't try to even get a living out of it, but just get along 'til times got better and maybe we could get a raise later on. And he agreed to talk to us.

Why the men were able to get the contract is still something of a mystery. A man who used to teach school in Wilder wrote a paper in 1937 about the strike.⁴ He wrote that one of the mine officials

told him that the management of the three mines had tried to get together and agree on a lock-out, but that the agreement had broken down, and the miners were able to take advantage of the split. A striker told us that there was a union sympathizer close to the management who convinced them to sign.

At any rate, the miners in the hollow worked for the next year under a contract. On July 8, 1932, that contract expired. Before it did, the Brier Hill Collieries at Twin signed again to renew it. But before the new contract had even begun, the company shut down indefinitely, saying it would try and wait out the bad times, throwing hundreds of men out of work. Meanwhile, the mines at Davidson and Wilder refused to sign unless the men would accept the cut in wages which they had fought off the year before.

The president of the union at Davidson explained it this way to a newspaper reporter:

We had a union contract, but it wasn't satisfactory because the company didn't live up to it. The contract was to expire July 8. Before that time a committee from each of the locals got together and decided on changes we would ask in the new contract that would take care of our grievances. We provided in that contract that miners wouldn't have to work knee-deep in water and would be paid for removing rock falls.

On July 8 our joint committee met with the operators and presented the contract. The operators turned it down flat and asked us to meet again the next day. We met and they offered a new contract that provided for a 20% wage cut.

We told them that we had bummed and begged for food, had run an aid truck every week, that some miners went into the mine without breakfast or lunch, worked all day, and then at the end of the day couldn't get a dollar to buy food with because the money earned was held back to pay for house rent and other expenses. We told them that we had to issue orders on our local treasury to buy things for the miners' families to live on, and we said that under such conditions we could not take a 20% wage cut.

The operators said that they had no other proposal, and they posted a notice at the mine that those who wanted to work at the wages offered could do so. Not a miner went to work, and the mines closed.⁵

Other men remembered:

I think I was maybe making 36 cents a ton, Loading a whole ton for 36 cents. It was a toss-up. You didn't know if you were going to win or starve

* District 19 of the United Mine Workers of America includes coal miners in Tennessee and Eastern Kentucky.

to death. You was going to starve to death with work!

When they put on that last cut at Wilder, the mine foreman come in and told us they told him they was putting on a cut, and I said, "What are you trying to do, organize the mine?" He said, "I'm just passing the word on." And he give me five cents a ton, they cut five cents to a ton.

If the committee recommended a strike, they'd work weeks and months to avoid it. Cause it hurt us worse than it did anybody, the strike did. There wasn't anybody wanted a strike. But it was necessary. The union would be broken up if we just went back to work.

For the rest of the summer, the mines stayed down. Summer was a slack season anyway, and the miners just waited, hoping that the companies would come around, but knowing that probably they would try to re-open the mines with "scabs"—or strikebreakers. Sure enough, in October, the Fentress Coal and Coke Company in Wilder announced that they would re-open on a non-union basis. Boyer, the general manager, told a newspaper reporter: "We offered them a union contract at a 20% cut in wages. They refused. Now we won't have anything to do with the union. We tried it out a year and it didn't work."⁶

Wilder was tense before the re-opening. At first the company could find almost no one willing to work, as most people either sympathized with the striking miners or were afraid of them. But gradually they were able to find more men who would go to work.

When the company saw the miners weren't going back, they scraped the hills and hollers and took farmers out of potato patches and put them to work in the mines.

Chalked signs had appeared on train cars around Wilder before the mines re-opened. One read: "No scabbing—but there may be blood and lives. We understand the mine company is to fire up. We will make it so damn smoky that they can't see to fire up."

About a week after the mines at Wilder opened, the Patterson brothers at Davidson followed the lead of the Fentress Coal and Coke Co. They posted a notice that they would re-open in a matter of days. That night their \$20,000 tipple burned to the ground. They postponed opening.

Before long though, back in Wilder, the company had managed to accumulate enough coal to be hauled away. On November 15, a train pulled out of Wilder carrying the first load of coal to leave the county since July 8, the day the miners first

walked out. The following day one end of a steel railroad bridge, over which that train had travelled, was destroyed by dynamite. At that point Tennessee Governor Henry Horton ordered in the National Guard.

During the next seven months, until the following June, the hollow was the scene of much violence. Strikers and scabs alike were shot at, wounded, or killed; company property was damaged, as was some people's personal property. There was then, and is now, a lot of disagreement as to "who did what." For instance, whenever any piece of company property was destroyed, the company and the law immediately blamed it on the strikers. Union leaders, however, often told a different story. The president of the local at Wilder told a news reporter:

I know that the bridges were burned and blown up after the coal had been taken out. If some of the disgruntled miners were going to do such a thing, it seems to me they would have done it before, not after, the coal had been taken out.

I also know that after the mine's sub-station was blown up, they got out bloodhounds, and the dogs tracked down two strikebreakers. I don't know why strikebreakers should do such a thing unless they were working with the company's private guards. You know these guards get \$5 a night, and when the trouble dies down they lose their jobs. So it's up to them to keep the trouble going.⁷

Other miners agreed:

The sheriff come over there and investigated where they had blowed up the fan one night. They claimed somebody had slipped in and . . . they had to go inside 50 yards to the fan after they got through the mine guards outside. I asked the sheriff in front of the superintendent, I said, "What do you think of the fan blowing up?" "Bound to have been done from the inside, because a rabbit couldn't have got through there to that fan." If there hadn't been something like that to happen, and everything had been quiet a while, you see, they would have cut the guards off. They'd have been out of work. And they wouldn't want to work in the mines.

Some others thought that it was union men who did at least some of the damage. And they thought there was a good reason for it:

They went to blowing up bridges, railroad bridges, because they were hauling out coal, you know. The union people did it. And they'd blow them piers out from under the railroad so they

couldn't haul any coal. They slipped in the mines and blew up fans inside the coal mines.

Everytime there would be some scab shot at, or blowing up coal trains, or beating up scabs, or that kind of thing, they'd say "the ganders" did it. You know: "I don't know anything about it. I was in the potato patch." "Well, who do you think did it?" "I don't know. I think the ganders did it."

There were few who enjoyed living in the middle of all that. People were afraid for themselves and for their children:

It was nerve-wrecking for everybody. Even the ones working.

My children would be playing marbles out in the front yard and the bullets would be whizzing over them. Shooting at somebody going up the little hill right out on the road, you wouldn't know who it was. And them bullets would just whiz.

On a Sunday night, I believe it was, I never heard such a blast go off and all, and I just felt so sad over it. I didn't know who'd done it or nothing about it, and I think they'd blown up some of the front of the mines, wasn't it? But we don't know who done it, or nothing. But what I worried about, didn't make no difference if he was a scab or what not, I didn't want nobody killed.

It seemed like the main thing that people wanted to explain to us about the strike was how much the miners had going against them, what a powerful opponent they had, and how the different things people did came after years of mine injuries, hunger and humiliation.

I don't know what I could tell you about the strike, besides there was a lot of fighting, and a lot of killing, and a lot of good men stealing. And you know over a period of, I don't know how long now, you get people that are just hungry. . . .

The union families didn't mean to take it lying down. But then neither did the companies. We learned enough to fill a book about the ways the company used to break the strike. They knew they had taken a hard stand and they had to be ready to back it up. And back it up they did.

First of all, it was the company that pressured the governor to send in the National Guard. They circulated a petition in the county, and tried to hide the fact that practically all the miners backed the strike demands. Superintendent Shivers said, "In asking the Governor for troops, the people were only expressing the desire to protect themselves until a handful of radicals were finally disbanded."



Photo by Brenda Bell

Near Wilder, 1973

They tried to make out like the troops would be neutral and keep the peace. And many people—especially mothers worried for their families—were happy to learn the troops were coming. But when they arrived, the company put them up in one of their fancy houses and made friends with the commanders. Most of the people ended up feeling like they were there to protect the mining and railroad companies, not to protect people's lives.

They had orders not to take sides, to try to keep peace, but I wouldn't doubt but that they took sides.

People were glad that they sent the militia. They thought that they would have peace, if they brought them. But it seems to me like it made it worse.

Nights there was just firing and shooting everywhere. And I know one morning there had been a lot of shooting going on up at the powerhouse, about four o'clock. And Captain Crawford, he was the captain of the guards, he decided one morning he'd go up there and see. They had orders to shoot at any lights they saw—if they saw a light at night to shoot at it. If they saw a light over the hill one morning, they'd just shoot for an hour. So he went up there one morning, and it was the morning star coming over the mountain! They'd shoot at that star!

Me and one of my girl friends, we'd been over to visit some folks and had come on back. And she didn't like them militias. She got up and threw a rock at them and hit their little building. They come out and they started saying, "Howdy honey, howdy sweetheart." They were laughing and running out and hollering, but we never let on like we heard them.

Well, naturally, we wouldn't like them, because they were on the other side, you know. They didn't beat nobody up or mistreat nobody, but they'd get out there and toot that bugle every morning and take off up the railroad, or they'd buy liquor and get drunk, a bunch would. They'd get drunk and have a big time. I don't believe they kept anybody from getting killed.

Some number of troops remained in the hollow through the better part of the winter. But they were the least of the strikers' worries. Pretty soon the company got the county court to grant an injunction against the strikers. This injunction said that 104 men specifically named could be arrested for being on company property, for having a picket line, or for eight other offenses including "jeering or sneering" at scabs.

Soon after the injunction they began using another tactic that was common enough in the coal fields: they hired what the miners called "gun thugs," had them deputized, and set them to guarding the mines.

I'll tell you—a fellow's not supposed to talk about his people—I had a uncle that was in that there. He was my daddy's brother. He was what we called a suck around the mines. He'd lick the bosses around or whatever the bosses would say, well, it was just that way with him. He was one of the thugs, as they called it.

Oh, they got them anywhere they could get them. In '24 I know of one of them they got out of the penitentiary.

Why, yes, they'd get any kind of scalawags to come in and help break the strike.

And Jack Green was the head thug of the strike. He never worked in the mines a day in his life, and nobody knew where he was from or what he had done or anything. He had a good education. He'd never done nothing in that county except bootleg and make whisky. He had killed a few men in the county, I guess a lot of men in the United States. And he was tough, so they put him in as the head of it. He kept all the guards and the thugs keyed up with moonshine.

I've heard one of the thugs tell about how a man jumped into the air when he shot him. "Jumped high as a brush pile," he said, "and fell as pretty as ever you saw."

Myles Horton, from the Highlander Folk School, was trying to support the strikers at that time. He learned about the background of some of the thugs and tried to publicize it, hoping that maybe the company would be shamed into taking them out:

They brought in three gun thugs—you know, professional killers. They had been in Illinois. They used them there, they killed a lot of people there. I got the evidence that they had killed a lot of miners, a lot of union leaders. They were professionals. I told the press that these guys were brought in to kill, and I gave them a record of who they were, and that they were there to kill Barney Graham and other leaders, but mainly Graham—he was the most militant one.

But many newspapers refused to print this information, and what publicity there was did not get rid of the gun thugs.

I didn't feel too bad about the men that had gone back to work, 'cause I knowed what they'd been through. But these that come on in, now them was the real ones—like Shorty Green and the thugs. Just working, that was all right, that wasn't so bad, but trying to kill everybody else because they didn't go back to work. . . .

They'd just run around nosing, picking up all the news they could amongst the union men.

The company would sell them a gun on credit. And boots. Leather jackets was the style for gun thugs.

Oh, them guards wouldn't work. And them miners from Twin and Davidson, some of them'd walk to Livingston and work on the farm for a bushel of corn or a gallon of molasses, or anything. And they'd walk all that distance and work all day on the farm. In the strike, the thugs would get paid \$5 a day for guarding and stuff like that. And free whiskey, free drinks. That was a whole lot of money then.

The company tried dozens of harassing tactics during the course of the strike. They tried to evict strikers' families, but the union men fought that one and won. Once they took the electric lights out of the homes of 33 strike leaders. Sometimes they tried to bribe people. One man told us they had tried this on him the first time in 1931:

The general manager told me one time, that was when we made that contract, "Now you're getting \$5 a month from the union, and you worked harder for the union than Shivers did for me, and I paid him \$250 a month, furnished his house. If you'll work for me like that, I'll have your pocket full of money all the time." I said, "When I get ready to be sold, I'll get on a block and let them bid on me, and let the highest bidder get me. Some of them might pay more than you would."

When bribery wouldn't work, the companies sometimes tried framing people:

One day Captain Crawford told me that somebody fired at some of the guards up there. I had an old gun. It was used in the Spanish-American War. It shot a great big bullet, a .4570. And he said somebody shot at one of the boys last night with a .4570. I said, "How did you know it was a .4570?" He said, "Well, it hit a bracket on a light pole." It was glass, you know, and he could tell what size bullet it was! [Laughing.] Hit glass—as if you could tell anything from that! So I just got shut of the gun. I knew what they was up to.

The companies also tried to keep people in the camps cut off from the outside. Wilder and Davidson weren't easy to get to in the first place:

You couldn't get over that mountain with anything but a wagon for a long time. Then they finally got some of these T-Model Fords in there. We had twenty-some odd miles to go over that mountain, and what stuff we got you had to bring in a wagon.

During the strike, there weren't no newspapers in that holler, there weren't no radio, there weren't no way of getting no news in there, besides word of mouth. A drummer come through or a coca-cola truck, that was the only thing that run in there anymore. Most of the stuff come in on the train. Actually, until I was up to 17, 18 year old, I didn't go any further than Wilder or up to Twin. Of course, I knowed the road, but I didn't know where it went. Now that's the truth. At that time it wasn't much, just a trail come across this mountain here.

If outsiders did get to Wilder, then the company tried to keep them from hearing the miners' side. Captain Crawford said that newspaper reporters should come only to him to find out what was going on. The first day that Myles Horton went into the hollow, he found this out the hard way:

What happened was that I just read in the paper about this strike. I thought there might be somebody over there we could recruit to come to Highlander, and I went over to see what was going on, and learn about the situation. I went over and I started talking to some strikers, you know, like I'd do anywhere. They told me they weren't getting any relief, Red Cross stuff was going to the scabs. So I checked it out with a bunch of people around, asked how the National Guard was treating them, and women said they were always shooting around and they were afraid they were going to kill their kids.

So, I talked to them awhile, convinced them I was on the level, told them about Highlander. They believed me. I told them what I wanted, asked them to send somebody with me to talk to some of the people. So they did. That way they could keep tabs on me and at the same time help me out. There was a bus that left about 4 o'clock, and I was going to take that bus back to Crossville.

I think I was on my way to the bus, and by that time the grapevine had not only worked its way to the miners, but to the National Guard and they had seen me going around talking to the miners and had decided, I guess, that I was a dangerous person. The head of the National Guard, Boyd from Cleveland, was away. But they stopped me and

asked me where I was going. I told them I was going down to catch the bus. They said, "Well, you're under arrest." I said, "What?! Under arrest for what?" They said, "You're just under arrest." They had their bayonets all punching me, and I knew damn well I was under arrest. They were just young kids, you know, and they'd like nothing better than to push hard, and I didn't want any of those damn bayonets in me. I was just surrounded. I said, "But you have to have a charge, you can't just arrest somebody. You have to say what you arrest them for." And they muttered among themselves, they hadn't figured that out. One of the guys said, "You're under arrest for coming in here and getting information and going back and teaching it." So they knew what I was doing, they knew about Highlander. They were from Cleveland, so they knew about Highlander, and they thought Highlander was the hot-bed of communism, you know, dangerous place. And here was a big conspirator here in their midst and they were going to be great patriots and arrest him.

When I got the charge, I said, "Well, I don't know what's illegal about that." They said, "Well, you're under arrest." "What kind of arrest?" "Military arrest." So I said, "Okay, I'm under arrest." They said when Col. Boyd comes in they were going to turn me over to him. So they took me down to the Shivers' house, a big fine—it had kind of a club atmosphere. I think it was a company house, but they lived there. The Shivers's weren't there; it was the headquarters of the National Guard then. At night they had a big fire and they had some good books there, and a big comfortable chair. So they brought me in and nobody was there. So they said, "You wait here," and they put guards around me. I looked around and I found a book, so I settled down in front of the fire in the comfortable chair and I started reading. There wasn't anything else I could do, I couldn't run away.

Then it started raining, just pouring down rain. And they got fidgety. Boyd hadn't gotten back; it was ten o'clock and Boyd wasn't back. They kept looking at me; I was the only one that was comfortable. So Boyd came in, and they told him. He said, "Oh my God, you shouldn't have done that." So he came up and he said, "This is a mistake, you aren't under arrest." I said, "It certainly was a mistake, but I'm under arrest. When people point bayonets in your belly and tell you you're under arrest—you're under arrest. They've been sitting here guarding me all this time." He said, "Well, you look pretty comfortable." I said, "I am comfortable. I made myself at home. I've been sitting here reading. I couldn't catch my bus." He said, "Well, it's all a mistake. I apologize. You can

go." I said, "Go? Go where? It's raining, I'm not going anywhere. There are no buses. I haven't got any place to go. I'm not going to get out in this rain." He said, "But you can't stay here." I said, "I'm not going to go out in this rain. I've been forcibly detained, and whether I was under arrest properly or not, I was under arrest, and I'M NOT GOING TO LEAVE." He said, "There's a little hotel down the way." "Yeah, but that's a quarter of a mile away. That's your problem. I would have been gone." He said, "We'll pay for your room and everything." I said, "I appreciate that but I'm not going to go out in this rain. I don't have any other clothes to wear, and I don't want to get wet. I'll just stay here. I'll sleep on that couch." "No, you can't stay here. This is our headquarters."

So he called a little huddle. Now the railroad track ran right to the back door or the front door of the hotel—right to the edge of the porch. And he made a couple of these cusses that arrested me, or some others just like them, get out on a hand car and hold an umbrella over me, and they got out and pumped the hand car up to the hotel and took me in. I knew I had him, because he knew that I would expose it, he knew I'd publicize it, and he was really concerned. That's why he didn't push me around. I knew when he came he'd be upset.

The company also encouraged the scabs to turn against the strikers. One man told us that when he went back to work, the company guards started trying to get him to stay out with them at night, and to see if he could spy on the strikers and find out what they were doing.

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The company hoped that with all these tactics, all the fear and the isolation and the plain hunger, they would be able to starve the union out. The miners fought back with everything they had—which wasn't much. Even before the strike, the union had run an "aid truck" around the surrounding farm country, begging for food for the miners. When the strike came, they needed it all the more.

They run a commodity truck for a while. They'd go through the country and pick up food, you know, and deliver it to the people that didn't have no work or nothing like that. They'd get truck loads and bring it in and take it to a place, and have people come with their pokes and divide it out with them. They'd have potatoes and cabbage and all kinds of such food. Flour and lard and meal. Meat. It might do you for a week or two at a time that way.

People all over this country give us loads of potatoes. They were in sympathy with us. They knowed we was just nearly on starvation. Well, we was. You just couldn't get nothing to eat. There was a committee that'd go around.

Some people didn't think the aid trucks helped out much.

The people in there was starving, didn't get nothing hardly. I laughed at my oldest boy. He says, "Momma, let me go down yonder to the aid station and see what I can get down there." I said, "Now, Benny, honey, there's no use for you to go." He says, "Well, I want to go." You know, it's just like it is out here at the welfare office. You know how they line up and you go in and sign up. When those trucks would come in with a load, they'd line up until all the food was gone. Well, he went down there—I let him go just to satisfy his mind—and he got one old long handled squash and come home with it! That was everything he got. Every once in a while I'd say, "Benny, honey, you want to go back down to the soup line?" He'd say, "Not me, Ma!"

But many were glad to get anything.

We'd been out bumming, and way in the night we was going back through this holler, right between them two mountains, just as dark . . . no light, we didn't have no light. We took sorghum molasses and corn meal (just corn meal now, I'm not talking about cooked), poured it in them molasses and stirred it up—and green onions—and it was pretty doggone good eating, I'll tell you!

I don't know what to tell! [Laughs.] There were some people got hungry. I know sometimes that the last bite we had was cooked and put on the table and eat. No job, no money, nothing. But somehow or another when the next mealtime came, we had something to eat. It weren't no steak and stuff like that.

I'd go with my wife and the other women, picking wild sallet. I believe, I'll say to the boys, I believe every kind of weed that grows makes good sallet. This woman would say, "This weed makes good sallet, but you've got to mix it with something else." And another one would say, "This makes good sallet, but you've got to mix something else with it." So about every weed that grows makes good sallet, but you've got to mix something else with it! [Laughs.] . . . It was something to fill up the empty places. And we survived on it.

There was a bunch of men who stole for other people's use, from people who were fighting the

union or from a store that wouldn't give credit. Then they would put the stuff on the porches of needy union families.

They had a bunch down there in that holler called the Meat Committee. They'd get out and kill a man's cow or hog, and all the strikers would get up the next morning and there'd be a mess of meat at their door. They'd divide it up with everybody. And anybody that had a big corn patch or anything, you'd go out and get roasting ears, and there'd be a big pile of roasting ears on the porch.

If one man got a mess of meat around here, they all got it, and if they got a mess of roasting ears, they all got it, and don't matter where it was. I've waked up lots of times there at the house and have me a little mess of meat and a sack of roasting ears setting out there.

Miners on the Meat Committee sometimes had funny adventures.

One morning a man who sold chickens found that all his hens were stolen. There was a note on the rooster's neck saying "Lonesome Daddy."

Some of these men asked Mrs. Thompson if they might come there for the rest of the night sometime when they had been out engaged in this sort of activity. She told them yes, just to say they were the "Red Cross Committee" when she asked who was there. One night a car drove up, and Mr. Thompson looked out the window, thinking it might be a scab trying to put a bomb under the house. He asked who was there, and the answer came back, "The Red Cross Committee." When the family let them in, they discovered two strange men—it really was the Red Cross Committee, looking for another family!

It wasn't that the men didn't want to work. They would have jumped at the chance. Some of the union men managed to get jobs with the state working on the roads, though it was never full time. Some tried to get work at neighboring coal mines, but found that they were blacklisted.

Now I went over there at Petros to look for a job, and they told my daddy-in-law if I stayed all night down there that he'd lose his job, and I walked all the way from Petros plumb through Wartburg, and camped out under that old bridge over there, and then walked into Monterey and took back down this railroad, and walked 21 miles to Davidson, and I was just about dead.



Miles Stryker/Workers' Graphics

Others found more individual ways to make a dollar:

I went to work making whiskey! [Laughter.] It's hard work. You could pack yourself to death, but I was young then, I could take it. I couldn't wrastle no barrel in the woods now! I'll tell you the truth, girls, I believe I made as good a whiskey as I ever drunk in my life.

So people found many ways of battling the hunger and of surviving the threats and violence too:

Our kids slept on the floor. Cause they would shoot through the house a lot of times. We'd take the springs and the mattress off the beds and put it on the floor, so they'd shoot over them.

Coming in nights, I had one man tell me not to come around the road. There was a pine thicket down where I had to go around the edge. He told me to go through his lot and cut across to where I lived. Afraid somebody would get me around the pine thicket, and lay there. The next six months I went through there and nobody knowed I had a path down through there.

But at the same time that each striker's family was fighting to defend itself and simply to survive,

the miners were organizing to try and beat the companies together. They didn't have to try to solve all their problems individually. They had a Policy Committee.

The union members had confidence in the Policy Committee. Five from each camp. We'd get together in 25 minutes, any time day or night. There'd be runners going from each man's house. And any striker that wanted to come to the Policy Committee would meet so and so at a certain time, and they'd go. Night or day. We had the best organized people; I bet they don't have any now. I mean everybody was together. But it was so long. And we didn't have anything to start on.

The president of the local and the head of the mine committee, they was on the Policy Committee. And then they elected two others. The mine committee was the bunch that'd take up any grievance.

It had been the Policy Committee that originally recommended strike rather than taking a 20% cut in wages, and it was the Policy Committee that was responsible for leading the strike. Along with the Policy Committee, each local met regularly:

We had a regular meeting out at the Davidson schoolhouse about once a week. And Wilder had

one down there. All of us had a meeting place, and sometimes they all met at Wilder, or all met at Davidson. We've had so many people down there in that holler a time or two that we could hardly get them in there.

Supposedly the Policy Committee and the three locals had the backing, help and good advice of their union, District 19 of the UMW of A.

Ben Williams was the field worker then, and Turnblazer* sponsored it. They come in and met with the Policy Committee.

They didn't help us—they didn't turn their hand. All they done over there was make a speech. They said, "Stay in the boat, fellows. We're going to win." That's what they'd tell us—stay in the boat. They didn't care, the big guys, the organizers.

We asked them what was happening to that money we were paying in there for the last four or five years. It was supposed to be in the treasury. They said it went into international dues money. And they didn't offer to buy anything or do anything to help us. Just told us to take that \$400 and buy a truck.

Everyone agrees that the UMW itself was in a rough period. It had few resources and had come under vicious attack in Harlan, Kentucky, a fact that Tennessee miners were very aware of. But in Harlan when the going got too rough, the UMW had pulled out. (It was the Communist-led National Miners Union that stayed and tried to win the fight.) And many Wilder miners felt that the UMW didn't stand by them in Tennessee the way it should have either:

Of course, the Mine Workers were very weak; they didn't have no treasury built up then, and they didn't have nobody to help them strikers, and they just had to do the best they could.

I don't know why the union was so weak, but them thugs up there in Kentucky had the sheriffs all bought out, and just every time you'd get ahold of a paper there was ten or twelve killed.

The UMW wasn't near as good, nothing like the shape they are now, but they could have beat that strike.

* William Turnblazer, then president of District 19 and the father of the William Turnblazer who was later president of that same district and who recently implicated himself in the murder of Jock Yablonski.

Turnblazer made that speech down at Highland, and he told us, "There's too much stuff down here for a man to starve. Too many hogs and things running on this land." Well, they come over here and couldn't even organize Petros, couldn't organize other mines; we was the only place in the country around here organized. And they was killing up in Kentucky, and the union didn't have no backing from up there, and we was the only place, sitting right here in the middle. And if we went anywhere out of this holler, the union men was just liable to get killed if they went to these other mines. And still that's all Turnblazer had to say to us.

But with what small backing they did have, the Policy Committee tried to find support for the men and settle the strike.

The railroad men didn't back us up. No, they started out to, but they got to where they was more harm than they was good. We had one meeting. They met with us one time, trying to get the company to arbitrate, with Bill Jacobs, but other than that they wasn't going to sacrifice a day's work.

McAllister was running for governor during that time. He said that the state had been helping the companies, and if he was elected, he'd help the miners. After he was elected . . . why, I was the chairman of the Mine Committee, and I figured it would be a good idea to go down and see him, since we give him a good vote. And Pat Officer, he was the speaker of the Senate, and he got a big vote from us. So we went to see them, and Bill Jacobs.* He agreed to give us school books for all the union kids. And up to five dollars relief, according to the size family, from \$2.50 to \$5. Until they got some work for them. And at the same time I asked him if he'd be willing to pick five men and arbitrate the strike. They went to see the company about it, and they wouldn't let Pat Officer come in the office. They let Bill Jacobs come in, but they wouldn't agree to arbitration.

Members of the Policy Committee had a lot more contact with and knowledge of outside supporters than most of the rank-and-file miners. They worked with a "Wilder Emergency Relief Committee" that was formed by Socialists and others in Nashville to bring food and clothing into the hollow. They also worked some with Myles Horton and others from the Highlander Folk School, though they weren't always sure how they felt about this connection with people who were labeled as radicals.

* Then Tennessee State Commissioner of Labor.

Well, we met some of the people from Highlander. They tried to give us some publicity for the mines. I don't know whether it helped or hurt. Their intentions were good, I would say at that time. And the things they was for was good, but it hurt us, because they had a background that the majority of the people didn't agree with. They felt like it was somewhat on the red side.

They asked a Nashville church committee, headed by Dr. Alva Taylor, to volunteer to arbitrate the strike, but the company refused the offer.

As the strike wore on into the late winter and early spring, the company's tactics began to take their toll. More and more miners began trickling back to work:

You know, there's one of the best bunch of union men ever been in the country here at Davidson, but we did go to work. We was forced to. We didn't have nothing to eat. We stayed out as long as we could bum anything. We went just as far as we could go without starving plumb to death.

Even families who stayed out, and wouldn't go back to work, could sympathize with those who did:

There were some people who went back to work, people they called scabs. But there's two sides to anything. Just like, I don't blame no man for taking care of his family. I just had one child, we raised a garden, we owned our own house, and we didn't have no rent to pay or nothing like that. And there's other families there that had eight or ten kids (them miners, they had to raise big families), and some of them had seven or eight kids. I don't blame them for not letting their kids go hungry.

There are a lot of real good union men that worked, went to work at the last, because it was just too, well, they lived in a company house, they seen the mines were going to be scabbed anyway, so they just went to work. Couldn't make a living, but they could live there, in a company house.

But the striking miners were in a fight for their lives, and although they might understand the position of the scabs, they fought hard to keep people from going back to work. If a man went back to work, he was liable to find his garden raided that night, or a note left on his porch or fence-post: "You are hereby notified to join the UMW of A. Signed, the Underworld." Or scabs might be shot at on their way to and from work.

Feelings were often bitter between families on opposite sides.

But do what they would, the strikers could not shut down the mines, could not turn back all the scabs. With the lack of strong outside support, the future of the strike looked bleak. Gun thugs still swaggered through town. Pellegra and other signs of malnutrition were evident everywhere.

Through all this the Policy Committee stayed firm, and one man, especially, seemed to stand for the spirit of determination among those who still wanted to fight until they won. That man was Barney Graham, the president of the union local at Wilder. Barney had come to the hollow in the 20's from somewhere else, some say Alabama, others say Kentucky.

Yes. When he first moved up here, he married here at Twin. He married a woman by the name of Nickens.

The men elected him checkweighman. The checkweighman looks after the men's coal and weight. And he proved to be a standing up man for the men, for the benefit of the men. And so, when he left Twin and went down to Wilder, he was elected checkweighman there, and I reckon he was checkweighman when the strike came on.

Well, I think he was a pretty good union leader. What I mean, what he was in for, he stood for it. Now he was in to try to get the men more to live on. I don't think he'd do anything unless you tried to hurt him. He was high-tempered, all right. But unless you raised a ruckus with him, I don't think he'd bother anybody. But he was high-tempered.

He was a fractious type person. You'd say something to him and he'd [slaps his hands] just like that. Just like dynamite. Like fooling around with a cocked gun, messing with him. Just one word and he would fly all to pieces.

Barney Graham was a good man, and he was for the union. He died for the union. He wasn't afraid of anybody, and anybody'd that'd try to run over him, because he was actually one of the union leaders. He wasn't a man that got up there and talked and abused someone else. He didn't have too much to say. There's a lot of people that were afraid—the companies were afraid of him, and they hired him killed.

He was finding out too much stuff on the company, and whatever they'd try to do, somehow he'd find out and beat 'em to the punch, someway or



Photo by Brenda Bell

another. And they was wanting to get rid of him. And they way-laid him. . . .

I was expecting it all the time. They thought if they could get rid of him, it would be all over. He was just hard-headed; you couldn't tell him nothing. He ought to have been watching and careful. But they got him into trouble—they must have gotten him drinking or something. Some woman took him off and then brought him back and set him off there so they could kill him. They had it all planned.

See, they killed the president, Barney Graham. Just a regular mob—just mobbed him. Blood just a-running in the road where they killed him. They said they were on top of the store-house building with a machine-gun and killed him. And the blood now was just a-running in the road. I seen it myself. They had gun thugs there that was working for the company. And they were wanting to get shut of Barney. He was president of the local and they figured if they got shut of him, that would put us all back to work.

I heard Shorty Green cussing somebody. Then I saw a blaze of fire—from at least two guns. It looked like one of them was from behind a car and one other was a few steps out in the open. After the shooting was over, I heard Shorty holler to

somebody, "Get that machine gun." I don't know how many shots were fired.

A bunch of us was watching our houses that night. We was expecting thugs to come through. Theyd shot in a fellow's house a little bit before that—the stove was hot and the bullets, lead bullets, would just hit the stove and stick on it. So we was kind of watching our houses then. And we heard the shots where they killed Barney. It sounded like a machine gun except there was some big guns and different sizes. So we figured about that time Barney was going home, and we went over there and John William Thompson—he was one of the thugs—had a machine gun, and he waved it at us to stop. I told Ed and Melvin to not put their hands about their pockets. And so we went on up to where Barney was shot. And his gun laying under him. He'd managed to get his gun out. He was shot, he had eleven bullet holes in him, with his brains leaking in three places. And there was a gun there with the handles off of it where they had beat him.

We asked who killed him, and Thompson said he didn't know, there was so many shooting. And I said, "Well, we'll just let him lay here til we find out. Cause he's dead, so we'll just let him stay here 'til we find out." He said, "There ain't no use in starting anything." I told him we wasn't starting anything, they had started it. So he talked to somebody and he come back and said, "The man that killed him is in the office. He won't talk to you,

but he'll talk to Ed and Melvin." We decided to let them go on down there. And Green told them he killed him. Self-defense! That Barney was standing up fighting when he shot him the last time! And him with his brains leaking in three places.

• • • •

Many of Barney's friends had done what they could to prevent what they had known was coming. (Months before three people had overheard some drunken members of the National Guard saying that they were in town to "get Barney Graham." And the thugs were even more candid.)

I know I tried to get him to move. We told him if he'd move the next day to Twin, above there where he wouldn't have to go through by them thugs, that we'd move him, and then he could come down to the meetings and there would be somebody with him all the time. But there was only two ways he could go home: by the company store or a path up through a pine thicket, and either place was suicide.

Myles Horton recalled:

We told Barney he was going to get killed. I told him who these people were and that they were brought in to kill him. He knew they were going to kill him.

He was that tough kind that wouldn't quit, you know. So I went to work to try to get pressure to expose this before it happened, thinking that might bring enough pressure on the company and on public opinion that it might save his life. And that's when I tried—tried everything I could, put everything in the paper, the names of these guys, their history, said they were going to kill Barney Graham, and I couldn't move anybody.

That just killed me. That just killed me. That kind of thing is a traumatic experience, I tell you. You get involved with death of people, know it's going to happen, and you can't do anything about it. Society's so cruel. If I hadn't already been a radical, that would have made me a radical right then. Didn't do anything to make me less radical, I'll tell you that.

Nearly a thousand people attended Barney's funeral. Six hundred were in the march that went from Highland Junction to Wilder to the spot where Barney was killed, and back again. The speakers at the funeral were William Turnblazer, President of UMW District 19; Howard Kester, head of the Wilder Emergency Relief who had run for senator on the Socialist Party ticket the fall before; and H.S. Johnson, a union coal miner and Methodist minister. Kester said:

I knew Barney Graham intimately. I had no better friend. I loved him as a brother, not alone for his own worth, but for his place in the leadership of America's toiling millions. Those who say that Barney was a "bad man" never knew him. Bryon Graham was a true son of the mountains, straight, fearless, and honorable in his dealings with men. He never hunted trouble and when possible went out of his way to avoid it. He never thought of his own comfort. When his family was in desperate need of food and clothing, I have known Barney to refuse all aid and to give it to others whom he thought needed it worse than he did. I could not keep him clothed because he gave away whatever clothing I gave him.⁸

Johnson said:

Barney Graham is dead; his blood was shed so that little children might have bread. Just as Jesus was murdered by the forces of corruption 2000 years ago, so was Barney Graham killed on Wilder Street last Sunday.⁹

Meanwhile, Shorty Green was loose on \$2,000 bail, with Bully Garrett, the company lawyer by his



Photo by David Bell

side. The trial was in September. The UMW had been promising to send down a good lawyer to handle the case. Two days before the trial, Turnblazer had assured the union miners over the phone that someone would be there. The lawyer never showed up.

They tried Shorty Green out here for that killing. Of course, the company had the money and politics all mixed up in it—you know how it works—and they got out of it.

It was a sick sort of a trial, and of course it was a farce. Bully was a big ole fat guy; I hated his guts.

Yeah, they tried Shorty Green. He had plenty of witnesses. He could have proved anything he wanted to. He proved in court that Barney was standing up fighting when he hit him in the head the last time. Our lawyer told them, "Why, an elephant couldn't have stood up under that." Brains leaking in three places. A .45 bullet going through his lung, besides ten other bullet holes. But it went through. We didn't have no witnesses there at all. Of course the whole thing was set up, the witnesses and everything.

Some people thought that Barney's murder was what broke the strike. But others felt the union had already been defeated.

When Barney was killed that broke the strike. They didn't get scared, they just . . . you know, their leader was gone. They had to go back and get them somebody else they thought would be trustworthy.

It was lost before they ever killed that man. That man was killed for . . . I don't know why. Because two-thirds of the men were working and the others were just on the verge of starving. Most of them was getting just anything they could find to steal.

• • • •

After Barney was murdered, there were a lot of very angry and bitter people. Shootings and threats on both sides flared again, and one scab was shot and killed from ambush. But by the end of the summer, the quiet of defeat had settled over the hollow.

That fall strike leaders and supporters turned their attention to trying to find jobs for those men who were still holding out. Eventually, through the efforts of union people, politicians, Highlander staffers, and sympathetic agency people, jobs were found for practically all the union men who

wanted them. Some went as laborers to work on Norris Dam, first dam in the TVA system. Others went to the Cumberland Homestead, a federal resettlement project designed to put poor people on subsistence farms, where they built their own homes and tried to develop cooperative industry. The younger men went into the manual labor camps of the Civilian Conservation Corps. The story of how these jobs were found and how the mining families reacted to their new situations is a story in itself. What it meant for the strike at Davidson-Wilder was that most of the remaining leadership found ways to leave. They had decided there was no hope of winning.

Ben Williams, our organizer, come in here. Up at Highland he made a little talk. "Boys," he said, "I'll tell you. If you can get jobs, you better just get them, for this union is shot all to hell." That's the way he spoke it.

Well, another thing, I think that one thing down there, if the international had had the money to back the men they never would have went to work. I mean, could have got them a little grease or something. He just come in and told us that it was over with.

Not that it was over with for good. As they had done so many times before, the miners waited their time and tried once more.

Ben Williams, he said, "We'll come back again one day." Which they did. This whole holler went union when these mines finally got organized in the 40's. And Monterey, too.

But mining is not what it was in Fentress County. That success in the 40's too, is long ago now. Since then working and retired miners have watched many things happen to their union. Many of them complained to us about favoritism in the handling of pensions, about men having their hospital cards taken away, and about corruption in the leadership. But most of them still get the UMW Journal and are following with interest the progress of the union under its newly-elected leadership. There are no more deep mines in the hollow now. They were worked out long ago. There are some truck mines hauling coal stripped off the steep mountainsides. There are small settlements at Davidson, Twin, and Crawford, and at Davidson there is a friendly and thriving community cooperative store. But at Wilder—as in so many old mining camps in the mountains—there is nothing at all.

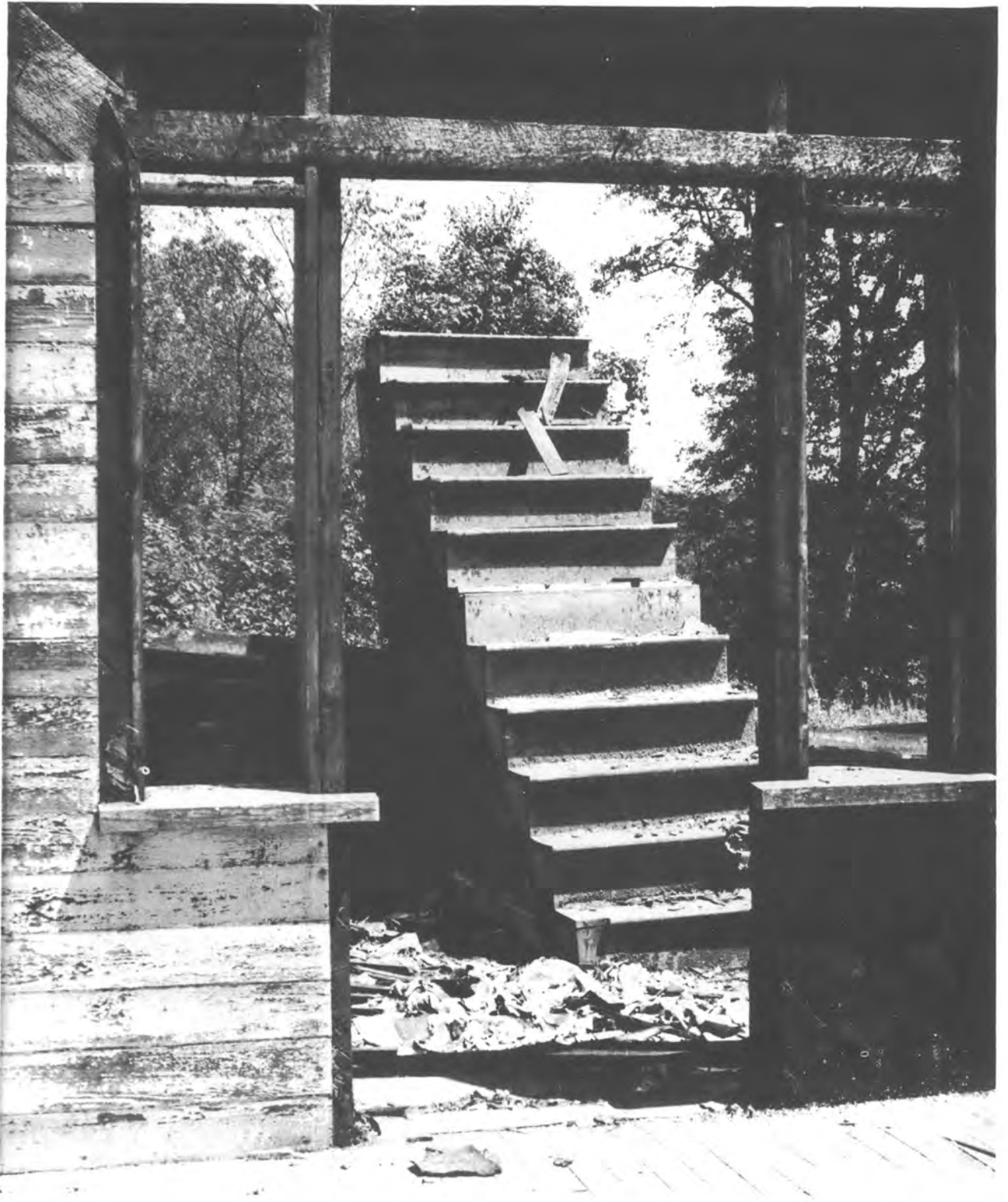


Photo by David Bell

Yeah, Wilder's a scary-looking place now. It's all fallen down, all worked out. All the houses are sold out.

People come through here now and they can't believe it when we tell them there was a whole town down there. There was thousands of people there. They had street lights and everything. If people never saw it then, they don't believe it.

There's not anything down there now. One house is all. Used to be a big settlement there.

The railroad come through here in 1900. We lived down that road in a log house behind the school house. I stood in the door watching them lay that track. In 1970 we sat here and watched them take that track up. I seen the first train go in and the last one go out.

The young folks don't stay around here anymore. They leave, hunting jobs.

The story of Wilder isn't over yet. Fentress County still has a lot of people, many of them poor

and still being used by others. And scattered over the country are the hundreds of children and grand-children and great-grand-children of the men and women who fought and lost one battle there.

One question we asked almost everybody we spoke with was whether they ever talked to their children and grandchildren about that strike, those times, and what they might mean for people today.

Yeah, I tell them, but they say, "Hush talking about those hard times! I've just heard about hard times, Momma!"

I've worried a lot about my kids, if another depression comes. What they'd do. 'Cause a lot of them wouldn't know how to even make a garden.

Children, I'll just tell you, you don't know what you're going to go through with in life, nor what



Photo by David Bell

you're going to have to put up with. You sure don't. But this is the awfulest times I've ever experienced. My grandfather fought in the Civil War, my oldest uncle fought in the Spanish American War. And this makes three wars that I went through. I had four boys in the '44 war. And I would have had my husband in the 1918, but they exempted him for being a coal digger. They needed coal as bad as they needed the soldiers. Of course, that was fighting war. And this, we ain't fighting war, we're fighting everything! We're fighting starvation, and we're fighting all nations, and everything else. Back in the depression, people was honestly living good to what they're living now. They've got plenty of monev and plenty to eat and plenty of everything, but look at the crimes and everything that's going on. The United States is in the worse shape its been in my history. If anybody would have swore I wouldn't have believed it. I wouldn't, really and truly.

Yeah, my children don't like to talk about it or even think about it. They like to forget those times. But, anyway, I'm kind of proud of it, that I went through it, and helped them out a little.

Acknowledgements

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Footnotes

1. Hedy West, *Old Times and Hard Times*, Sharon, Conn.: Folk-Legacy Records, Inc., 1968.
2. See bibliography below.
3. The people who appear in the story under their real names are the following: Commander Boyd, W. D. Boyer, Captain Crawford, Billy Garrett, Barney Graham, Della Mae Graham, Jack "Shorty" Green, Henry Horton, Myles Horton, Bill Jacobs, H. S. Johnson, Howard Kester, Governor McAllister, Pat Officer, E. W. Patterson, Hubert Patterson, L. L. Shivers, Dr. Alva Taylor, John William Thompson. All other names are fictitious.

4. Fount F. Crabtree, "The Wilder Coal Strike of 1932-33," unpublished thesis, Peabody College, Nashville, Tennessee.

5. *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, Dec. 2, 1932, "Wilder Miners Weren't Paid Living Wages."

6. *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, Dec. 3, 1932, "Mine Union Official Blames Company Guards in Dynamiting of Wilder Bridges."

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Nashville Labor Advocate*, May, 1933.

9. *Ibid.*

10. A note on graphics; photographs in this section are pictures of the Davidson-Wilder area today. The drawings of Barney Graham was done from a 1933 newspaper photo. Other drawings are not from that specific area, but were thought to convey some of the spirit of the people who the story is about.

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Crabtree, Fount W. "The Wilder Coal Strike of 1932-33." Unpublished thesis, Peabody College, Nashville, Tennessee. Includes quotes from strikers and mine owners, but generally not very helpful.

Greenway, John. *American Folksongs of Protest*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953. Contains an account of the strike along with the songs. Strike description in many places is not true to the recollections of people we interviewed.

Highlander Research and Education Center files. State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wis. A very helpful source. Files contain drafts of press releases and articles sent to various labor papers, letters, papers by Wilder young people later students at Highlander, and reports concerning the relocation of strikers in late 1933 and early 1934.

Horton, Zylphia. Unpublished papers in the possession of Myles Horton. Notes and anecdotes for a Highlander play on the Wilder strike, done with the help of young people from Wilder.

Newspapers, 1932-1934. Papers we looked at included the *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, *Knoxville Journal*, *Nashville Tennesseean*, *Nashville Banner*, *Nashville Labor Advocate*, and the papers of Overton and Fentress, Tennessee, counties. The county papers in the Tennessee State Archives are not complete. Best coverage was found in the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* and the *Nashville Tennesseean*.

Perry, Vernon. "The Labor Struggle at Wilder." Unpublished thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1934.

Tennessee Valley Authority Library and files. Knoxville, Tennessee. Files have some scant information on Wilder strikers who went to work for TVA. The Library staff is very friendly and helpful.

United Mine Workers of America files. UMWA Headquarters, Washington, D.C. Contains correspondence related to the role of the union in the strike.

West, Hedy. *Old Times and Hard Times*. Folk-Legacy Records, Sharon, Connecticut. Contains two songs from the Wilder strike with some remarks by Hedy West and A. L. Lloyd.

DAVIDSON-WILDER BLUES

by Ed Davis

Mr. Shivers said if we'd block our coal
He'd run four days a week.
And there's no reason we shouldn't run six,
We're loadin' it so darn cheap.
It's the worst old blues I ever had.

Chorus: I've got the blues,
I've shore-God got 'em bad.
I've got the blues,
The worst I've ever had!
It must be the blues
Of the Davidson-Wilder scabs.

He discharged Horace Hood
And told him he had no job;
Then he wouldn't let Thomas Shepherd couple
Because he wouldn't take the other fellow's job.

Mr. Shivers he's an Alabama man,
He came to Tennessee;
He put on two of his yeller-dog cuts,
But he failed to put on three.

Mr. Shivers, he goes to Davidson,
From Davidson on to Twin;
And then goes back to Wilder
And then he'd cut again.

Mr. Shivers told Mr. Boyer,
He said, "I know just what we'll do;
We'll get the names of the union men
And fire the whole durn crew."

We paid no attention to his firing,
And went on just the same;
And organized the holler
In L. L. Shivers' name.

Mr. Shivers, he told the committeemen,
He said, "Boys, I'll treat you right;"
He said, "I know you're good union men,
And first class Camelites."

I felt just like a cross-breed
Between the devil and a hog;
And that
And that's about all I could call myself
If I sign that yeller-dog.

There's a few things right here in town
I never did think was right;
For a man to be a yeller-dog scab
And a first-class Camelite.

There's a few officers here in town
And never let a lawbreaker slip;
They carried their guns when scabbing began
Till the hide come off their hips.

Phlem Bolls organized the holler
About a hundred strong;
And stopped L. L. Shivers
From putting the third cut on.

Mr. Shivers got rid of his nigger,
And a white man took his place;
And if you want me to tell you what I think of that,
It's a shame and a damned disgrace.

Dick Stultz is for the union men,
And Bully Garret against us all;
Dick kicked Bully in the stomach,
And you'd oughta heered Bully squall.

Paw Evans has got a 'tater patch,
Away out on the farm;
Alek Sells guards that 'tater patch
With a gun as long as your arm.

I'd rather be a yeller-dog scab
In a union man's back yard,
Than to tote a gun for L. L. Shivers,
And to be a National Guard.

Photo by Brenda Bell

THE BALLAD OF BARNEY GRAHAM



On April the thirtieth,
In 1933,
Upon the streets of Wilder
They shot him, brave and free.

They shot my darling father,
He fell upon the ground;
'Twas in the back they shot him;
The blood came streaming down.

They took the pistol handles
And beat him on the head;
The hired gunmen beat him
Till he was cold and dead.

When he left home that morning,
I thought he'd soon return;
But for my darling father
My heart shall ever yearn.



We carried him to the graveyard
And there we lay him down;
To sleep in death for many a year
In the cold and sodden ground.

Although he left the union
He tried so hard to build,
His blood was spilled for justice
And justice guides us still.

Although she was only 12 years old when her father was killed, Della Mae Graham must have already been an amazing person. At Barney's funeral, the newspapers said, there was a single mourners' bench—and she was the only one sitting on it. Her mother was too sick with pellagra to come. Della Mae held her composure until almost the end, when she finally broke into tears. At that moment, they say, most of the crowd broke down with her.

The week after her father's death, the *Nashville Tennessean* reported:

In the hope of securing funds for the strikers' aid, Graham was to have gone with [Howard] Kester and other labor leaders this week-end to Washington to attend the Continental Congress for Economic Reconstruction, which has been called by labor, farm and political groups for Saturday and Sunday. After Graham's death, Mr. Kester decided to take the oldest child to the meetings. Della Mae is in the national capital today, seeing sights she never saw before, and telling the story of her father's death so as to secure aid for the miners whom he had imbued with the idea of fighting on.

We wanted so much to be able to meet Della Mae and talk with her, but she grew up and married and moved away, and we weren't able to find anyone who knew where she is now. For the time being, her song will have to stand by itself.



Miles Stryker/Workers' Graphics

An Interview with Tom Lowry

Conducted by Fran Ansley, Brenda Bell
and Florence Reece

“Little David Blues”

Tom Lowry composed the “Little David Blues” in his head, and that’s the only place he thought the words and tune were. He was amazed to learn from us that someone had written down the song during the Davidson-Wilder strike, and that it was published in *American Folksongs of Protest*. No one even bothered to tell him.

We had found out about Tom from some friendly people in the Davidson community grocery store. They were looking over the songs we showed them, explaining verses to us, and someone said, “Why Tom Lowry, he lives right up here in Roanoke!”

One late summer morning Fran Ansley, Florence Reece and Brenda Bell sat on Tom’s side porch and talked with him about his song and about coal mining. Florence also wrote a song during a mining strike—she was in the thick of the Harlan battles with her husband Sam and young family when she wrote “Which Side Are You On.” Tom and Florence had never met. Here are some excerpts from our conversation together.

Tom: I hadn’t thought of that song, hadn’t thought of that holler. . . . I hadn’t thought of none of that in years!

Fran: When we first came over in Fentress County, we didn’t know anybody. We knew your song—that’s what got us off on this whole wild goose chase. We wanted to hear the story of the strike.

Tom: You mean that song got you people started on this?

Florence: Look what you done and didn’t know it. You done a lot of good and didn’t know it. I’m so proud! I’m glad they brought it back to memory. Sing it for us!

Tom: I swear, I never would have thought of that no more! (Laughing.) I don’t know if I can sing it, but I’ll try. You know, that takes me a way back, buddy. I can just see me setting on that old big front porch over there. . .let’s see. . .Little Cowell. . .



LITTLE DAVID BLUES

Little Cowell worked for John Parish
 For 35 cents a day;
 He ate so many cheese and crackers
 He fell off a pound a day.

Refrain: It's all night long,
 From the midnight on.

Then he came to Davidson a-working
 For Mr. Hubert and E. W. too,
 And Cowell knows just exactly, boy,
 How to deny you.

You go in the mines and find water
 It's right up to your knees;
 You surely don't like to work in it,
 But you don't do as you please.

They'll take you by the collar,
 They'll maul you in the face;
 They'll put you in the water hole,
 It's right up to your waist.

You come out by the office
 After working hard all day;
 Your sheriff dues and your doctor bill
 You surely got to pay.

Men go through the office
 they go through one by one;
 They'll ask you for two dollars in scrip
 And "Oh, gee! Make it one."

You get your handful of scrip,
 And you go right in the store.
 You find a fellow with a black mustache,
 Writing it down on the floor.

You ask for a bucket of lard
 And "What's meat worth a pound?"
 "We sell it to you at any price,
 'Cause we're spizwinkin' now."

You ask for a sack of flour,
 And they you'll ask the cost.
 It's a dollar and a quarter a sack
 And fifty cents for cloth.

I went into the store one day,
 Mr. Cowell was frying some steak;
 I warned it would give him
 Scab colic and the bellyache.

(There is a pause, while Tom studies his song, talking to himself, trying to get up his nerve to sing for us. Then he starts singing, hesitantly at first, the tune wavering, but then getting steadily stronger. He chuckles at the words as he sings, and we laugh and sing along some. He's good.)

Tom: Now I don't know if that's any way near the way I used to try to sing that.

Brenda: Tell us how you came to write the song.

Tom: To tell the truth now, I was running around there. If I hadn't married when I did I don't know what I would have done. I hate to admit it, but I was a little bit on the mean side. I'd been mistreated now; I wasn't getting along with my stepdad when I left over there. I left home because I knew I'd kill him or he'd kill me one. So, I got to drinking and just about anything to do, I'd do. I didn't care, it didn't make no difference to me. I got to feeling like I didn't have no friends in the world. Everybody seemed like they were agin me, which they wasn't—I can see that now.

I don't know, you'd have to know the situation of that song before you know what it was. It all had to do with the circumstances that come up around me. The strike started it. The little fellow in there had been like a daddy to me. I mostly made that song about that one man. That was Little David Cowell. He was a little bitty fellow and they brought him in there in that strike as a bookkeeper. "Oh gee, oh golly,"—that was about as rough a language as I ever heard from him. One of the finest men I ever got to know in my life.

Well, of course, the miners worked hard. Some of them, like when you "go through the office one by one," I've heard many a man go through there after two dollars in scrip, they'd ask for two dollars and Cowell'd look at what they'd done that day. You see, when you load your turn of coal that day it comes by telephone from the mine and they call it down to the office before the miner comes in. Cowell'd say, "Gee golly." Maybe you loaded so much and you'd ask for two dollars and he'd say, "Oh gee, can't have two, just make it one."

But Mr. Cowell, see, he went on and done different things that I didn't like at the time. He was against what I was believing—I thought he was anyway. I thought he was agin the Mine Workers, agin everybody that was striking, which he wasn't. He worked down there for that company, and he lived on a dime's worth of cheese and crackers, that was all a person could eat. He worked for so little, well, that's what he lived on. It just come out of the top of my head, I just started remembering it. I don't know, I hadn't thought no more about it since then.

I was thought very little of, myself, now I'll just tell you. My wife, even she thought I was a regular smart aleck. Even in that song, now, I was trying to do my bit, I guess. I was going to tell them how I felt, anyway. I didn't just tell it in that song, I'd tell it to anybody who would listen to me. I was a hundred percent for the union.

Florence: When you was writing that song, you was organizing. You should have written down those songs, and you should now. Why don't you just study when you're by yourself? Just think, think, think—and when you think, write it down. It'd be good for the people.

Tom: As Snuffy Smith says, "When your schoolhouse is as weak as I am, you don't write too much." You see, I didn't get through the third grade.

Florence: Well, we didn't—my husband didn't either.

Tom: You see, back then, when a boy got big enough, and come out of a big family, he'd go to work. Of course, I did, too. I had two full sisters and they was twin, and me, and there's eight more.

Florence: Coal miners, they raise big families. And when their sons would get up, they'd take them in the mines with them to help them load up coal to feed their families. And as soon as they'd get old enough, they'd get married, and it'd start revolving all over.

Tom: Back then it was nothing strange for a twelve-year-old boy to be working in the mines. So they'd do that, and they growed up like anything else—like a boy raised on the farm out here.

Of course, I did a lot of other things besides mining, but that's what I knowed. I worked at Oak Ridge, I worked on construction work, I drove a school bus for some time, I worked for the state highway department and the county. Just little jobs in between. But until I got crippled in the mine over here, I'd go right back in the coal mines.

But that strike and all that, that was a rough deal. That song I wrote, I didn't call it a song. I didn't call it anything. As I said, mine was mostly about old man David Cowell and how he'd turn people down. I tell you what, it's pitiful, you take a man that goes in the coal mines and works real hard all day working in that—I've seen men in water up to their knees. They couldn't get the company to furnish the pumps to pump it out, and they just walked right in there and worked all day long, buddy. Then you got in that office to ask for your scrip, and your family maybe had a little flour, a little gravy. It may sound like a lie, but I swear it's true. My mother would take a biscuit and put sugar between the biscuit and a little chew of fat meat, and I've loaded 20 tons of coal on that.

Florence: I know you're telling the truth. My daddy faced the same thing, and my husband faced the same thing. So, when coal miners get together, they **know** when the truth is told!

Tom: And came back home for supper and you know all there will be for supper is pinto beans and cornbread.

Florence: Exactly! I've told you many a time, Brenda. That's what we had. That's what I raised my children on.

But here's the thing. You know all these things, and your children face this same thing. You can tell them what will happen to them. You say, "Now, when these demonstrations come, they'll probably ban them and say, 'Oh, don't get in that demonstration, ain't going to do no good—communist.'" It's no such thing. It's people wanting a decent wage. And they'll kill you for less than that.

Brenda: You say, Tom, we need to understand the circumstances around the strike. I wanted to ask you where did "All night long, from midnight on" come from? Did people always work night shift in the mines?

Tom: I guess where I got that "midnight on" in there. A lot of fellows would go in the mines and work all day, then they'd come out and go back to prepare for the next day. They'd work half a night. I've done that. I doubt at that time there was a

night shift except people who fired the boilers. Very little night work, except preparing for the next day. Later on, when I worked at Horse Pound, we worked straight around the clock. Quick as one shift come off, another went on.

Brenda: There's a verse in here about the fellow with the black moustache.

Tom: They brought him in there from Livingston. Store manager, and he got rich off them coal miners. They paid him a salary and he got a percentage. Of course, they do that a lot now. He was a big dark-skinned fellow and wore a moustache. I wrestled with him a lot, I used to way-lay him. He wore white a lot, and I'd way-lay him. See, there wasn't nothing around there but coal dust, sulphur balls, and ashes, and I went without a shirt a lot. He'd sneak around and try to get back in the store before I could find him. I'd hide from him and I'd just run out. All I wanted to do was black up his clothes. He was all right. He was a good boy.

Brenda: He'd write down how much scrip you'd bring in?

Tom: "Writing down in the floor." Where I got that, you see, everything back then had to be weighed. Back then you had to cut it and weigh it. Pinto beans, you'd have to weigh them. Before draw day, you'd weigh it and have it all ready. Well, they wrote down when you went in there to



Photo by Brenda Bell

In that song, now, I was trying to do my bit, I guess. I was going to tell them how I felt. —Tom Lowry

My daddy was killed in the coal mines in 1914, and he was loading a ton and a half of coal for 30 cents. After they got the unions, they wouldn't have done it.

—Florence Reece



Florence Reece and Fran Ansley

Photo by Brenda Bell

trade. The store manager always had a ticket book or something and he'd write that down. Of course, he wasn't writing it down on the floor. Floor just rhymed with store.

As for the other people in the song, John Parish was the fellow Mr. Cowell started working for. He had an old sewing machine. Seems to me like he was a notary public, or a lawyer maybe, a little jack-legged lawyer. Then during the strike, there were two brothers, E.W. and Hubert Patterson. They bought the Davidson mine and Mr. Cowell went to work for them as a bookkeeper, under a contract. And the miners struck. Then I took my spite out on him, and them others.

Now there's other verses to it I can't remember. There's more to it than you've got. There's some of it pretty rough! I guess it's too rough to write down, to tell you the truth of it!

Fran: Well, I guess you all had a rough time of it! Sometimes it's hard to understand how people could come through it.

Tom: I've come in, since me and Edna married, I've come in so tired that I'd have to lay down a while before I could take a bath. Of course, you took it in an old tub.

Florence: Yeah. Eyes so black—you couldn't get all that coal dust out.

Tom: That's right. And I'd work on a motor. I've went to work many a morning at 5 o'clock, and they'd turn the lights on at the tippie. I mean in the summer time like this weather right now, you can just guess how many hours we'd work. They'd turn

the lights on to dump the last trip, and we only got the same price—it didn't make any difference. Never heard of overtime or double time.

Florence: And no vacation with pay.

Tom: Only time I can ever remember getting off in my life back then was at Christmas. They would give you Christmas off. Didn't have no holidays.

Florence: The men used to tell my husband, he'd tell them about they'd get so many days with pay. "Who ever heard of getting paid for not working?" He said, "If you got sense enough you'll stand up there." Now they're getting it. They say now, "Sam, you know a long time ago you told me about that and I thought you was a liar."

Tom: There's been a lot of sacrifices for that Mine Workers.

Florence: I say there has.

Tom: I actually guess the biggest part of that started in Harlan, Kentucky.

Florence: That was something awful. They's a man up there, and he'd just shoot them men, I don't know how many. But finally they killed him. Said the man's wife went over there after he was shot, and he wore a breast-flint, and said he had something on his face, and they just raised that up and spit in his face, after he was a-dying. Because he killed so many people. He was worse than Hitler, it could have been.

At first I just went to church and thought, "It's bad, it's bad," until them thugs started. Then I thought, "You stand up and be counted or you're

going to be killed and your children will starve to death." They's one woman, they arrested her husband and put him in Harlan jail, she had little twins, and she had pellegra, you know, scaled all over and starving. They said, "Florence, don't let her stay with you, you'll catch that." I said, "She got that from her table, I won't catch it." She took her two little girls and went to see her husband. Old John Henry Blair said, "We'll turn you out of jail if you'll leave the county." "I ain't going to leave the county," he said, "I live here; I want to stay here and go back to work." And he give them two little girls a dime apiece. That dirty old high sheriff.

Tom: They didn't care about life. Now that part of that there song there, "Don't kill that mule, you be careful with that mule, because we can't buy that mule. We can get men, but you can't go out here and buy a mule." But dad-gum that man. I've heard the mine foreman, "If you don't like it, bare-footed man waiting outside the door there waiting to take your job."

Florence: Exactly! And that's what my husband—boy, you could hear him cussing. One old superintendent said, "I hope that these miners' kids had to gnaw the bark off the tree." And, boy, they was a-looking for him. They said they was going to kill him. I told my husband, "Don't you do that, it ain't worth it, don't do it."

Fran: Florence, why don't you sing your song for Tom?

Florence: Used to, I could sing, but now I can't because I'm too old. My throat's always grooveling. We'd always sing in church and everything, you know. See, I wrote this song in 1930; they had the Harlan strike then.

Tom: Yeah, lord, I read and heard about that.

Florence: Did you hear about "Which Side Are You On?"

Tom: No.

Florence: That's the name of the song. Because you see, the gun thugs were coming down to help them search our house; my husband was an organizer with the United Mine Workers. And they'd put him in jail, and turned him out, and all that stuff. And he had to kindly stay out to go on organizing. And the thugs were to come, why, they would have killed him if they'd come. They'd search our house to see if we had any high-powered. I said, "Well, what are you here for?" I had a bunch of children. They said, "We're here for IWW papers and high-powered rifles." I never had heard of IWW papers. My husband did have a high-powered rifle because it belonged to the National Association of Rifles, or something like that, and him and the miners would go into the mountains and hunt with his old rifle. He didn't have it for no bad pur-

pose. When I found out they was wanting that, I knowed these thugs were dirty—hired by John Henry Blair to come in there and break the strike. I said, "All these miners wants is a right to live in decent ways." And the miners had their hands and



Miles Stryker/Workers' Graphics

their prayers—that's all they had. But the coal operators hired these gun thugs. They buy them good whiskey to drink, they rent them good hotels, they give them high-priced cars to drive, and pistols, high-powered rifles, and one had a machine gun.

They could give that to beat the miners back. But to give the miners more to raise their children, they couldn't do it. And then my husband and me finally left. But I'll not go into the whole story, but, anyway, it was just like Hitler Germany. It was the worse thing I was ever in and I never will forget it. I'd stay there by myself, and I'd say to myself, "There's something I've got to do." They wouldn't let the newspaper come in there, you know. And people would send in truckloads of clothes or food or something, but the thugs would meet them and if they wanted anything, they'd get it, turn it over so the miners couldn't get it. They were trying to force them back to work.

Now, my daddy was killed in the coal mines in 1914, and he was loading a ton and a half of coal for 30 cents. After they got the unions they wouldn't have done it. So, the union was the only thing stood by the men, but the coal operators didn't want the union 'cause the miners would have a say—but anyway—I'll try to sing this song.

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?

*Come all of you good workers,
Good news to you I'll tell
Of how the good old union
Has come in here to dwell.*

*Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?*

*With pistols and with rifles
They take away our bread
But if you miners hinted it,
They'll sock you on the head.*

*They say they have to guard us
To educate their child.
Their children live in luxury
While ours is almost wild.*

*They say in Harlan County
There is no neutral there;
You'll either be a union man
Or a thug for J. H. Blair.*

*Oh, gentlemen, can you stand it?
Oh, tell me how you can.
Will you be a gun thug
Or will you be a man?*

*My daddy was a miner
He's now in the air and sun*
He'll be with you fellow workers
Til every battle's won.*

Tom: That's right. Your song, see, that come out of experience. It was right there happening.

Florence: Yeah. The thugs, you know, I was trying to get some of them to answer which side they's on—what're you doing over there being a gun thug and shooting down your fellow men.

Tom: I can remember—that's a bad situation.

Florence: They had the National Guard up in Harlan County awhile. They claimed it was going to be for the miners, but they got up there and they were for the coal company. They had two men that put up a soup kitchen. I've seen little children walking along the road down there, and their little legs would be so little and their stomachs would be so big. They didn't get anything to eat. I've seen some of our good neighbors just staggering. Well, they put up this soup kitchen, think it was in Harlan or right below—two men, killed both of them same night. The thugs done it—pretended it was somebody else to get the miners. And they'd find bones up in the mountain where they had killed the miners.

Tom: This Barney Graham you're talking about, after he was killed, I guess if one shot had been fired, no telling how many men would have been killed. But I've seen them walking around in there, and that Shorty Green fellow too, with big guns on them, you know. Several deputies, they called 'em "deputies," them thugs for the company, they had their deputy badges and papers and everything. They'd walk around here, I've seen them, they'd lay a hand on them guns many a times over dad-gum crazy little old fights, lord have mercy. You'd stand around there innocent and just get shot down. But I didn't think about it then. Actually I was around there part of the time hoping it would start, because they was men out there then, at that time, that I had it in my heart that I wouldn't have cared to see them killed. Boy, I tell you what, when you get hungry and you go to bed hungry, and you cry and you know who's crying because, of course, kids will, and there ain't nothing to eat, and you don't know where the next meal's coming from, and you look at the next fellow out there and you know he ain't in no better shape than you are. Then a dad-gum bunch of people running around there with a bunch of guns on, and if you look cross-eyed at one of them, they'd kick you or they'd knock you. If you don't think it'll make you mean—it shore will. I sure don't want to go through that again.

* blacklisted



Jack Delano/FSA

MINERS' / CONVICT INSURRECTIONS / LABOR

edited by Fran Ansley and Brenda Bell

Among the most dramatic events in the history of the Southern Appalachian coal fields were the East Tennessee miners' insurrections of the 1890's, still known as "the wars" by many people around the coal camps of the area. In a series of massive armed confrontations, the coal miners of Tennessee rose up against the state convict leasing system to defend their jobs which the coal companies were trying to fill with convict laborers.

As with so many of the significant battles of the South's working class, the story of this rebellion is little known to younger people in the area today, although there are several songs which have survived the years, and scholarly information about it is stored away in city libraries.

We will not be able to tell the full story of the miners' insurrection here, but we would like to share some pieces of a "history-in-progress." They are important both for the new light they shed on events from the perspective of actual participants, and because the interviews, done in the 1930's, are a lively example of the concern with oral history shared by many progressive people who became politicized in that period of mass upsurge.

Most of the interviews were conducted by Jim Dombrowski in 1937-38 while he was with the Highlander Folk School. They provided much of the material for Dombrowski's unpublished manu-

script "Fire in the Hole," a history of the people of Grundy County (the area where Highlander was located and with which it was actively involved at that time). The interviews and Dombrowski's commentary we think speak for themselves.

The last interview in the collection is a current one with a young man who comes from the area in Anderson County, Tennessee, which was at the heart of the insurrections. He is greatly concerned with the nearly-lost history of his home, has spent afternoons walking through the woods to locate old gun emplacements, and scouting through libraries for information. He hopes that someday he will be able to pull together the full story and to help bring it back to life among the people whose heritage it is.

This collection of interviews is not an analysis of the events, and we lack the information to do such an analysis now. But there are several issues raised by the miners' insurrection which we'd like to touch on briefly before going on to the interviews.

For instance, some day we would like to see this story told as part of the history of prison labor, not simply as part of the history of trade unions. The convict lease system first began in Tennessee in 1866, as part of a wave of such legislation which swept through the South and Midwest after the Civil War.¹ A Nashville furniture company built

workshops on the grounds of the penitentiary, fed and clothed the men, and paid 43¢ a head per day to the state. One year later, the prisoners burned the workshops to the ground in protest over the treatment they were receiving. From that time to this, prisoners have waged battles to win decent working conditions and fairer wages.

Meanwhile the labor movement has often agitated for an end to convict labor, but usually on the grounds of unfair competition rather than of justice for convicts. For example, the Mechanics and Manufacturers Association of Tennessee began agitating against convict leasing very early, saying it was unfair to labor.² And in fact, the bulk of convicts were shortly switched to the coal and iron mines and to farms in order to avoid competition with the mechanical trades.³

When the Tennessee legislature abolished the convict lease system in 1896, they didn't stop working the prisoners, they simply bought a piece of land and set up a state-owned coal mine at Brushy Mountain where convicts continued to mine coal until the mid-1950's. (Despite this fact the Nov. 1, 1938, UMW Journal ran an article entitled "Historical Rebellion Brought End to Convict Miners in Tennessee." The rebellion eventually brought an end to convict leasing, but not to convict miners.)

Of course it was no easy victory getting convict labor out of the hands of private companies. By the time of the miners' insurrections all of Tennessee's convicts were leased by the Tennessee Coal Iron & Railroad Co. (TCI), a New York-based corporation. They leased about 1600 men from the state for \$101,000 per year. [That comes out to about \$63 per year per man.] Part of these men they worked in their own mines in Grundy County; part of them they sub-leased to other companies in that area and north of there in Anderson County around Coal Creek and Briceville. TCI already had a monopoly on coal in the North Alabama fields (where they also used convict labor). They were a highly successful company, becoming a subsidiary of US Steel in 1907.⁴ It was the convict lease system which built TCI's fortune.

Besides the outright super-profits TCI made off its convicts, they were also able to use the convicts as a club against free miners. A TCI official told the New York Times:⁵

One of the chief reasons which induced the company to take up the system was the chance it offered for overcoming strikes. For some years after we began the convict lease system, we proved that we were right in calculating that the free miners would be loath to enter upon strikes, when they saw that the company was amply provided with convict labor.

So it is clear why TCI fought so hard to prevent the end of the convict leasing system. The state, though, had quite an interest in the system as well. Between the years 1870 and 1890, Tennessee made a total net profit of \$771,000 from its convict leasing system. This was only \$176,000 short of repaying the state for all expenditures on all its penal institutions since the first penitentiary had been built in 1829 under Governor Sam Houston.⁶ So, of course, they kept working the prisoners and selling their products even after they were forced to stop leasing them to private industry. Then in the 30's, federal legislation was passed making it illegal for any prison-made goods to be sold in the free market.⁷ But the states, including Tennessee, still work their convicts and still pay them scandalous wages; it's just that they have them manufacture goods directly for the state. Prisoners, however, are still fighting.

Another issue raised by the insurrection is that of racism. The state prison system began to take on its modern character immediately after the close of the Civil War, when the percentage of blacks in the prisons began to rise astronomically month by month from the tiny percentage they had comprised in the days when plantations took care of their own.⁸ (Then as now, the majority of prisoners, black and white, were convicted of crimes against property. Dombrowski says that over half of all convicts in Tennessee at the time of the rebellion were imprisoned for larceny.) Blacks made up two thirds of the convict miners in East Tennessee.

Evidence of what role racism played in forming the attitudes of East Tennessee miners toward the convicts is scant. One woman told Dombrowski that "free niggers" had been forcibly driven from the Tracy City area some years before, but that there were free blacks who worked at the coke ovens at the time of the rebellion. Another man related that years later when they finally succeeded in forming a union, "We took the niggers into the union and gave them a union of their own." (There is no evidence that free blacks were similarly run out of the Anderson County area.)⁹

On the other hand, many comments in the interviews show that among rank-and-file miners and their families there was substantial sympathy for the convicts, black and white. Archie Green quotes "an early observer" as saying, "Whites and Negroes are standing shoulder to shoulder." He also reports that a black man was shot by militia, and several thousand fellow-workers and neighbors attended his funeral.¹⁰

It seems likely that the ambiguity of the evidence reflects a mixed situation and an ambivalence on the part of the miners toward blacks

which was similar to their ambivalence towards convicts as a whole. What would be interesting would be more knowledge of what the Knights of Labor and the UMW (both involved in the insurrection) said and did about racism. Also, of course, first hand testimony from blacks themselves would be invaluable.

What does seem clear is that in the course of their fight against the convict leasing system, the miners were forced by the logic of the situation to ignore more and more the distinctions between themselves (as law-abiding, predominantly white citizens) and the convicts (as law-breaking, predominantly black criminals). And it was to the extent that they ignored these distinctions, in a massive and popularly-supported way, that they succeeded in winning their demands.

We hope that these and other issues will be dealt with in greater depth and on a firmer factual foundation sometime in the future. In the meantime, we present these interviews as one piece in that process. The first two interviews with the Scoggins of Coal Creek were conducted by Grace Roberts. Subsequent interviews were conducted by Jim Dombrowski in Grundy County, and include his original commentary. The last interview with Johnny Burris was done in August, 1973, with Fran Ansley and Brenda Bell.

* According to Archie Green, Grace Roberts was a relative—probably a niece—of Eugene Merrill of the miner's insurrection. She was apparently still living in the Coal Creek area at the time these interviews were conducted in the late 1930's. She later moved to Clinton, Indiana.

Chronology of Convict Labor Wars

1871	First convict miners brought to Tracy City and Sewanee.
1876	First strike of miners at Coal Creek.
1877	First convicts brought to Coal Creek.
1884	The Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company (TCI) signed a five year contract for all Tennessee convicts.
1887	Law guaranteeing miners the right to elect a checkweighman passed in Tennessee.
1889	TCI signed a second six-year contract.
1890	United Mine Workers of America founded.
April, 1891	The Tennessee Coal Mining Company at Briceville fired their men's checkweighman and demanded that they sign an "ironclad" agreement promising never to join a union. When the men refused, the company locked them out.
July 4, 1891	The company announced it had signed a contract with TCI for convicts to work the Briceville mine. (There had been some convicts at Coal Creek before, but never at Briceville.)
July 14, 1891	First Insurrection. Three hundred armed miners and citizens marched on the Briceville stockade, walked the convicts to Coal Creek, and put them on a train for Knoxville. They sent a telegram to the governor explaining their action and appealing for his help in ridding the state of the convict lease system, not only at Briceville, but in all of East Tennessee.
July 16, 1891	Governor arrived with the convicts and with state militia to install and protect them. He addressed a mass meeting, urged law and order.
July 17, 1891	Lots of public support for miners appears, including from the militia units.
July 20, 1891	Second Insurrection. Miners poured into Anderson County from all over, marched quietly and with discipline to the Briceville stockade. Two thousand armed men lined the surrounding ridges. Sent convicts again to Coal Creek and then Knoxville. Then marched on the Knoxville Iron Company mine at Coal Creek, sent those convicts off too. Not a shot fired. Women gave out sandwiches to miners and soldiers as they marched that night; governor mobilized all fourteen companies of Tennessee militia.

July 24, 1891	After negotiation, governor says the convicts must return. But he will call special session of legislature to consider taking action on convict lease law.
August, 1891	Legislature met, and rather than repealing the law, reinforced it by increasing the governor's "emergency powers," making it a crime to lead a protest group or to interfere with the work of a convict.
October 28, 1891	Miners and their committee tried various tactics in the courts. Failed.
October 31, 1891	Miners' committee resigned, saying they had done all they could.
November 1, 1891	Third Insurrection. Meetings held in mines at Briceville and Coal Creek in the dark for secrecy. That night 1500 men marched on the stockades, the leader disguised in a 'kerchief. They set the convicts free and burned the stockade at Briceville. At Coal Creek they spared the stockade because the warden's wife was sick, but burned everything else, and released the prisoners. Citizens helped convicts escape by giving them food and clothes.
January, 1892	Men marched for first time to Oliver Springs where convicts were also being worked. They released them and burned the stockade there. Governor offered cash rewards for leaders and participants. For a month or so, things were quiet. Miners met with companies, agreed on terms, and went to work.
Spring, 1892	Convicts returned to Coal Creek with a company of militia, and a military occupation was established. They built a fort and set up Gatling guns. The Tennessee Coal Mining Company at Briceville refused to take convicts back, despite pressure from TCI. The company at Oliver Springs also tried to refuse, but TCI bought them out and returned the convicts.
July, 1892	At Coal Creek, Tracy City and Oliver Springs, work is slack for free miners, but convicts work full time. Briceville had no convicts but discriminated against strikers and men in the Knights of Labor.
August, 1892	Tracy City miners, who had suffered under the convict system the longest, but had not yet rebelled, were cut to half time work.
April, 1893	Fourth Insurrection. A committee at Tracy City got keys to stockade at gunpoint and put convicts on train to Nashville. Intercepted a trainload of guards sent to Inman (where TCI also had a mine) and disarmed them. Unrest in Coal Creek at this news. People there already upset by the arrogant and high-handed soldiers. A black man had been shot, and another young man lynched. Unsuccessful attack on stockade at Oliver Springs. Governor ordered more troops; called for volunteers, too, but the response was slow. For Coal Creek's final showdown, miners poured in and put Fort Anderson under siege. Soldiers and prominent citizen-type volunteers had many setbacks in the strange terrain. But finally enough soldiers got through that the miners knew they were beaten. Ten day reign of terror began, with 300 arrested. Militia stayed to occupy town. Men in Briceville forced to sign "iron-clad" agreement.
1896	Fifth Insurrection. At Tracy City, 50-100 men staged unsuccessful attack on stockade. Troops were sent in to hunt for leaders. Eventually most went back to work, but had to sign disclaimer of any involvement in release of convicts. Despite appearance of miners' defeat, when the TCI contract expired, it was not renewed and convict leasing in Tennessee was abolished by the legislature (twenty years before it was ended in neighboring Alabama). Same legislature buys land and sets up state-run convict mine near Petros, Tennessee, as alternative.

Mr. W.M. Scoggins

This is the story of the labor trouble and battle between miners and militia at Coal Creek as told by Mr. W.M. Scoggins, a participant.

I lived in front of the Shamrock Store at Coal Creek and there had been trouble in the mine on account of a lockout, I believe over something about the checkweighman. You see I am an old man now and can't remember every little thing as well as I used to, but I shall never forget that terrible time.

It was a common practice to work convicts in the mines and though the miners had asked the repeal of the law and it had been promised for several years, yet this had not been done, and the miners' organizations were seething over it, and at the same time the convicts were released at Coal Creek, there had been a concerted understanding that they would be released all over the state at the same time. A number of mines in the vicinity of Coal Creek had them, but only two very near. They were leased by the state to the owners of the mines to dig the coal when the men came out on strike.

The miners at Coal Creek had been out quite a time and were getting quite worried as to where the next meal was to come from, and were angry and meeting in groups and talking things over. Some were for violence, others held back until all patience became exhausted, for their families in many instances were in want. Not only were the miners angry, but the business men of Coal Creek as well; for when the miner of a mining settlement has no money, the merchant suffers as well. The state does not buy in small quantities of the small merchant, but in large quantities of the wholesaler and when the battle of Coal Creek came, there were merchants and professional men in the ranks as well as miners.

I knew there was going to be trouble for there was a dangerous stillness, and one night men gathered by two's and three's or in larger groups and went to the Tennessee Iron and Coal Company where there were convicts and guards, and demanding their surrender, lined up outside while the guards and convicts passed through the line of two's, turned over their guns, were escorted to Coal Creek, put on a train and sent to Knoxville. Not a shot was fired for the guards, recognizing the futility of resistance over such overwhelming numbers, offered no resistance.

They were sent back, accompanied by militia and the trouble really started. For two years, there was discord and brutality. Homes were entered on the slightest pretext and not only food but many valuables were taken. A fort was built on the mountain overlooking the stockade and the militia installed in that. The militia men seemed to think that brutality was necessary to make an impression but they failed to understand the men they were dealing with.

One afternoon, as I was sitting on my porch an old Negro named Jake Whitson waved at a trainload of militia men. He was shot down in cold blood. Jake was a good old darkey and never did anyone no harm.

Another time a young man named Dick Drummond was in a gathering of young men. A militia man was there and someone shot him through the window. The shooter could not be found, so Dick was made the scapegoat. He was hanged on a bridge and his body left hanging as an example to the rest.

Any man that did not please them was in danger of being arrested and courtmartialled. Andy McClure was taken out by a militia man but Andy's wife went along with a pistol under her apron. She



Photo by Charles Winfrey

Shamrock Store, 1973. The Methodist Church of Briceville is in the background.



Photo by Charles Winfrey

Drummond's Bridge. This is the site where the state militia hanged Dick Drummond without trial.

said, "I will go with him to his death," but he was turned loose in a short time.

One evening I was lying on the floor at home when I saw men going down the railroad in groups. I asked one fellow, "Where are you going." "Get your gun," he said, "We're going to Oliver Springs to burn the stockade and turn the convicts loose." I borrowed firearms and went along, but in going over the hills some fellow fired a pistol and gave the alarm so we were turned back, but the next day trains come in from all over the district and the work was accomplished. This was just a few days before the stockade was burned at Coal Creek.

Then one night the crowd came again to the Tennessee Iron and Coal Company. The stockade was burned and the convicts were turned loose. Some of the miners took off their own clothes and gave to the convicts. Even the stores took the clothing from their shelves and put it outside where the convicts could get them. Some because they thought they would be entered and robbed anyhow, others because they were in sympathy with the miners.

The militia fired from the fort overlooking the mine but the men being so familiar with the locality got behind a rock as large as a house and not many were hit. There were hills or mountains on three sides of the fort and the miners were on the south-east side, but they gradually encircled it and demanded its surrender. Colonel Anderson's answer was, "I'll die game, tell my daughter that my last words were I will not surrender." He was taken to Coal Creek where some of the hotter heads demanded that he be killed, but Brother Masons among the crowd got hold of him and spirited him out of danger.

A company of 125 men were organized at Knoxville and sent to help the men in the fort. They came over the mountain by pulling each other hand over hand. And as they were dressed in civilian clothes, the militia did not know they were friends and fired into them with a Gatling gun, killing three. Next day the papers were full of the fact that the miners had killed three of them when the facts were the miners were still half a mile away from them. The leader of the company men at Knoxville was found in a farm house not far from the trouble next day and he is said to have remarked that it was about 19 miles coming but about 30 going back over that mountain.

The governor was to speak to the miners from the bridge the next day, Thursday, but things were so turbulent that someone sent him a message not to come. This angered the men for they were expecting him to give them some promise of action by the legislature on taking the convicts out and they were in an ugly mood and when some militia

men grew arrogant a miner took a whack at him and the battle started. This was on Thursday morning and it lasted until Friday evening.

Mollie Scoggins

The women's side of the labor trouble in Coal Creek by Mollie Scoggins as told to Grace Roberts.

I am the wife of W.M. Scoggins and we lived in front of the Shamrock store a short distance from Coal Creek. I kept a boarding house and had several small children. I did not know anything about the real trouble until it really happened, for the men did not tell anyone what they were going to do until it actually transpired. But I saw the convicts and guards on the train when they were sent to Knoxville and when the militia came to Coal Creek I was scared for they were so brutal. But through the night the stockade was burned, and I lived real close to it; everything was done so quietly that I did not even waken.

The convicts did not do any damage when they were turned loose though some people were afraid they would, and when one came to my door for food and picked up my little boy I was scared and just troubled. But he petted and talked to him and I thought, "He probably is a married man with small children of his own."

I clothed two of the convicts myself so they could get away and so did a number of the neighbors but as the state paid a bounty of \$85 a head for them, most of them were recaptured, though I don't think any citizen of Coal Creek gave them any information. An English woman that lived close to me that had just lost her husband by death gave the convict her dead husband's clothes and as she had intended to keep them it was a sacrifice on her part. But we were all ready to do anything we could to help our husbands.

John Brown came to my house and said, "Mollie, I must have a place to hide for they are going to hang me." I said, "But my little children, what if I get into trouble?" He said, "But where will I go?" I tore some boards off the attic and he stayed there all night.

While the battle was going on the women were in the streets in groups, some were praying, some were crying and every once in a while one would faint. I never want to see such a scene again. Every time a cannon or a gun would go off, some one of them would say, "Oh, I know that is my son or husband," and others would scream. I never want to see such a scene again.



Photo from *Only A Miner*/Archie Green

Uncle Jessie James

William Ely James (Uncle Jessie James), March 27, 1937, Palmer, Tennessee, 66 years of age, gave me the Lone Rock convict song [which he had learned from a black convict—ed.]*

This morning Teffie and I drove over to the mining village of Palmer. Drab, unpainted cabins, in sharp contrast to the beautiful white house of the superintendent. His wife is president of the garden club. But miners' wives do not have the time or the money to go in for landscaping on the scale enjoyed by the superintendent's family. Just before coming to the company store you turn sharp left and continue to the Miners Hall, a large bare room over a store. It is cold. We ascend the dark stairway and knock. The warden says for us to remain downstairs until the local business is over. A latecomer passes us, whispers the password in the ear of the warden and is admitted. We sit around the stove in the store below until a messenger asks us to come above. We are asked to speak. We talk about the Highlander Folk School, the CIO campaign in the South, the April 1st rally in Palmer. There are questions about the recent broadcast,† do we endorse John L. Lewis, there has been some criticism recently of the president of Local 5881 and a member of the Grievance Committee, for their visit to

* Archie Green met two of Uncle Jesse's children in the Fall of 1970 and describes their conversation in his book, *Only A Miner*, p. 214.

† A BBC broadcast about Highlander done in January, 1937.

Highlander. There is a great deal of interest in the recent broadcast.

Following the meeting, old Uncle Jessie James gives us some "dots" on the early days in the miners' struggle for a union. He is a small, explosive, little man, small head, flashing black eyes, talks quickly and with lots of gestures. Now 66 years of age. Started to work in the mines of Grundy County on January 20, 1890. Outside of strikes and lockouts has worked in the mines ever since.

I worked five days this week. Yesterday I loaded five cars. For 47 years I have worked in artificial light. My eyes are not so good close up. But I've a squirrel rifle at home. And Buddy if you put a cross on a stick at 80 yards, and I don't hit it, you'll know I'm ahittin' right around it. I've worked in the saw mills, cut timber, in the mines, and I've never scabbed yet, and [hitting Teffie a blow on the shoulder for emphasis] by God I'll never be a scab if I go to hell for it. Organized labor brought switches instead of tables [turning tables when the men had to use a stick for a level to turn the cars by hand], it brought them iron tracks, instead of wood. It brought freedom. It used to be that I was told, if you don't like your job, leave it.' But they can't do that now. No sir! I've seen it come, and I've seen it go, I've seen it come again, and I've seen it go again; and now I've seen it come, and if it goes, I'll help to bring it again."

I.H. Cannon

I.H. Cannon, Tracy City (born January 24, 1859); Sunday, March 28, 1937.

A man of slight build, thin hair, a drooping mustache, which at one time he could twist back of his ears, fine sense of humor, a sparkle in his eye that 78 years, all but 16 of them spent underground, has not dimmed. He has three nephews and a brother-in-law who were in the Ludlow massacre. In 1875 at the age of 16 he started to work in No. 1 mine at Tracy City.

The first time I ever heard of a labor organization in the Southland was from a man named Powderly [Terrence V. Powderly, president of the Knights of Labor]. It must have been somewhere between 1880 and 1890. Powderly was not here, but Old Tom Carrick was a Knights of Labor organizer. A man named Gotchaulk, called by us "Gutshot" was another organizer. He was a furriner and left for the north. The Knights of Labor did not have a majority of the miners. The Company

had its thugs join the Knights of Labor and when they found out the leaders, they were fired. I belonged to the Miners' Craft, affiliated with the Knights of Labor, about 1880. It reigned for about a year. We met in a building, on the railroad to White City east of Tracy. Conditions were bad. We worked eleven hours a day. Drivers got 80 cents a day; coal diggers 20 to 25 cents a car according to the thickness of the seam. Later this got down as low as 12½ cents. We had no organization and the Company had several hundred convicts to whip us down with. We never had no success with the organization so long as convicts were here.

The year before trouble broke out in Tracy there had been severe fighting in Coal Creek. On August 13 the miners ran the convicts off the mountain at Tracy. On the 15th the same thing was done at the iron mines at Inman, on the 17th at Oliver Springs coal mines, and on the 18th at Coal Creek. (Commons, History of Labor in the US, v. 2, p. 498)

When the trouble started we had no organization. The convicts got all the work. I was a guard in the mines for a while. Convicts would be punished for not gettin' their tasks. The warden and deputy warden would do the whippin'. I never did task anyone more than six cars a day. The whipping was done with a two ply strap as wide as your three fingers, tied to a staff. The convicts were face down with their pants off. They were whipped on the hips and legs from 5 to 12 lashes. Ordinary offenses were punished with a few lashes. If they tried to kill a man they were whipped more.

We miners were about half-starved and we got up something like the sitdown today. We met on Sundays in a holler back of that hill. A time was set when we would run the convicts off the mountain. It rained all that night. I spent the night out in the rain. About the third morning after that about 80 people started from East Fork Holler. When they got to the stockade the crowd numbered about 200. Tom Carrick was to be the leader but he backed down at the last minute. Berry Simpson volunteered and took the lead. This was between eight and nine o'clock after the convicts were out in the mines and coke ovens, and the guards were scattered.

The night before the men had been out notifying the miners, but I did not know about it. I was in No. 2 mine and as soon as we heard about it we left. Franz Nunnally, Plais Grantham and about eight others come out. We come by the tippie and spoke to the bank boss and to the blacksmith, Franz Crabtree, but they refused to join us. Our men had guns, sticks, and nothing. I came home for my gun. On the way back I passed E.O. Nathrust, superin-

tendent. "Good morning," I said. He smiled, "Good morning." By this time the stockade was burning!

We went to the coke ovens and asked the guards for their guns. Part of them were with us, being from our community. Some asked us to take their guns and we wouldn't do it, saying we had no use for 'em. The convicts were rounded up and marched to the Tracy depot. Captain Burton, warden, begged for their guns. He was a mighty fine man. He said they would take 'em to Nashville. All this time the railroad was trying hard to get the engines off the mountain. They was four or five and all but one had gone. The last engine was run by Bill Bolton, engineer, and Levi Sitz, my nephew by marriage. The engine was moving. I threw the switch, and George McCullough threw a Winchester on Bolton and said "Stop." The engineer asked Thomas, railway superintendent, what to do. He said, "I say, sir, the miners are running things today. Go to them and get your orders." We had a string of flat cars, about ten or twelve, and put about 60 convicts in each car. By that time all of the miners and most of the county had joined in. We must have had about 300. About ten o'clock the train set off. On a curve this side of Sewanee some convicts jumped and made a break. I was not there, but I heard two were shot and some got away.

At the iron mines in Inman, Sequatchie, the TCI Company had about 100 convicts. They sent a trainload of guards to Inman but the whole train was captured at the bridge on Big Sequatchie River, the guards were disarmed. My brother was detailed to the bridge and was there. The bridge was three or four miles from the mines. The convicts at Inman were sent also to Nashville, but the stockade was not burned, although the press said it was. Also the stockade at Tracy was not burned by the miners but by the convicts. They thought we was going to give 'em clothes and set 'em free. I saw the convicts pouring on coal oil from a gallon bucket. We made a lot of money that morning for the TCI because the state paid the company \$20,000 for the stockade that was destroyed.

The convicts come back and stayed two years. The stockade was rebuilt. Gun openings six inches square and three feet from the ground were built in, and guard houses set up on top of each corner.

Since this was written, Brother Cannon has passed on. His request to be buried with his UMW badge on was carried out. He was out hunting when he passed away, a hunter all his life, hunting for justice. He loved his fellow workers and served the union faithfully over 50 years. He kept his faith in the union, in his brothers, and his good humor until the end. [JAD, Summer, 1938]

Mr. Thompson

Visit with Mr. Thompson, Tracy City, Tennessee, July 5, 1938.

At the end of a long road the old man's cabin faced the road. Sitting in his doorway, he could see anyone coming down the road for half a mile. No screens, lots of flies. A deaf woman for a wife, tough on one who evidently likes to talk as much as he does.

When the convict trouble came we was only gettin' one day work a week. And the convicts was workin' full time. My brother was a guard. I used to visit him no tellin' how many a Sundays. I heard 'em beating the convicts. You could hear the strap from clear over as far as that cabin. I heard 'em holler. Yes, Lord. It was a sight to behold. I saw 'em kill 'em in the mines. The mine boss that is, for not getting their tasks. And maybe they was sick. It was shameful.

For two or three months before the first attack right on through the second one we was drilling out on Reid Hill, two or three hundred of us after dark. There was some funny things happened. Bless your life, yes. One night a horse got loose and liked to scared those men to death. I bet I saw six or ten men fall in a water hole. I laughed and laughed.

After we sent the convicts off the first time and burned the stockade, they built another one better than the first one. It had a block house on each cor-

ner and portholes about four inches square all around the walls. There was a mule barn up the hill and I saw portholes in that too and reported it.

We were to report on Bivens Hill, about 250 of us. They told us to black up so nobody would know us. I blacked myself up with gunpowder melted up. Just the finest kind of a nigger with my gun, and started up to the hill after dark. There was too much whiskey and I begged them to wait until morning. I knew there would be some killing that night. Good heaven and earth. There was about 20 shot and Bob Erwin was killed. Shot in the back from the left-hand corner of the stockade.

I shot an old man. I hate it but we was under orders. They say all is fair in love and war, you know. I had my gun poked in a porthole. Not far enough so they could grab it. Shooting at anything I could see. I was holding one of the rear portholes. I was using BB's in a double barrel shotgun. The old man said to me, "What's your name?" "Here's my name," I said and let him have it. He was only 20 feet away. It caught him right in the middle. If he had been 50 feet away it would have cut him, too. I followed that fellow. Kept asking after him for a long time after that shooting. I finally found out where he was. And by George, he got well. I was glad.

We had two cases of dynamite planted under the office building on the corner of the stockade. But a heavy storm come up, and what with all the shooting and the rain we could not get it to go off. We used up two boxes of matches.



Tennessee National Guard, 1893.

Photo from Only A Miner/Archie Green

Mrs. Sarah L. Cleek

Mrs. Sarah L. Cleek, Laager, Tennessee (July 28, 1938 interview).

Started to Tracy late this afternoon to return a bundle of newspapers borrowed from Mr. Wright. Stopped at Henry Thompson's cafe for a bottle of beer and met Charlie Adams, John Cleek and Milard Hall. The three were politicking about the county. Charlie is the union candidate for road commissioner and apparently has the job sewed up. We talked about the old days of the union and John mentioned that he had an old diary at home belonging to his grandfather that covered some of the convict warfare days. This sounded most promising and I drove him home to look at it. We passed through Tracy, Coalmont and Gruetli post office to the crossroad known as Laager. His old mother lives in a little shack just off the highway. I had often observed her sitting on her porch when we passed on union business. The house is a poor excuse for a home, just a two-room shack, but it is the best that \$2.00 a week old age pension money will afford. The yard was a blaze of color, petunias, zinnias and red sage. John introduced me and Mrs. Cleek went into the house and returned with a small gray canvas folder stamped "Monthly Time Book" and in large printed pencil letters "C.G. Tate, 1894." It contained a lot of loose pages from the time book of her father, who had been a guard in the mines during the convict trouble at Tracy City.

With a question or two from John to help, she talked freely about the old struggles of the miners to make a living.

Me and a widow woman used to carry pies to the stockade and sell them to the convicts. They were treated cruelly. With my own eyes I saw where they was buried. Their thighs or shank bones were not buried deep enough or something. They used to dig there for clay to daub the coke ovens with. The bones stuck out of the ground. I could see where the coffins was buried. Nigger Hill, the convict burial ground was called. They sent them out to work sick or not.

My Daddy said the warden and the doctor sent one man out to work one morning. He lay around the ovens during the day. A white man found him dead.

They used to cry out to my Daddy to let 'em out. The lice and chinch bugs were eatin' 'em up.

But I saw a line of men a quarter of a mile long with shotguns on their shoulders one night. They marched and told 'em what to do and they did it, and they never had no more convicts. But they shot

some of 'em. My uncle John Tate was shot through the shoulder. They're still holding the laboring class of people down.

"About how old were you, Mrs. Cleek, when you were married?" I asked. John spoke up, "You were nineteen, weren't you, mammie?" "No sich thing," she said quickly, "I was sixteen" and she went inside to get some papers to verify it.

I was born in 1869 and married in 1885. Gettin' married is the biggest piece of foolishness. I'm not sorry 'cause I got a good man, a fine man. But children come along and you can't raise 'em like you want to. I had ten children.

My husband had his ankle busted and we went to Huntsville to live. I put my children in the Merri-mac mill to make a living for the family. The two girls made \$5.00 a week each. I was treated like a red-headed step-child by those mill people. I want to tell you how dirty they done me. I didn't think they was that kind of men in the south. My children worked on and on. Business got bad and they let some go. I took in boarders to help along. We was in a company house. My one girl left in the mill was making five dollars and they took it all for rent and deductions.

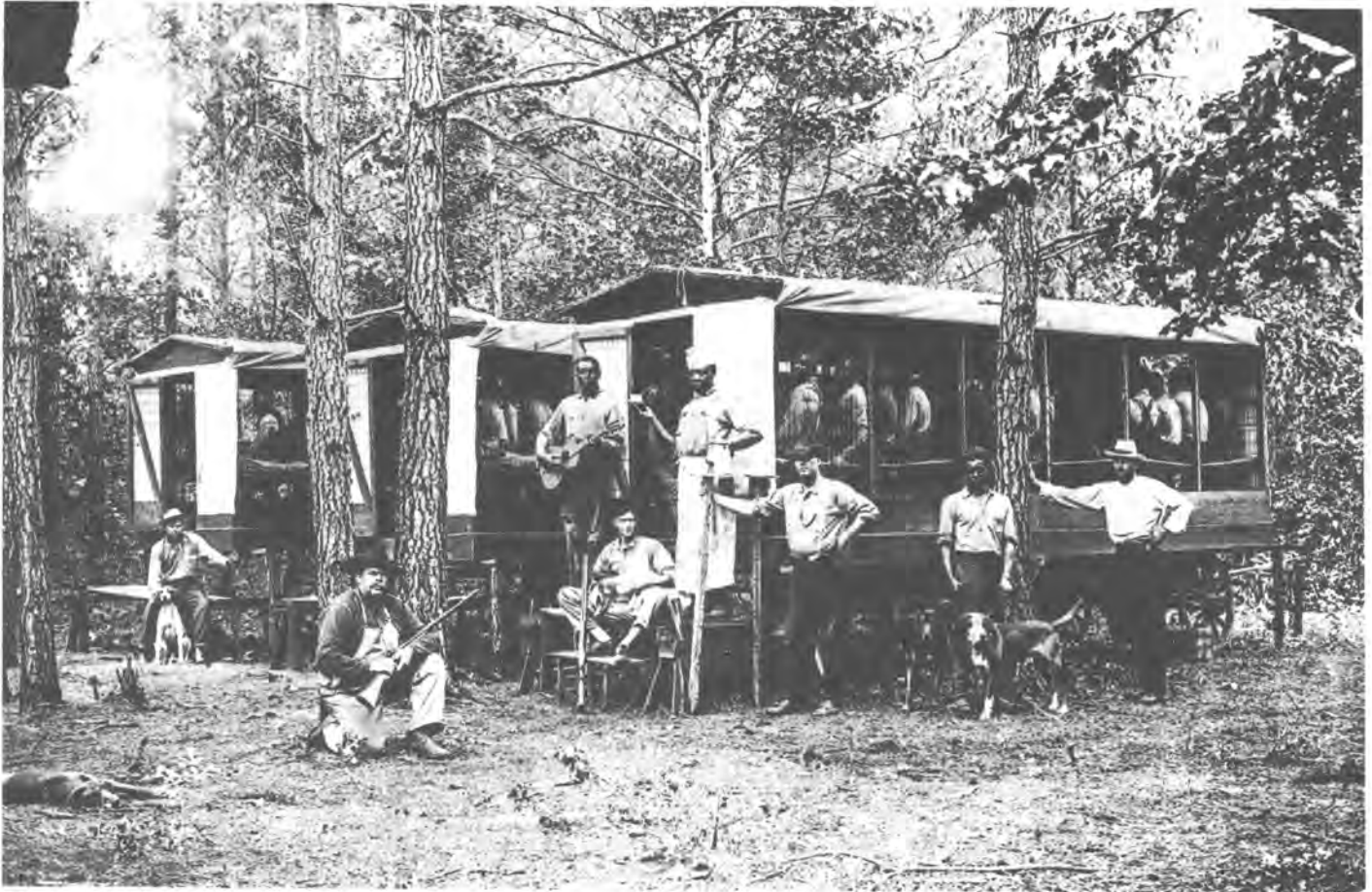
My children come home at night all pale and almost dropped. They sweated blood. They drained me down. Kept nudgin' me for rent. Threatened to put me out. The super Joe Bradley ended it. And Sheriff Ben Giles tells me to vacate or he'll set me on the street. I tell him, "You'll have it to do." I had no money and they finally did set me right out on the street, me and my crippled girl and a boarder with a five-month-old baby. That boarder was Charlie Adams (now running for road commissioner).

John spoke up. "The trouble was there was too much union talk around that house."

"That's right, my girl joined," she said. "There ain't a drap of that scab blood in my veins. I'm a socialist from the crown of my head to the end of my toe."



Graphic from *Only A Miner*/Archie Green
Tracy City Furnace



Mrs. S.O. Sanders

Mrs. S.O. Sanders, "Aunt Tut," 69 years old, Tracy City, Tennessee, April 1, 1937.

Union has had hard times because there is not enough "stickability." People here are "like hot weather mushrooms."

Her two brothers were union men. She learned "right smart" about the union from them as a young girl. They were blacklisted. "The Knights of Labor come in here. It crops out a little in '86 or '87." Her younger brother, J.C., was a member of the Knights of Labor. "That's how come he came to be blacklisted." They had very few members, only 10 or 12. Company thugs joined and as fast as they found out the members, they would be fired. All meetings were in secret.

After the burning of the stockade "I fed men right off my own table and never saw a face." Miners were "lying out in the woods" being hunted by the company. "I called 'em by a white flag run up on the fence. Our house was in the woods near

old Burrow's Cove. The men would come up out of the woods in the back of the house. I fed 8 to 10 men a day, some of 'em boys I grew up with."

Free niggers were run out in December, 1882. The people here were just about starving to death. Franklin and Marion County joined in. The crowd had to come through where father had a mill to get to Nigger Hill. They never left a hoot of 'em. About 30 houses for free niggers were burnt on Nigger Hill, later called Hobbs Hill and Kennedy's School House, just above the ice plant.

Then they brought in seven or eight hundred free niggers to run the coke ovens. White men could not stand the heat to pull coke. Paid 10 cents an oven. A good hustlin' nigger would pull four or five a day. Seventy-five cents a day the best any of 'em made. Convicts were here at the same time, seven or eight hundred convicts. White men could not get jobs. No Lawd no.

After I was 14 year up to time I was married I made stripes. That's convict clothes. One woman had a contract and we worked for her. Fifty cents a day and made from 12 to 16 shirts a day, worked from 6 to 6. The lady did the cutting and we did the sewing. Made caps, coats, shirts, pants.

Toughest time I ever heard after the convict trouble. Lawing and punishing citizens. Lots of 'em

had to sleep out in woods. People who lived in the woods would feed 'em while we were gettin' up a purse to get 'em away. Some went out toward Whitwell, some toward Jasper and Monteagle. High Sheriff Alec Sanders got shot and some miners got little scratches.

In April during the time of the first attack on the stockade there was an awful storm passed over and they lost one man in the attack (the rain made it impossible to shoot the dynamite). In August they captured the stockade.

Everything was done behind closed doors. What we got we had to sketch it. My old man and two brothers was in that convict trouble. My old man was victimized from 1893 to 1918. He did not even try to get a job until they got a union.

A.M. Shook, general manager of the mines, never gave a dollar on the school building that bears his name. He docked the miners' pay a dollar every month, and they was only getting about a dollar a day. If they did not have the dollar to their credit at the end of the month their children were not permitted to go to school.

After that we moved to Alabama in Walker County 30 miles west of Birmingham, Horse Creek was the old name for it. In 1908 there was a strike. Four hundred thugs lived 200 yards from my house. The president of the local, my old man and a young man was with me in the house. The company got an injunction and no men were allowed on the streets at all. Women could not go to the post office or the grocery store. Guards paraded the whole community. I fed and cared for these three miners. I shifted 'em around each night. First in one room, then another, to keep 'em from finding 'em. I guarded the house at night. Slipped around in the grass, and behind trees finding out what was going on and carrying messages. Another woman and me did most of the messenger work and we scarcely saw each other. We was about one mile from the station. One night four guards was out on the trestle waiting for the union officers to come from Birmingham. They thought they was in Birmingham but they was safe in my house all the time. They come outside of the house and stood by the gate talking, not thinkin' anyone was home. But I was lying scrootched up underneath the porch. They aimed to take the president out and do away with him, I heard it every bit. I slipped around to the president's house and got the family and brought 'em to my house and put 'em to bed.

I've looked down the muzzle of guards' guns, several of 'em. I wouldn't trust 'em as far as I could throw a mule. I've seen so many of their tricks. I've seen 'em haul women and children out of their homes and throw 'em in the woods. I expect there's beds now in those woods.

Dolph Vaughn

Interview with Dolph Vaughn, October 3, 1938.

Dolph has been a leading spirit in the Hodcarriers Union of WPA workers. Since the 1924 strike he has been blacklisted. He could renounce the union and get along, but he prefers poverty and self-respect. He has a two-story cabin that once was a substantial home. Now time has made it merely a rough wall against the weather. The floor is worn and several boards are loose or out entirely. Boards will do to repair windows when there is no money for glass. This week he sold his cow to pay the grocery bill. He wore a pair of pants that loving hands had mended until nothing remained of the original cloth. His youngest girl, Helen, 5, eyes like saucers, blonde curls, loves to sing union songs with her mother. She corrected mother when the latter sang a new union song composed by her daddy. There are three other girls, the oldest just graduating from the eighth grade and a boy of about 12. The mother is a lovely woman, and still sings the old mountain ballads with a high pleasing voice. She sang Little Mohea on the British broadcast at Highlander Folk School. There is never a word of complaint from any of them. Nothing but the finest family unity. Children well-behaved, considerate and lovely. Surely there is no defeating such spirit. Sooner or later these people will win for themselves a decent world where they can lift up their heads like men and women, free from the terrible fear of hunger and want for themselves and family, and know that their children will have the opportunity to develop, and to enjoy the beauties and good things denied to them. Old Uncle John took a liking to them, naturally, and they make his bed and cook his biscuits. He takes care of himself otherwise.

Dolph's father, Bob Vaughn, was one of the members and leaders of the first local in Tracy.

Bob Vaughn, Hughes Cannon (I.H. Cannon's brother) and Jim Frazier were the three men that threw their guns on the super and demanded the keys to the stockade at Tracy City. After it was all over they sent marshalls in to Tracy to try and find out who was responsible. They agreed that if they would let the convicts come back until their contract was up, they would drop all charges and would take the convicts away at the expiration of the contract.

Agreed. All of the men were put back. But in a short time Wiley asked all of the men to sign a paper saying they had nothing to do with the convict trouble. They all signed it but Daddy. He said,



Ben Shahn/FSA

"Now Mr. Wiley, I can't sign it, you know that I was one of the men that drew a gun on you and demanded the keys." "Yes, I know," said Wiley, "but if you don't sign it I can't give you a job." Papa refused and he could not get work. He sent his wife and son to relatives and went about in other coal fields but could not keep work. Sooner or later they fired him, telling him he had been a leader in the convict trouble and they could not use him. So he came back to Tracy and decided to use drastic measures. "I'd just as soon be in the penitentiary as starve to death," he said. He went down to a place on the road where there was a bank on one side and a branch on the other. He waited there until Wiley's carriage was about ten feet away. Then he stepped out and grabbed the bridle. Wiley tried to back off. He was shaking like a leaf. "I'm not going to hurt you, Mr. Wiley, but I just want my job back. You know that every doctor, lawyer and merchant in Tracy had something to do with that convict trouble. I did no more than the others who signed." "Yes, I know," said Wiley, "you were the only person that was fair about the paper. You come up to the office tomorrow and I'll see what I can do about your job."

They put him to work driving a team of mules outside. It was a bitter winter and Papa didn't have any clothes to amount to anything. And the job did not pay much. They would not give him anything better. And he could not afford to quit.

Papa's old job was running an endless rope for

hauling coal. He was the only man on the job who knew how to splice the rope when it broke. Several times that winter the rope broke and they came to him to fix it. Finally he told Wiley that the next time it broke they could buy a new one. He would not splice the rope again unless they put him back on his old job. Nathrust came running out and threatened to fire him if he did not do it. He stood his ground and was put back. Sometime later Bob Vaughn was a leader in organizing the first UMW local in Grundy County.

The following is a letter from Bob Vaughn to his son Dolph:

Shiloh, Ill., Dec. 9, 1936

My greatest ambition has been and is now for the working people. I have undergone lots of hardships for the upbuilding of organized labor. I trust you will establish the same record. . . . In organization there is strength and without that the working people can not expect any benefits for their labor. . . . We have never been able to reap the benefits of the wealth that we have produced. We as the working people have the right to enjoy the same life as the employers do because we are the one that produces the wealth of our country. . . . The greatest thing now days as I see it is to educate the young generation as to how the older people gained these benefits because of the hardships we had to fight in the early days for every inch of ground.



Johnny Burris/Photo by Charles Winfrey

Johnny Burris

The following is a conversation with Johnny Burris from August, 1973:

Tell us about your family and about growing up in the Coal Creek area.

My mother's family came to the Coal Creek area around 1920, from Fentress County, Tennessee. My paternal grandfather was John "Paddlefoot" Burris. He was a miner-farmer-hunter as most of the mountain people were. He settled with his family about three miles back in the mountains northwest of Briceville, a place called Seicer's Flats. That's where my mother and father met, married, and settled down. My father was Albert "Sog" Burris. He worked in the mines until he became too sick to work—he had Hodgkin's disease. This was the cause of his death in 1948. I was born a few months later in the same log cabin where my older brothers and sisters were born. After about five years the family moved down to Briceville to be closer to schools, stores, etc.

Mining is still in the family blood, although now it's a different type of mining. Two of my older brothers and a brother-in-law are heavy equipment operators in strip-mines. They are paid as good or better than they would be at any other type work available in the area.

While I was growing up what little I knew about the Coal Creek insurrections I heard from my mother. She remembers her relatives and old folks telling her about how dangerous it was when the militia was in town. They were always drunk, and arrests were bad. The soldiers would pick people up on the streets, anyone that looked like a miner. So people ran from the militia. But I didn't know much about the whole situation, exactly why the militia was occupying the town. A lot of labor troubles happened in the area from 1890 through the 1930's and 40's, and people around here have a tendency to run them all together when talking about them. They are mostly pro-union, so I grew up with that feeling, but didn't know about individual labor troubles.

What about in school?

One thing that had impressed me was that the history books ignored Coal Creek. Just skimmed over it. I can't understand it. Maybe there'd be a paragraph, if anything at all. The teachers passed it by. Kids only knew what their parents told them. So miner's children knew more, but they didn't have an understanding of the whole thing. I didn't really know much about the wars, and why they happened, until a year ago.

How did you learn more?

A friend, Boomer Winfrey, and I got to talking about it. His grandmother used to tell him about his grandfather fighting the militia and how he would come in to rest up and have some dinner, fill up an old coffee can with more shells, and go on back out to fight some more. Boomer got me interested. He took me up to where Fort Anderson stood and showed me the trench lines. So then I got to reading, trying to fit things together. But I couldn't find much to read, and that got me even more interested. I went to the Lake City library and asked for material on the Coal Creek war. The librarian said, "The what?" They didn't have anything about it! She called the public library in Knoxville and they sent over an article they had. There are references to the war in several books and articles, but no one has ever written the complete story. So mostly I've been talking with old timers and trying to find the sites of the stockades and all.

After the fourth insurrection, a battalion was sent in from Clinton over the mountain to Coal Creek, to surprise the miners who were gathered at the depot. They came by a place called Fatal Rock. Now as a boy I'd been camping at a place called Star Rock. There's an old road that goes by there.

and it's a picnic spot now. I got to thinking, and figured it was the same road the militia came over. The miners met the militia, killed two and wounded three. The militia left in such a hurry that they had to send back some prominent citizens from Knoxville the next day for the bodies. And I didn't know that when we'd go camping there.

I talked to an old miner named Alex Carroll who used to live up in Tennessee Holler, where the Tennessee Coal and Mining Company had its mine. He used to live three or four miles up in the head of the holler. He didn't know about the rebellion, but he told me where the stockade was, and the old mine. The first part of that mine was worked by convicts. He said he's never seen prettier work. The company didn't allow the convicts to use explosives of any kind, so the walls were straight, not curvy like when dynamite is used. It was all hand work.

Why do you think the miners' rebellion at Coal Creek has been "forgotten"?

Well, this area and the Harlan-Hazard, Kentucky, area have always been so violent. Then there were all the different complicated relationships people got into during that time. There was a lot of bad blood. Probably the insurrections were talked down locally for those reasons. And the state was such a villain! That's got to be the reason it's not in the state text books.

Still today no one wants to recognize what happened there. The East Tennessee Development District is authorized to catalogue historical sites in a five county area, and they're not doing anything about Coal Creek that I know of. Places are being destroyed—there's a dump now where Fort Anderson was. All the openings of some of the most famous mines in this country are grown over. I've looked and can't find the opening to the Fraterville mine where 170 miners were killed in the early part of the century. Eighty or ninety men were killed in the Cross Mountain mines and I don't know where that was. Surely those places are historical enough to be marked. They are the history of the miners who died in them.

What would you like to see done to preserve that history? How can it be given back to the people?

I'd like to see a good, readable, accurate account, with local color. Something people from this area would enjoy. I'd like to see places marked. I'd like for children growing up now to have a chance to study the local history in school. You see all kinds of Appalachian museums, living mountain villages,

etc., but I never have seen a museum about mining. I'd like to have one around here. Then a movie could be made about the rebellion. Seems like something the AppalShop* would be interested in. Also, I'd really like to get people from East Tennessee interested in this kind of thing. It seems like all the people I meet who are working for change in the mountains are from somewhere else.



Coal Creek/Photo by Charles Winfrey

What is Coal Creek like today?

First of all, the name of the town was changed to Lake City in 1933 when Norris Dam was built, forming Norris Lake. The central business district shifted from Creek Street to Highway 25W. 25W was the main route north-south for a long time; now the interstate by-passes Lake City. The main industry is strip-mining. Some deep-mined coal comes through from Clairfield, but just about all the coal you see is strip-mined. The train still runs to Briceville about twice a month, to get strip-mined coal. Most people have to work in Oak Ridge or Knoxville; some in little local industries. Briceville's population has shrunk from 4,000 to about 1,100 now. The majority of the people have an income under \$3,000. At one time there were three or four doctors, several dentists, stores, and all. Now in Briceville there are only one or two little grocery stores, and no doctor. There were no public services until the People's Health Coalition was started. I'm involved in a citizens group trying to get better water service.

Young people don't stick around unless they have a college degree or can learn a skill they can use in this area. Most graduate from high school and get a job, go to Cleveland, Detroit. That's what most of my friends did. I worked in a steel mill in Cleveland two years ago.

* The AppalShop is a group of young mountain film makers in Whitesburg, Kentucky.

Footnotes

1. Folmsbee, pp. 404-405.
2. Folmsbee, p. 406.
3. Hutson, *ETHS*, No. 7, p. 105.
4. Green, p. 164.
5. Quoted by Green, p. 164.
6. Hutson, *ibid.* For an example of the conditions under which they extracted those profits, here is an excerpt from the Commissioner of Labor's "Special Report" on Tennessee prisons in 1891. It describes a mine that worked both convicts and free miners at the time:

A sickening stench is met with showing the air to be so contaminated that it is a wonder human beings can exist therein; and in passing through some of the entries, a person has to pass through so much mud, slush and stagnant water that any man with a proper regard for his cattle would hesitate to keep them in such filthy quarters. . . . It is shameful to think that any class of men, whether free or convicts, are compelled or allowed to work therein.

quoted in *Fire in the Hole*, p. 98.

7. The Haws-Cooper Act enabled states to pass laws restricting or prohibiting the sale of prison-made goods. Tennessee did so in 1937, fearing that otherwise it would become a dumping ground for other states.

8. One small example turns up on the front page of the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* of August 16, 1933, where it is reported that the anniversary of the fourth miners' rebellion is being marked that day by a strike of convict miners at Brushy Mountain Prison at Petros, Tenn.

9. According to Folmsbee, *ibid.*, p. 404, "Negroes who before the war seldom composed more than 5% of the prison population, made up over one half of the inmates by 1866.

10. Green, p. 167.

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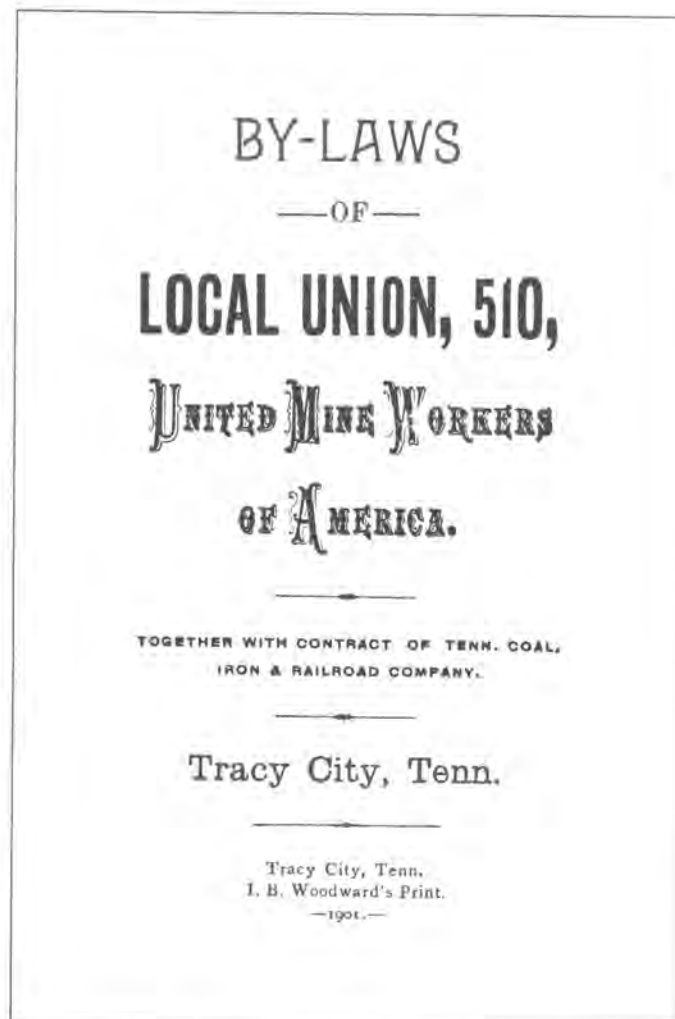


Photo from *Only A Miner*/Archie Green

A PROFILE:

ZORA NEALE HURSTON

comparative present-day anonymity, then, is surprising, but is perhaps explained by the complexity of her personality and the controversy that attended her career.

Writing in the May, 1928, edition of *The World Tomorrow*, Zora Neale Hurston made the following observation about herself: "Sometimes I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can anyone deny themselves the pleasure of my company!" This is the kind of remark that one came to expect from Miss Hurston, who is remembered as one of the most publicly flamboyant personalities of the Harlem literary movement. She was very bold and outspoken, an attractive woman who had learned how to survive with native wit. She approached life as a series of encounters and challenges; most of these she overcame without succumbing to the maudlin bitterness of many of her contemporaries.

In her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, she explains her life as a series of migrations, of wanderings, the first of these beginning with the death of her mother. She then went to live with relatives who very often could not relate to her fantasy-oriented approach to life. Consequently, she was shuttled back and forth among relatives, who found her a somewhat difficult child to rear.

She was totally dependent upon them for survival, but she refused to humble herself to them:

A child in my place ought to realize I was lucky to have a roof over my head and anything to eat at all. And from their point of view, they were right. From mine, my stomach pains were the least of my sufferings. I wanted what they could not conceive of. I could not reveal myself for lack of expression, and then for lack of hope of understanding, even if I could have found the words. I was not comfortable to have around. Strange things must have looked out of my eyes like Lazarus after his resurrection.

She was fourteen years old when she began taking jobs as a maid. Several of these jobs ended in disappointment. She was in a difficult position. She was a Southern black child who was forced by economic

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Photo by Carl Van Vechten/Amistad 2

by Larry Neal

Among the literary figures that emerged from the all too brief, black-cultural upsurge of the Harlem renaissance, Zora Neale Hurston was one of the most significant and, ironically, one of the least well known. She was one of the first black writers to attempt a serious study of black folklore and folk history and, as such, was a precursor of the interest in folkways that shapes much of contemporary black fiction. Her

necessity to make a living. But if given a choice between performing her duties as a maid or reading a book from the library of an employer, she almost always chose reading the book. She described this period of her life as "restless" and "unstable."

But she was finally fortunate enough to acquire a position as maid to an actress. This position represents a significant break with the parochialism of her rural background and opens the way for her entry into creative activity as a way of life. Here, at last, she could exploit her fantasies. Here she could be the entertainer and the entertained. And most importantly, for this small-town Southerner, she could travel and seriously begin to bring some shape to her vagabond existence.

Black people have almost boundless faith in the efficacy of education. Traditionally, it has represented the chief means of overcoming the adversities of slavery; it is the group's main index of concrete achievement. Zora shared that attitude toward education. It represents a central motif through her autobiography. Education, for her, became something of a Grail-like quest. As soon as she was situated in a school she would have to leave in order to seek employment, usually as a maid or a baby-sitter. But her life experiences and her reading were an education in themselves. By the time she entered Morgan College in Baltimore, she was sophisticated, in a homey sort of way, and tough. She had personality and an open manner that had the effect of disarming all of those who came in touch with her. But none of this would have meant anything if she had been without talent.

After a short stay at Morgan College, she was given a recommendation to Howard University in Washington, D.C. There she soon came under the influence of Lorenzo Dow Turner, who was head of the English department. He was a significant influence. Like Leo Hansberry (also of Howard), Turner is one of those unsung heroes of Afro-American scholarship. He is the author of an important monograph on African linguistic features in Afro-American speech. It was while Zora was at Howard that she also published her first short story, "Drenched in Light," in *Opportunity*, a magazine edited by Charles S. Johnson. Her second short story, also published in *Opportunity*, won her an award, a secretarial job with Fannie Hurst and a scholarship to Barnard. There, she came under the influence of Franz Boas, the renowned anthropologist. It was Boas who suggested that she seriously undertake the study of Afro-American folklore—a pursuit that was to mold her contribution to black American literature.

Zora Neale Hurston was born in 1901 in the all-black town of Eatonville, Florida. This town and other places in Florida figure quite prominently in much of her work, especially her fiction. Her South was, however, vastly different from the South depicted in the works of Richard Wright. Wright's fictional landscape was essentially concerned with the psychological

ramifications of racial oppression, and black people's response to it. Zora, on the other hand, held a different point of view. For her, in spite of its hardships, the South was Home. It was not a place from which one escaped, but rather, the place to which one returned for spiritual revitalization. It was a place where one remembered with fondness and nostalgia the taste of soulfully prepared cuisine. Here one recalled the poetic eloquence of the local preacher (Zora's father had been one himself). For her also, the South represented a place with a distinct cultural tradition. Here one heard the best church choirs in the world, and experienced the great expanse of green fields.

When it came to the South, Zora could often be an inveterate romantic. In her work, there are no bellboys shaking in fear before the brutal tobacco-chewing crackers. Neither are there any black men being pursued by lynch mobs. She was not concerned with these aspects of the Southern reality. We could accuse her of escapism, but the historical oppression that we now associate with Southern black life was not a central aspect of her experience.

Perhaps it was because she was a black woman, and therefore not considered a threat to anyone's system of social values. One thing is clear, though: unlike Richard Wright, she was no political radical. She was, instead, a belligerent individualist who was decidedly unpredictable and perhaps a little inconsistent. At one moment she could sound highly nationalistic. Then at other times she might mouth statements that, in terms of the ongoing struggle for black liberation, were ill-conceived and even reactionary.

Needless to say, she was a very complex individual. Her acquaintances ranged from the blues people of the jooks and the turpentine camps in the South to the upper-class literati of New York City. She had been Fannie Hurst's secretary, and Carl Van Vechten had been a friend throughout most of her professional career. These friendships were, for the most part, genuine, even if they do smack somewhat of opportunism on Zora's part. For it was the Vechten and Nancy Cunard types who exerted a tremendous amount of power over the Harlem literary movement. For this element, and others, Zora appears to have become something of a cultural showcase. They clearly enjoyed her company, and often "repaid" her by bestowing all kinds of favors upon her.

In this connection, one of the most interesting descriptions of her is found in Langston Hughes's autobiography, *The Big Sea*: *In her youth, she was always getting scholarships and things from wealthy white people, some of whom simply paid her just to sit around and represent the Negro race for them, she did it in such a racy fashion. She was full of side-splitting anecdotes, humorous tales, and tragicomic stories, remembered out of her life in the South as the daughter of a traveling minister of God. She could make you laugh one moment and cry the next. To many of her white friends, no doubt, she was a perfect "darkie," in*

the nice meaning they gave the term—that is a naive, childlike, sweet, humorous, and highly colored Negro.

According to Mr. Hughes, she was also an intelligent person, who was clever enough never to allow her college education to alienate her from the folk culture that became the central impulse in her life's work.

It was in the field of folklore that she did probably her most commendable work. With the possible exception of Sterling Brown, she was the only important writer of the Harlem literary movement to undertake a systematic study of African-American folklore. The movement had as one of its stated goals the reevaluation of African-American history and folk culture. But there appears to have been very little work done in these areas by the Harlem literati. There was, however, a general awareness of the literary possibilities of black folk culture—witness the blues poetry of Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown. But generally speaking, very few writers of the period committed themselves to intensive research and collection of folk materials. This is especially ironic given the particular race consciousness of the twenties and thirties.

Therefore, vital areas of folklorist scholarship went unexplored. What this means, in retrospect, is that the development of a truly original literature would be delayed until black writers came to grips with the cultural ramifications of the African presence in America. Because black literature would have to be, in essence, the most profound, the most intensely human expression of the *ethos* of a people. This literature would realize its limitless possibilities only after creative writers had come to some kind of understanding of the specific, as well as general ingredients that must enter into the shaping of an African culture in America. In order to do this, it would be necessary to establish some new categories of perception; new ways of seeing a culture that had been caricatured by the white minstrel tradition, made hokey and sentimental by the nineteenth-century local colorists, debased by the dialect poets and finally made a "primitive" aphrodisiac by the new sexualism of the twenties.

And to further complicate matters, the writer would have to grapple with the full range of literary technique and innovation that the English language had produced. Content and integrity of feeling aside, much of the writing of the so-called Harlem renaissance is a pale reflection of outmoded conventional literary technique. Therefore, the Harlem literary movement failed in two essential categories, that of *form* and that of *sensibility*. *Form* relates to the manner in which literary technique is executed, while *sensibility*, as used here, pertains to the cluster of psychological, emotional and psychic states that have their basis in mythology and folklore. In other words, we are talking about the projection of an *ethos* through literature; that is, the projection of the *characteristic* sensibility of a nation, or of a specific sociocultural group.

In terms of the consummate uses of the folk sensi-

bility, the Harlem movement leaves much to be desired. There was really no encounter and subsequent grappling with the visceral elements of the black experience but rather a tendency on the part of many of the movement's writers to pander to the voguish concerns of the white social circles in which they found themselves.

But Zora's interest in folklore gave her a slight edge on some of her contemporaries. Her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), is dominated by a gospel-like feeling, but it is somewhat marred by its awkward use of folk dialect. In spite of this problem, she manages to capture, to a great extent, the inner reality of a religious man who is incapable of resisting the enticements of the world of flesh. She had always maintained that the black preacher was essentially a poet, in fact, the only true poet to which the race could lay claim. In a letter to James Weldon Johnson, April 16, 1934, speaking of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, she wrote:

I have tried to present a Negro preacher who is neither funny nor an imitation Puritan ram-rod in pants. Just the human being and poet that he must be to succeed in a Negro pulpit. I do not speak of those among us who have been tampered with and consequently have gone Presbyterian or Episcopal. I mean the common run of us who love magnificence, beauty, poetry and color so much that there can never be too much of it."

The poetic aspect of the black sermon was one of her central concerns at the time of the publication of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*; by then she had begun systematically to study and collect Afro-American folklore and was especially interested in isolating those features that indicated a unique sensibility was at work in African-American folk expression. In this connection, she wrote an essay for Nancy Cunard's anthology, *Negro* (1934), entitled, "Characteristics of Negro Expression." A rather lightweight piece really. But it is important, because it does illustrate one central characteristic of African-derived cultures. And that is the principle of "acting things out." She writes: "Every phase of Negro life is highly dramatized. No matter how joyful or how sad the case there is sufficient poise for drama. Everything is acted out." She saw the black preacher as the principal dramatic figure in the socioreligious lives of black people.

Commenting to James Weldon Johnson on a *New York Times* review of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, she complains that the reviewer failed to understand how the preacher in her novel "could have so much poetry in him." In this letter of May 8, 1934, she writes: "When you and I (who seem to be the only ones even among Negroes who recognize the barbaric poetry in their sermons) know there are hundreds of preachers who are equalling that sermon [the one in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*] weekly. He does not know that merely being a good man is not enough to hold a Negro preacher in an important charge. He must also be an artist. He must be both a poet and an actor of a very high order, and



Photo by Bill Fibben

then he must have the voice and figure.”

Her second novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), is clearly her best novel. This work indicates that she had a rather remarkable understanding of a blues aesthetic and its accompanying sensibility. Paraphrasing Ellison’s definition of the blues: this novel confronts the most intimate and brutal aspects of personal catastrophe and renders them lyrically. She is inside of a distinct emotional environment here. This is a passionate, somewhat ironic love story—perhaps a little too rushed in parts—but written with a great deal of sensitivity to character and locale.

It was written in Haiti “under internal pressure in seven weeks,” and represents a concentrated release of emotional energy that is rather carefully shaped and modulated by Zora’s compassionate understanding of Southern black life styles. Here she gathers together several themes that were used in previous work: the nature of love, the search for personal freedom, the clash between spiritual and material aspiration and, finally, the quest for a more de-parochial range of

life experience.

The novel has a rather simple framework: Janie, a black woman of great beauty, returns to her home town, and is immediately the subject of vaguely malicious gossip concerning her past and her lover Tea Cake. Janie’s only real friend in the town is an elderly woman called Pheoby. It is to her that Janie tells her deeply poignant story. Under pressure from a strict grandmother, Janie is forced into an unwanted marriage. Her husband is not necessarily a rich man; however, he is resourceful and hard-working. In his particular way, he represents the more oppressive aspects of the rural life. For him, she is essentially a workhorse.

After taking as much as she can, she cuts out with Joe Starks, whose style and demeanor seem to promise freedom from her oppressive situation. She describes him:

It was a citified, stylish dressed man with his hat set at an angle that didn’t belong in these parts. His coat was over his arm, but he didn’t need it to repre-

sent his clothes. The shirt with the silk sleeveholders was dazzling enough for the world. He whistled, mopped his face and walked like he knew where he was going. He was a seal-brown color but he acted like Mr. Washburn or somebody like that to Janie. Where would such a man be coming from and where was he going? He didn't look her way nor no other way except straight ahead, so Janie ran to the pump and jerked the handle hard while she pumped. It made a loud noise and also made her heavy hair fall down. So he stopped and looked hard, and then he asked her for a cool drink of water. (See Zora's short story, "The Gilded Six-bits," for another example of the clash between the urban and rural sensibility in Langston Hughes's *The Best Short Stories by Negro Writers*, Little, Brown, 1967.)

She later leaves her husband, and takes up with Joe Starks, who is clearly a man with big ideas. He has a little money, people love him and he is an excellent organizer. But Janie does not really occupy a central emotional concern in Joe's scheme of things. She is merely a reluctant surrogate in his quest for small-town power and prestige. Joe is envied by everyone for having so much organizational and economic ability. But his lovely wife, who represents an essential aspect of his personal achievements, is basically frustrated and unloved. After several years, Joe Starks dies. The marriage itself had died years ago. She had conformed to Joe's idea of what a woman of influence and prestige should be. But again, she had not been allowed to flower, to experience life on her own terms.

The last third of the novel concerns Janie's life with Tea Cake, a gambler and itinerant worker. Tea Cake represents the dynamic, unstructured energy of the folk. He introduces her to a wider range of emotional experience. He is rootless, tied to no property save that which he carries with him, and he is not adverse to gambling that away if the opportunity presents itself. But he is warm and sensitive. He teaches her whatever she wants to know about his life and treats her with a great deal of respect. In spite of the implicit hardship of their lives, she has never lived life so fully and with such an expanse of feeling. And here is where Zora introduces her characteristic irony.

While working in the Everglades, they are nearly destroyed by a mean tropical storm. They decide to move to high ground and are forced to make their way across a swollen river. (The storm is described in vivid details that bear interesting allusions to Bessie Smith's "Backwater Blues.") A mad dog threatens Janie, and while protecting her Tea Cake is bitten. He contracts rabies, and later is himself so maddened by the infection that he begins to develop dangerous symptoms of paranoia. He threatens to kill Janie, and in self-defense she is forced to kill him. This is the story that she tells Pheoby.

But there is no hint of self-pity here. Just an awesome sense of the utter inability of man to fully order his life comparatively free of outside forces. Zora

Neale Hurston was not an especially philosophical person, but she was greatly influenced by the religious outlook of the black church. So that this novel seems often informed by a subtle, though persistent kind of determinism. She has a way of allowing catastrophe to descend upon her characters at precisely the moment when they have achieved some insight into the fundamental nature of their lives. She introduces disruptive forces into essentially harmonious situations. And the moral fiber of her characters is always being tested. Usually, in a contest between the world of flesh and the world of spirit, she has her characters succumb to the flesh.

However, she has no fixed opinions about relationships between men and women. She can bear down bitterly on both of them. She will allow a good woman to succumb to temptation just as quickly as a man. And when such things occur with couples who genuinely love each other, she has a way of illustrating the spiritual redemption that is evident even in moral failure. She is clearly a student of male/female relationships. And when she is not being too "folksy," she has the ability to penetrate to the core of emotional context in which her characters find themselves. In this regard, she was in advance of many of her "renaissance" contemporaries. There are few novels of the period written with such compassion and love for black people.

In *Moses Man of the Mountain* (1939), she retells the story of the biblical Moses. Naturally, she attempts to overlay it with a black idiom. She makes Moses a hoodoo man with African-derived magical powers. She is apparently attempting to illustrate a possible parallel between the ancient Hebrew search for a nation and the struggles of black people in America, and she is moderately successful.

The Bible has always been of special importance to her. It was the first book she read seriously. Her father was a preacher. Further, the Bible is the most prominent piece of literature in the homes of most black families, especially in the South. The title of her first novel comes from the Bible. In a letter to Carl Van Vechten, she explains: "You see the Prophet of God sat up under a gourd vine that had grown up in one night. But a cut-worm came along and cut it down. . . . One act of malice and it is withered and gone. The book of a thousand million leaves was closed." And finally, in further correspondence to Carl Van Vechten, she expresses a desire to write another novel on the Jews, and not necessarily their liberators. She notes, for example, that these "oppressors" forbade the writing of other books. So that in three thousand years, she points out, only twenty-two books of the Bible were written. The novel was never published, but its working title was *Under Fire and Cloud*.

Her last novel is a sometimes turgid romance entitled *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948). Its central characters are white Southerners. It is competently written, but commands no compelling significance.



Photo by David Doggett

Since she was often in need of money, she may have intended it as a better-than-average potboiler.

She made her most significant contribution to black literature in the field of folkloristic research. *Mules and Men* (1935) is a collection of African American folktales; it also gives a rather vivid account of the practice of hoodoo in Louisiana. *Tell My Horse* (1938), a book about Jamaican and Haitian culture, is perhaps one of the most important accounts of voodoo rites and practices in print anywhere. It successfully competes with most of the books on the subject, and there are quite a few of them. An interesting aspect of both these books, especially *Tell My Horse*, is the complete manner in which she insinuates herself into whatever kind of sociocultural event she is trying to understand.

Both in Louisiana and Haiti, she allowed herself to be initiated into the various rites to which she had devoted her studies. Therefore, in order to learn the internal workings of these rites, she repeatedly submitted herself to the rigorous demands of the "two-headed" hoodoo doctors of New Orleans and the voodoo houngans of Haiti. She was an excellent observer of the folkloristic and ritualistic process. Further, she approached her subject with the engaged sensibility of the artist; she left the "comprehensive" scientific approach to culture to men like her former teacher, Franz Boas, and to Melville Herskovits. Her approach to folklore research was essentially free-wheeling and activist in style. She would have been very uncomfortable as a scholar committed to "pure research."

She had learned from experience that the folk collector must in some manner identify with her subject. For her the collector should be a willing participant in the myth-ritual process. Her actions in some of this research seem to indicate that she had nothing against assuming a persona whenever it was necessary. Given the dramatic nature of her personality, it was highly possible; we can be almost certain that she carried off her transformation into ritual participant exceptionally well. Such was not the case when she first began her research while still a student at Barnard College:

My first six months [collecting folk materials] were disappointing. I found out later that it was not because I had no talent for research, but because I did not have the right approach. The glamour of Barnard College was still upon me. I dwelt in Marble Halls. I knew where the material was, all right. But I went about asking, in carefully accented Barnardese, "Pardon me, but do you know any folk-tales or folk-songs?" The men and women who had whole treasuries of material just seeping through their pores looked at me and shook their heads. No, they had never heard of anything like that around there. Maybe it was over in the next county. Why didn't I try over there? I did, and got the self-same answer.

This disappointed her for a while. But soon she

discovered exactly how her own background in the South had so thoroughly imbued her with the natural attributes of a good folklore researcher. She remembered that her own Eatonville was rich in oral materials. In a sense, you could say that she realized that she, Zora Neale Hurston, was finally folk herself, in spite of the Guggenheim Award and the degree from Barnard College. Here she is, in *Mules and Men*, blending into her materials:

"Ah come to collect some old stories and tales and Ah know y'all know a plenty of 'em and thats why Ah headed straight for home."

"What you mean, Zora, them old lies we tell when we're jus' sittin' around here on the store porch doin' nothin'?" asked B. Mosely.

"Yeah those same ones about Ole Massa and colored folks in heaven, and—oh y'all know the kind I mean."



Zora had a way of implicitly assuming that the world-view of her subjects was relatively accurate and justified on its own terms. For example she very rarely, if ever, questions the integrity or abilities of a hougan, or hoodoo doctor. Likewise, she never denigrates her subjects or their rituals, which to the Western mind may smack of savagery. What she sees and experiences, therefore, is what you get. This is particularly true of those cases in which we find her both the narrator and the participant in a ritual experience. Here is another selection from *Mules and Men*:

I entered the old pink stucco house in Vieux Carre at nine o'clock in the morning with the parcel of needed things. Turner placed the new underwear on the big Altar; prepared the couch with the snake-skin cover upon which I was to lie for three days. With the help of other members of the college of hoodoo doctors called together to initiate me, the snake skins I had brought were made into garments for me to wear. One was coiled into a high headpiece—the crown. One had loops attached to slip on my arms so that it could be worn as a shawl, and the other was made into a girdle for my loins. All places have significance. These garments were placed on the small altar in the corner. The throne of the snake. The Great One was called upon to enter the garments and dwell there.

I was made ready and at three o'clock in the afternoon, naked as I came into the world, I was stretched, face downwards, my navel to the snake-skin cover, and began my three-day search for the spirit that he might accept or reject me according to his will. Three days my body must lie silent and fasting while my spirit went wherever spirits go that seek answers never given to men as men.

I could have no food, but a pitcher of water was placed on a small table at the head of the couch, that my spirit might not waste time in search of water which should be spent in search of the Power-Giver. The spirit must have water, and if none had been provided it would wander in search of it. And evil spirits might attack it as it wandered about dangerous places. If it should be seriously injured, it might never return to me.

For sixty-nine hours I lay there. I had five psychic experiences and awoke at last with no feeling of hunger, only one of exaltation.

Her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, helps to give us a fundamental sense of the emotional tenor of her life. It was a life full of restless energy and movement. It was a somewhat controversial life in many respects, for she was not above commercial popularization of black culture. And many of her contemporaries considered her a pseudofolksy exhibitionist or, worse, a Sol Hurok of black culture. One elderly Harlem writer recalls that she once gave a party to which she invited white and Negro friends. Zora is supposed to have worn a red bandana (Aunt Jemima style), while serving her guests something like collard greens and pig's feet. The incident may be

apocryphal. Many incidents surrounding the lives of famous people are. But the very existence of such tales acts to illustrate something central to a person's character. Zora was a kind of Pearl Bailey of the literary world. If you can dig the connection.

As we have already stated, she was no political radical. To be more precise, she was something of a conservative in her political outlook. For example, she unquestioningly believed in the efficacy of American democracy, even when that democracy came under very serious critical attack from the white and black Left of the twenties and thirties. Her conservatism was composed of a naive blend of honesty and boldness. She was not above voicing opinions that ran counter to the prevailing thrust of the civil rights movement. For example, she was against the Supreme Court decision of 1954. She felt that the decision implied a lack of competency on the part of black teachers, and hence she saw it as essentially an insult to black people.

After a fairly successful career as a writer, she suddenly drops out of the creative scene after 1948. Why she did this is somewhat of a minor enigma. She was at the apex of her career. Her novel, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, had received rather favorable reviews, and her letters to Carl Van Vechten indicate that she had a whole host of creative ideas kicking around inside of her.

Zora had a way of assuming

that the world-view of her

subjects was relatively accurate

and justified on its own terms.

Perhaps the answer lay in an incident that happened in the fall of 1948. At that time she was indicted on a morals charge. The indictment charged that she had been a party in sexual relationships with two mentally ill boys and an older man. The charge was lodged by the mother of the boys. All of the evidence indicates that it was a false charge; Zora was out of the country at the time of the alleged crime. But several of the Negro newspapers exploded it into a major scandal. Naturally, Zora was hurt. And the incident plunged her into a state of abject despair. She was proud of America and extremely patriotic. She believed that even though there were some obvious faults in the American system of government, they were minimal, or at worst the aberrations of a few sick, unrepresentative, individuals. This incident made her question the essential morality of the American legal system.

In a letter to her friend Carl Van Vechten she wrote: "I care for nothing anymore. My country has failed me utterly. My race has seen fit to destroy me without reason, and with the vilest tools conceived of by man so far. A society, eminently Christian, and supposedly devoted to super decency has gone so far from its announced purpose, not to protect children, but to exploit the gruesome fancies of a pathological case and do this thing to human decency. Please do not forget that thing was not done in the South, but in the so-called liberal North. Where shall I look in the country

for justice. . . . All that I have tried to do has proved useless. All that I have believed in has failed me. I have resolved to die. It will take me a few days to set my affairs in order, then I will go."

There was no trial. The charges were dropped. And Zora Neale Hurston ceased to be a creative writer. In the early fifties, she wrote some articles for the *Post* and the conservative American Legion magazine. She took a job as a maid; and after a story of hers appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*, her employers discovered her true background and told all of their friends. Stories later appeared in many newspapers around the country, telling of the successful Negro writer who was now doing housework. One story, in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, quotes her as saying: "You can use your mind only so long. . . . Then you have to use yours hands. It's just the natural thing. I was born with a skillet in my hands. Why shouldn't I do it for somebody else awhile? A writer has to stop writing every now and then and live a little. You know what I mean?" James Lyons, the reporter, goes on to say: "Miss Hurston believes she is temporarily 'written out.' An eighth novel and three short stories are now in the hands of her agents and she feels it would be sensible to 'shift gears' for a few months."

But none of her plans ever materialized. She died penniless on January 28, 1960, in the South she loved so much.



Photo by Bill Fibben



IN SWELTERING DESERT HEAT, IMMEDIATELY AFTER A 25-MILE HIKE, NEGRO SOLDIERS OF THE 93RD DIVISION MARCH ON THE PARADE GROUND AT FORT HUACHUCA, ARIZ.

NEGRO DIVISION

It prepares to go overseas

When German prisoners recently were sent to a U. S. prison camp, they said that the best fighters they encountered in North Africa were Australian troops and American Negro troops. Actually, the number of Negroes engaged in combat in Africa was small, but more and more of them are now being sent overseas to help in the fighting. For instance, the 93rd Infantry Division shown here, which was the first all-Negro combat division to be organized, has reached a state of training where it is ready to move out of the country at a moment's notice.

In spite of what the Germans say, however, Negroes remain essentially untried as fighters. During World War I

more than 90% of the Negroes in the U. S. Army served in labor battalions. Even today the majority of Negroes in the Army are still in such battalions. But an increasing percentage of them are being put into combat units. They are admitted to all branches of the Army, including the Air Forces, and two all-Negro divisions have been activated. Approximately 3,000 Negroes are officers, almost three times as many as in World War I.

The 93rd Division consists of 16,000 enlisted men, all colored, and a thousand officers, half of whom are colored. Cooperation between the whites and the Negroes throughout the division is generally considered to be excellent.

Photo from *Life Magazine*, April 9, 1943

World War II Reflected in Black Music

“Uncle Sam called me”

by Bernice Reagon

Black music in its most natural setting is an essential part of the black culture system, for during a black musical experience, communication occurs simultaneously on physical, emotional and intellectual levels. Hence, to Fela Dourande's (Nigerian musician, Yoruba chieftain) definition of music as “sound at its most powerful level,” I would simply add the term communicative sounds, meaning sounds that can be read or understood by those for whom they were intended.

Because of this communicative function, music in black life and culture plays a vital role in the balanced working of black society. It reflects (and sustains) much of the black view of the world. In the lyrics of black songs are valuable, often precise, historical data that helps one to know where blacks placed themselves during certain periods, especially during key periods such as world wars, natural catastrophes or mass movements. Musically, rhythmically and lyrically, black songs, then, provide us with a rich historical source, not only chronicling events, but conveying the mood and attitude of black people towards these events as they affected their lives.

This article is an edited account of a study of songs created by the black community during World War II and attempts to demonstrate the potential of the songs of black America as historical documents. To avoid viewing the songs in a vacuum, the accounts of the war in the *Pittsburgh Courier*—the major source of information accessible to the black community at the time—are used here as a backdrop. Being a weekly, the *Courier* only rarely “broke” the news; rather, it served to interpret current events from the black perspective.

Of the 40 songs collected, I have selected those I consider strongest in terms of historical data and those revealing the major topics, themes, opinions, events and personalities that caught the interest of the creators and performers of these songs. The songs fell into several subject areas: survey songs scanning the whole war period, the draft, the national defense industry, the disruption of the family, certain war heroes and villains, and the hopes and fears of the black community.

The most comprehensive of the survey songs is a gospel ballad (so called because it was sung by gospel quartets) known as *World War II Ballad, Oh What a Time*, or *Pearl Harbor*. Its musical structure involves a “call and response” pattern in the chorus, with verses sung in the preaching style commonly used by gospel groups of the thirties and forties. This style seems to be a singing adaptation of the epic sermon formerly used by traditional black ministers. The melody has been used repeatedly to record events that have had a serious impact on the black community—as in the sinking of the Titanic and natural disasters such as floods, fires and tornadoes.

I am using three of the four versions of the song I found. The melodies of all versions are the same; they differ in rhythmic, harmonic, and instrumental background and in vocal styles. They also vary in the specific events of the war that they cover. The *World War II Ballad* was collected by Mack McCormick in Houston, Texas. It is sung by the Percy Wilburn Quartet, an amateur gospel group, with no instrumental accompaniment. *Oh, What a Time* is done by the Georgia Sea Island Singers, and is led by the leader of the group, John Davis. The last version, *Pearl Harbor I and II*, was recorded by the Soul Stirrers Gospel Quartet during the late forties on the Alladdin Black Gospel label in Chicago. According to them, the original ballad was written by a gospel singer named Otis Jackson who was known for his gospel chronicles.

Oh What a Time by the Georgia Sea Island Singers begins with Hitler's initial move for power and relates the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the heroism of Dorie Miller, and the dropping of the atomic bomb. Despite the fact that conflict in the European arena had been underway for several years, all versions pinpoint 1941 as an approximate beginning of the war. It was during this time that the war began to have a more direct impact on black people in the United States.

Bernice Reagon, singer, lecturer, is currently working towards her Ph.D. in oral history at Howard University. A former member of the Freedom Singers and Harambee Singers, she has been actively engaged in the collection of folk songs and traditions.

*If you read in the papers and you read it well
 You know the story I'm about to tell
 In 1941, the Second World War had just begun
 Ole Hitler from Berlin stretched out his paw
 He brought the European countries under the war
 Mr. Big Shot Hitler went out to plan
 Picked out a place, he called no man's land
 He told his boys you need not to fear
 Because me myself will be the engineer*

During 1940 and 1941 the *Pittsburgh Courier* increasingly moved its coverage of the war from the editorial page to headlines, pictorial features and major articles. The December 6, 1941, issue was one of the first issues almost entirely devoted to coverage of the war. It headlined a story which took a strong stand against the Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, and his endorsement of racial discrimination in that branch of service. At the time blacks could not hold any rank above the equivalent of mess sargeant; those applying with higher skills were usually disqualified as physically unfit. The same issue included a picture story on the only two blacks in the West Point Academy and a report on a meeting, called by Judge William A. Hastie, the civilian aide to the Secretary of War, where General George Marshall, Army Chief of Staff came together with leading members of the Negro press to discuss Judge Hastie's plans to increase black opportunities in the Army. Reading this issue, America's entrance into the war seems inevitable.

Oh What a Time continues:

*Have a little patience let me tell you the news
 The first thing he done was put out all the Jews
 The next thing he done in the European lands
 He put all the little nations under his command
 Then he and France began to fight
 He took beautiful Paris late that night
 Ole Great Britain got troubled in mind
 She throw'd 65,000 on the firing line
 Ole Great Britain let out a cry
 For the United States to send supplies
 Well we load our vessel and we started across
 The next thing we heard our vessels were lost
 This made America mighty displeased
 Ole Adolph Hitler trying to rule the seas
 We sent him a message straight from home
 Said you'd better leave our vessels alone*

*Well great God almighty what a terrible sound
 They tell me that the bombs kept hitting the ground
 Well many didn't have time to repent*

From 1933 the *Courier* editorials mentioned the increasing oppression of the Jews by Hitler and noted, too, that Hitler was being as hard on jazz as he was on the Jews, making attempts to bar it from

the German people as "a decadent distortion of genuine Negro music in the United States." The editorials also supported the organized protests of American Jews against Hitler's regime as the kind of action American blacks should adopt as a means of pressure and resistance against their oppressors. Through the early part of the thirties, the *Courier* was exuberant about Roosevelt's New Deal policies. Later, in 1938, a different trend began, with editorials criticizing Roosevelt for being empathetic to the treatment of the Jews, while remaining blind and silent as blacks continued to be lynched under his nose.

The takeover of Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland by Hitler occurred during the end of 1938, and the spring and summer of 1939, which is referred to in the above verse as the "little nations under his command." *Courier* columnist George Shuyler mentioned these actions only in passing as he began to take an increasingly dim view of Roosevelt's New Deal policies. He likened Roosevelt's brand of state capitalism to Hitler's Nazi regime and felt that it would not take much to make these policies fascist.

The fall of France and the "taking of beautiful Paris" was indirectly mentioned in an article by George Padmore on the death of the French Senegalese Deputy, Galandou Diouf also in the December 6th issue. Padmore wrote that Diouf had been dismissed from his position as French Senegalese Deputy when he urged France to refuse cooperation with the German invaders.

The lost vessel in the ballad could very well have been the "Reuben James," which the December 6th *Courier* reported had been sunk by a German torpedo and used this story as a part of its criticism of anti-Negro naval policies. The article cited a move of whites to organize the parents of the sailors lost at sea to protest the use of American ships in the war and maintained that this kind of action should compel Secretary Knox to move even faster in dropping racial obstacles and barriers in the Navy, making available to this branch of service a loyal supply of manpower—Negroes.

It seems clear that while the songs reflect a subtle patriotism, the *Courier* was almost blatant in its use of the news stories to point up areas of discrimination and lack of opportunities for the advancement of blacks.

The Soul Stirrers Gospel Quartet, whose history in gospel music spans thirty years, brings us the next series of events in this ballad. The group is backed by a Hawaiian guitar. The lead was sung by Willie Eason, backed by harmonies characteristic of the Soul Stirrers.

Their souls were called to judgment
 The women and children let out a cry
 Saying Lord have mercy, don't let us die
 They called the Lord and called Him loud
 And seemed a man came from out of the clouds
 Well the man that came was well prepared
 General Douglas MacArthur, the Chief of Staff
 A little like Moses in the days of old
 He said let's whip the Japs and knock 'em out cold
 Cause God's on our side we gonna win
 We'll fight the Japs until the end.

This is the first reference to the entrance of Japan into the war. MacArthur's role in the Philippines was not viewed as "Moses-like" by the *Courier*. The November 15, 1941, issue carried an item by J.A. Rogers that severely rapped General Hugh Johnson's blatantly racist statement: *General MacArthur has one of the hardest military problems ever put upon a commander who must rely mainly upon soldiers of another race.*

In his regular feature in the December 6th issue, Rogers wrote about Japanese aggressiveness. He urged blacks not to be taken in by their color, since their policies were extremely exploitative of the darker races, citing their invasion of China in 1931, their joining the Axis powers, and their acting with Mussolini against Ethiopia. (Ethiopia was a primary issue in the *Courier*, which from 1933 on consistently, almost hysterically, denounced Italy's actions against the black republic.) Rogers concluded that Japan's bombing of Chinese villages and civilians made Hitler's actions in Europe seem angelic.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor, as seen in the version by John Davis and the Georgia Sea Island Singers, seemed to catch all by surprise.

*Ole Japan with his ole sharp eye
 Pretending he wasn't on either side
 Then he came to the United States
 So he and Roosevelt could communicate
 He didn't fuss, he didn't argue
 But he turned around and bombed Pearl Harbor
 I don't know but I've been told how ole Pearl
 Harbor's air base got stole
 Out there on the Pacific waters
 Different commanders wouldn't carry out orders
 Some were high and some were low
 Saying they weren't gon' fly no more
 Well they did not fly that day
 Those old Japs were on their way
 What they did it was a fact
 They didn't have much chance to fight
 Some were smart and some were dumb
 That's how Pearl Harbor air base got bombed
 Japs bombed ship from under the belly
 Our first hero was Captain Kelly
 His mother got the news I know she cried
 But he won a medal before he died.*

This attack upon American soil brought an almost unanimous response from the black community. Because the *Courier* was a weekly, it carried the news in its December 13th front page editorial and denounced Japan as the aggressor, "pulling us into a war that we didn't want." The ballad's account of United States inefficiencies is not reported in the *Courier* until early 1942.

Immediately after the bombing, people were interviewed in Nashville, Tennessee, by a joint collecting project involving Fisk University and the Library of Congress. Several black citizens were asked to record their reactions to the bombing. Reverend W.J. Faulkner, President of the Nashville branch of the NAACP and a Congregational minister, commented:

This sudden and unfortunate attack of the Japanese on our country has revealed in stark outline a tragic attitude of unpreparedness and selfish indifference on our part to the real dangers confronting our nation and our democratic way of life. Too long have we been divided at home. While we have been dissipating vast strength and straining our national union through labor conflicts and class bickerings and in practices of stupid and costly racial discrimination, our enemies have conspired to destroy us. I earnestly hope that at last we have become struck wide awake to the real threats to our national safety at home and abroad, and that we will be galvanized into effective action by uniting all of our people and resources on the basis of equality into one invincible army of patriots, who will work for the triumph of Christian democracy and brotherhood throughout the world.

Not all were taken by surprise as is shown in the statement given by Faye deFrance, YWCA Secretary in Nashville, originally from Denver, Colorado:

Japan's aggression was an expected act. We must take into consideration that the Japanese have aimed this aggression toward China for the past four years, and concede the fact that Japan is an aggressive nation. However, this particular act was not entirely of Japanese making, this one situation had to reach a head soon, the United States was bound to enter the war. Just what the fuse was to be was the only uncertain factor. Rather than Japan's aggression, I would say Japan's obedience to instigative commands from the Axis powers. Like many others who were not active participants or witnesses of the last world war, the actual horror of seriousness of combat has not dawned on me yet, just a mild excitement that naturally comes with mass action—a usual response of an individual to group psychology. . . . Being just another of the uninformed masses, I



Photo from Life Magazine, April 9, 1943

With arms folded and steel helmets pulled down over their heads, Negro soldiers roll by in their vehicles during the Division parade.

have a feeling of resentment toward Japan for her treacherous sly attack on the United States. Words and thoughts put into my mouth by radio news commentators and rashes of newspaper articles. Yet, an actual hatred of Japan herself does not exist within me. She is the tool of stronger powers. My resentment is definitely directed toward them. I impatiently await the finish of Japan so that the Axis powers, the motivating factors for this recent aggression, can be stopped in their murderous attempts to thwart the cause of democracy and liberty. Their greedy attempts to rule the world and resources of all countries must be stopped. My faith and belief in the superiority of the United States is childlike in its entirety. Even though the treatment of minority groups has been and is still unfair, my loyalty to my country is unlimited and unbounded.

The Courier accounts, the interviews, and the ballad reflect sundry reactions to Japan's action, but all agreed that America had to enter the war. There was no consensus, however, on Japanese motivations. The Courier and the people interviewed noted the continued condition of blacks

in society. At this point the ballad does not; in fact, it has not yet made any racial comment. On this point its position is clearly American with "God on its side."

This does not hold long, however. The next verse brings to the fore the heroism of the black soldier while exposing the racism of the Navy and the white press.

In nineteen hundred and forty-one
 Colored mess boy manned the gun
 Although he had never been trained
 Had the nerves ever seen
 God willing and mother wit
 Gon' be great Dorie Miller yet
 Grabbed a gun and took dead aim
 Japanese bombers into fiery flame
 He was aiming the Japs to fight
 Fought at the poles to make things right
 Fight on Dorie Miller I know you tried
 Did your best for the side
 Four long months we didn't hear from him
 Colored press they began to hum
 Mother and father began to worry
 It came out in the Pittsburg Courier
 Telling the news in every place
 I love Dorie Miller cause he's my race.

The December 20, 1941, *Courier* carries a story about an unidentified Negro messman who had taken over a gun from a fallen sailor and brought down several Japanese bombers before running out of ammunition. It was the first time he had ever fired the gun. Only after an exhaustive search was the March 14, 1942, *Courier* able to identify Dorie Miller as the unsung hero of this action. It was clear that the white press and defense officials had made little effort to locate Dorie Miller. The *Courier* questioned why the government almost immediately had identified and rewarded for his heroism Joseph Lockwood, a white staff sergeant, while at the time of the March 21, 1942, issue, Dorie Miller had received nothing. In this same issue, the NAACP urged Secretary Knox to honor Miller by lifting the naval ban on Negroes.

Secretary Knox, according to a *Courier* editorial on April 18, 1942, announced that Negroes would be enlisted in the reserve components of the Navy, Coast Guard and Marines for service around shore establishments. The editorial clarified that this meant service in Navy yards, labor gangs, and building foreign bases and small craft, where black seamen would not contaminate whites. Further, the *Courier* speculated that if Pearl Harbor and Dorie Miller caused this limited change, maybe a greater crisis would do more.

President Roosevelt allegedly wanted to award Dorie Miller the Congressional Medal of Honor, but Secretary Knox protested and prevailed. Dorie Miller was awarded the Navy Cross instead. This story appeared in the May 16, 1942, *Courier*.

It was the bombing of Pearl Harbor that ultimately broke down many of the previous quotas exercised by the armed forces. The country's official entry into the war meant rations on food and other items, as related in this next verse by the Soul Stirrers Gospel Quartet:

*Then the war was on, a cool job ride
Ration on gas and ration on tires
Told me over 35 was against the law
Had to save all my rubber just to win the war
Sweeten my coffee wasn't sweet enough
In wearing our pants without a cuff
The ration books numbers 1 and 2
They were covered with stamps red, white,
and blue
They had to count those points
Count them every week
If we would lose that book we wouldn't get no meat.*

*In nineteen hundred and forty-one
They were calling for me and calling for you
In nineteen forty-two
They were calling for the father and the sons, too*

*In nineteen forty-three
They might have missed you but they sure got me
In nineteen forty-four
They were calling back for more and more
In nineteen forty-five
I would tell you about but I wouldn't want to lie
The story I'm telling it may not rhyme
I hushed one day heard a B-29
Coming thru the air Lord big and bold
She had one bomb way back in the hole
Pilot called to the bombadeer
Said Jack this is it you can drop it right here.*

The ration books, which in many cases were handled like money, are an instant reminder of this period. Large families with allotments could trade off sugar stamps for meat stamps from small families. It was the increased draft calls, however, that made the presence of the war most drastically felt in the black community.

Another variant on the above verse by the Percy Wilburn Quartet of Houston, Texas, is done by John Davis of the Georgia Sea Island Singers. It ends:

*The war is over, victory won
Japs couldn't stand that atomic bomb.*

The increase in draft calls was reported in the *Courier* in the late thirties, which carefully monitored these calls and waged an intense campaign to increase the number of blacks proportionately in all categories. The black community fought for the "right to fight."

The last lines of the verse bring an end to the war. In the *Courier* this is presented with some ambivalence. Its overall position fell somewhere between the objective "Jack this is it, you can drop it right here" line by the Percy Wilburn Quartet and the proud pronouncement by the Georgia Sea Island Singers, "the war is over, the victory is won, the Japs couldn't stand that atomic bomb."

The August 18, 1945, issue of the *Courier* covered the story of the dropping of the bombs. The front page carried the names and faces of the black scientists who worked on its production, men who were lauded by Undersecretary of War Robert P. Patterson for their silence. On the same page, George Shuyler wrote of the awesome responsibility of controlling this new power and warned against its use for murder. The cartoon in this issue showed a symbol of America holding atomic energy with Satan and Jesus standing on either side of her, representing evil and good vying for control over the use of this new discovery.

Beginning of the Conflict

The ballad *Oh What a Time* pinpoints 1941 as

an approximate beginning of the war. More accurately this would be the point at which the European and Asian conflicts became worldwide. There are many who date its real beginning with the rise of Hitler in Germany in 1932-33. The religious song, *God's Mighty Hand*, recorded by Matchbox Records, presents the 1930's as a time of world-wide trouble and cites 1933 in particular as a catalytic point in Europe. The melody is a popular one, frequently used by southern black and white songsters. The song can be found with religious and secular textual settings. This version combines contemporary occurrences with the need of people to heed the power of the Lord. Each five lines of the chorus is melodically different; the overall pattern, thereby, creates a melodic curve. The verse utilizes the last four melodic lines of the chorus but not in the same sequence.

Oh Yes, now God's mighty hand
 He troubling this ole land
 North, south, east, west, and the sea
 He troubling rich and poor
 They're running from door to door
 The hands of the Lord is on this land

Oh, listen people what I say
 We're living in evil days
 See the man who won't hear the Lord
 But God he doesn't lie
 Every nation gonna cry
 For the hands of the Lord is on this land

God got worried with your wicked ways
 Better make up and give him praise
 See, war done broke out throughout the whole
 world
 Don't you see God ain't pleased
 Better seek him on your knees
 For the hands of the Lord is this land

Nineteen hundred and thirty-three
 he rode down from heaven
 Gonna see death everywhere on this land
 You gonna see more death than you ever saw
 Maybe gonna start another war
 And the drones of the planes gonna be sad.

The text here presents the Depression of the 1930's and the European war as beginning at the same time and connects them with the general evil in the world. There is no clear delineation of nations. The peoples of the world are children who are now being punished for not serving God. The Depression is also presented as an equalizer of the rich and the poor—a period expressed throughout black lore as “a time when everybody else found out how blacks had been living all the while.” (Many blacks weren't even aware of the Depression because they were already on rock bottom.)

Another song that dated 1932 as a beginning of the war is Huddie Ledbetter's *The Hitler Song*, which concentrated on Hitler's program of exiling the Jews. The *Courier* picked up on this theme, stressing the oppression of the Jews as an admonition of what could happen to blacks in the United States, and constantly urged black people to follow the actions of American Jews as they moved to halt Hitler's plans. Likewise, the *Courier* called on all Jews and those sympathetic with their cause to cease discrimination against Negroes.

The December 6, 1941, issue of the *Courier* carried the call of Edward White, Executive Secretary of “Fight for Freedom”—A. Phillip Randolph's vehicle for mounting a national march on Washington in demand of jobs—asking black leaders to meet and stand against Hitler. The statement endorsed by the black leaders read: *the dictum of every Negro is that Hitler must go. This is so true that we [the black leaders] have treated it as something that goes without saying. We have concentrated our efforts to knocking out Hitlerism here. But we must speak out to avoid confusion within our ranks and speculation among our friends.* This public statement probably resulted from the pressure on the black press to cease emphasizing issues of racial discrimination in the defense system. They were charged with being unpatriotic and even traitors, and with lowering the black communities' morale with their constant exposures.

Pearl Harbor

The bombing of Pearl Harbor brought about a refocus of priority. The consensus was not to forget grievances but to protect the democracy that would allow such a struggle for equality. The reaction to Japan's attack was one of righteous anger, as reflected in *Pearl Harbor Blues*, written by a Doctor Clayton in 1942. The song is done in a classic blues style with an A-A-B arrangement of its melodic lines.

December seventh, nineteen forty-one
 December seventh, nineteen forty-one
 The Japanese flew over Pearl Harbor and dropped
 the bombs by the ton

The Japanese so ungrateful, just like a stray
 dog in the street
 The Japanese so ungrateful, just like a stray
 dog in the street
 Well he bites the hands that feeds him soon as
 he gets enough to eat

Some say the Japanese is hard fighters, but any
 dummy ought to know
 Some say the Japanese is hard fighters, but any
 dummy ought to know

*Even a rattlesnake won't bite you in your back, he
will warn you before he strikes his blow*

*I turned to my radio and I heard Mr. Roosevelt say
I turned to my radio and I heard Mr. Roosevelt say
We wanted to stay out of Europe and Asia, but now
we got a debt to pay*

*We even sold the Japanese brass and scrap iron, and
it makes my blood boil in my veins
Cause they made bombs and shells out of it and
they dropped them down on Pearl Harbor
just like rain.*

Interestingly this song reveals that the hostility toward Japan became very closely tied with her people; there is talk of the Japanese as a people, while most of the German activity was credited to the evil of their leader, Hitler. The *Courier* felt that with this bombing and the shortage of manpower, America should certainly draw upon her most loyal resources, "the race that had never produced a traitor, Negroes." Black Americans had a right to fight, the editorial demanded: *The Army of the United States is our Army. The Navy of the United States is our Navy. Let the German-Americans fall away. Let the Italians or other Americans sabotage its vital interests. . . . But let us. . . Negro-Americans . . . cling to and protect that which is ours. . . this America!*

The following song, *I Am American*, collected by Dr. James in Fort Valley, Georgia, picks up the same theme. It is sung by a sanctified church congregation in a call and response patterned chorus with verses.

*I am American—praise the Lord
I am American—praise the Lord
I am American—praise the Lord
Praise His holy name*

*If you people would listen to me
From my hearts I prayed anew
That our flag will wave over the brave
Bring our boys back home safe*

*When you walk down the street
Smile at everyone you meet
Rich or poor, young or old
Let this message you be told
When you work and play and sing
You be proud of your liberty*

*Call our boys from east and west
Come on boys let's do our best
Be wide awake and watch your step
Let your flag be everywhere.*

The *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 13, 1941, carried statements of similar sentiment by leading

black Americans. This was a time of commitment and coming together of Americans. Mary McLeod Bethune, head of the National Council of Negro Women, said, "No blood more red, nor more loyal, penetrate the veins of mankind; America can depend on us," and added that her organization was submerging any obstacles that would come between "us [blacks] and an all-out effort of America toward a final victory."

The late Walter White pledged the loyalty of 13 million Negroes to carry on the fight for democracy, even though they were denied it at home. J.A. Rogers called the Pearl Harbor bombing our biggest opportunity for progress. Judge William Hastie declared in the December 20, 1941, issue that "race youths" who volunteered for the army would be accepted.

All views were not so certain. Among the interviews conducted by Fisk University and the Library of Congress during the period was the recorded reaction of Roger Camfield, a graduate student at Fisk in Sociology:

Imagine 70,000,000 people on an island the size of New Jersey which is poor in resources to boot. Imagine those people having to expand because all available territory is controlled by nations who intend to maintain their power and control. War was inevitable under the circumstances. How it came was dramatic, but the fact that it came was expected. No blame in this matter can be squarely placed. The present Japanese-American war is but one aspect of the culmination of capitalistic expansion and centralization of control. Which expansion has been characterized by internal strife and war, over ever widening spheres, until now this war has completely covered the world. Of course as all people of the world are doing, I as other Negroes, will fight, without knowing the aims they are fighting for, or the results that will be attained.

Black Soldiers

Songs from black soldiers center upon the draft process, training camps, Roosevelt and Hitler and those they left behind. Most of these songs are blues. They also reflect a lot more of the hardship and cruelty of the war. Arthur Weston sings the following blues, with guitar accompaniment, entitled *Uncle Sam Called Me*.

*Yes Uncle Sam sure done call me, yes, baby,
you know I sure is got to go.
Yes Uncle Sam sure done call me, yes, baby,
you know I sure is got to go.
Yes he done call me to the United States army,
Yes baby, you know I sure is got to go.*

"I'll tell you how I feel about the war."

The following interview was conducted in October, 1973, with a southern black farmer who fought in World War II. He is from a family of independent farmers and from a county that was 75% black-owned before Henry Ford began paying \$5 a day to build automobiles. Because of the sensitive nature of some of his commentary, he remains anonymous.

How did people in this area feel about World War II? Was there any organized effort not to go to the war?

I'll tell you how I felt about the war. I didn't want to go. During that time I couldn't say if it was an organized effort or not, but I do know that quite a few people would do anything to get some type of deferment to keep from going. And quite a few blacks stayed and worked on the farm in order to keep from going because they were getting exempted for farming. But, quite a few of them got drafted off the land, too. Sam's Army got me right out of college, in 1941.

I took my basic training at Fort Knox, Kentucky, at the Army Force Training Center. From there I spent some time in Texas, in Arizona, a little time in Missouri, in the Carolinas and from there, overseas in this whole Italian campaign. We worked with the 5th Tank Group. They were blacks, officers too. We had only one white officer. We were attached to the Fifth Army for a while there, and later were with George Patton's Third Army. In fact, we were the first black tankers that the American Army ever had. I wasn't a tank driver. I was in maintenance. After I finished my basic training, and we stayed in Texas a while, I went back to Fort Knox to school and I had further training.

Did you feel that army life was much more difficult for a black soldier?

Well now, it all depends. I can't truthfully say that because we were combat troops and were treated as combat troops. But for a lot of black troops in the service units, it was very difficult. My personal experience with the Army was that we were treated just like any other troops. We had the best of everything. But most black troops were in your service units—engineers, quartermasters, etc. And there's a reason for it. You goin' have to state some facts regardless how it sounds. The

education level [of blacks] was very low. They didn't have anything to offer the Army but a strong back and a weak mind. So what else could they do? Give them a shovel or have 'em drive a truck.

When you were over there did you have a sense that you were fighting for a cause you believed in?

I was trying to live. I had to fight to live to get back home. I didn't have any principle. I was there because I was drafted. I felt that the only way I'm going to survive to get back is to learn how to shoot good and ask questions later. Self-preservation is the first law of nature. You live by it regardless. I believe in that strongly, and I believe in it today. I don't believe in turning the other cheek.

How did you view the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

At that time I didn't have too much thought about it. It didn't make me any difference one way or the other. In fact I was really glad of it because I was supposed to come home from overseas and take a furlough and go to the Pacific. And they dropped the bomb and the war ended before that happened to me.

Would you say that your experience in the Army made you very personally survivalistic?

I wouldn't say the Army made me that way. But the military did make me take more interest in the community. It made me look at my brother and try to stay a little closer to him. Well, I didn't really learn that in the service, but it was executed quite a bit in service. Even in the States, before I went overseas, I was involved in riots on military posts in Virginia, in Louisiana, in Texas and one in Missouri.

There was a riot in Patrick Henry, Virginia. It was started by two peckerwood gals, and we wound up slaughtering a bunch of rednecks. I think more troops sailed from Patrick Henry than any other base. It was just a tradition among white troops there that anytime a bunch of them was going to sail overseas, they'd go through the black area and run them out of their area on the post, out of their barracks. Just because they could do it. And practically everything that had been there among black troops before had been service troops, quartermasters or something like that. We were some of the few black combat troops that went through there.

They had a bunch of boys there from Illinois,

New York, a few from other metropolitan areas, but the majority of them came from that area. And they all liked to suds up during their off-time, drink all the beer they could. So they started buying beer and feeling good, talking a lot of trash. Anyway, it was two or three old peckerwood gals working in the PX. And them old Georgia boys didn't like it. So they decided they was going to run us out of our area. We had gotten wind of it.

There was a post order to pick up all the live ammunition. It was an order that came in from higher headquarters. They already had taken our weapons and put them in the armory. The [command] officers shook us down, patted us down. They asked the question, "You got any ammunition? You a damn fool if you ain't." You know what they meant. They were black officers. Therefore, they was playing it straight with us. They had to, because we played it straight up with them.

Well, we were prepared for anything that come up because we was expecting it. When they came to our area, somebody came running through the company streets yelling, "Git your gun. Paratroopers is coming." Just like that. And in about ten or fifteen seconds, I heard the armory room door crash. You went in and you picked up a gun. Don't pick up yours, pick up a gun. You see how simple that is? Can't nobody trace it. I don't care nothing about your fingerprints. See, such and such a gun was assigned to me, the serial number, automatically my fingerprints are on it, but that don't say I fired the gun. You got it? Then the paratroopers come to our area. You would have thought you was over in Germany. Slayed four of them. No brothers ever was bothered. They planted an FBI in the outfit, followed us overseas. Nobody knowed who did it. They fingerprinted, but fingerprints didn't mean nothing. Everybody's weapon had different fingerprints on it. And that stuff never happened again over there at Camp Patrick Henry.

I'm not gonna talk about two incidents at all, except to say they was in Alexandria, Louisiana, and Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. The light skirmish at Fort Leonard Wood was over conditions. You was just considered second class. The whites got the best, and you got what was left. We didn't have any complaint on the food, but everything else—clothing, especially if you were hard to fit, treatment, barracks, everything else. They wasn't as fair. Doggone it, I had one situation in Fort Jackson, South Carolina, they didn't want no black troops on the post. You had to camp way out, outside of it.

Then I was in Chevrolet, Texas. There wasn't no bloodshed and stuff there, although it almost came to the point of bloodshed. We had been gone

three days out in them hills on a field trip. We came in and the post commander issued an order that our outfit—in fact we were the only black combat outfit there—wasn't supposed to go to the PX that Sunday afternoon until we went in and put on full dress.

Everybody joined in. The PX was sitting on this corner, and our area was about a block away. We pulled a tank up in front about a hundred yards from the PX, one at the end, one behind it, one on the north side and one on the east side and targeted in on it. With those 475 mm. guns pointed with high explosives, you know who got the winning hand.

What happened to you, to the men, after the incident? Were there any reprisals?

No, nothing happened, because the officers was with us. They said, "We're going in the PX," and we did. Besides, it was an unfair order. They couldn't touch the officers because they couldn't pinpoint who gave the order to move in. The order came over the radio. Who sent it? I don't know.

Did you ever hear of incidents where troops would do in their officers?

Yes.

Was that viewed as the battle way of straightening things out?

Well, it's not a legal way, and it's not in any book to do it that way. But that's one way of getting the job done so you can survive or get what you entitled to. If he's your obstacle, let's eliminate the obstacle and make some progress.

How did the Army react? Did they see these incidents as a threat, or try to ignore them?

In my opinion, it didn't make the top brass any difference. They was drawing they long pay, enjoying themselves. What happened to the small individuals, the foot soldiers, the small troops, and a captain or even a company commander didn't make a bit of difference in the world. They were expendable.

*You was just considered
second class. The whites
got the best, and you
got what was left.*



Arthur Rothstein/FSA

Yes Uncle Sam called me this mornin' when the
clock was strikin' four,
He says, pull out of your bunks, boys, and get
back out in the rain and snow.
Yes he sure has called me, yes, baby, you know
I sure is got to go.
Yes he have called me to the United States army,
Yes, baby, you know I sure is got to go.

Yes, I'm gonna tell you one more thing, pretty maid,
I know you sure ain't goin' to like,
Uncle Sam done called me to the United States
army.
And I don't know whether I will ever get back.
Uncle Sam sure is called me, yes, pretty maid,
I sure is got to go.
Yes he have called me to the United States army,
Yes, pretty maid, I sure have got to go.

Lord, look at that picture over yonder, Lord,
she was sittin' way out in the west,
Lord, look at that picture over yonder, Lord,
she was sittin' way out in the west,
Yeah, when you get insurance with Uncle Sam,
he sure gonna learn you all about the rest.

Lordy, I'm runnin' and dodgin', Lord, I'm trying to
find some place to hide,
Lordy, I'm runnin' and dodgin', Lord, trying to find
some place to hide,
Lordy, I'm runnin' and dodgin', Lord, trying to find
some place to hide,
But when you go to war with those Japanese, you
got to face it, sure got to die.

The most specific information of a soldier's life came from the soldiers themselves. The military offered none. Thus, the *Courier* (editorial of March 7, 1942), tried to demand information from the Army and Judge Hastie concerning the whereabouts and activities of Negro soldiers. But in spite of all these problems, J.A. Rogers' view of the war as opening up more opportunities for blacks was deeply believed by many of the soldiers who fought. J.D. Short, in his blues, *Fighting for Dear Old Uncle Sam*, talks of the war in the United States when "the war's all over." He also gives a picture of frontline action.

I'm going down swinging, boys, I'm going
down fighting for dear old Uncle Sam.

The war's all over, yes gonna be war right here,
The war's all over, yes gonna be war right here,
Well on the count of so many women now throwing
away a soldier like a sin.

I may go down in South Pacific, going down in the
land,
I may go down in South Pacific, going down in the
land,
I'm going down swinging, boys,

A massive Double V for Victory campaign was initiated through the *Courier*. Like J.D. Short's blues, it called for Victory abroad and at home. Starting with a letter from James G. Thompson in the April 11, 1942, issue, this idea mushroomed into a national campaign. The symbol, designed by Wilbert L. Holloway of the *Courier*, found its way onto posters, hats, cars, cards, as even a few liberal whites committed themselves to a Double Victory.

The following blues written by Big Boy Crudup unveils another aspect of the psyche of the black soldier. *Give Me a 32-30* sees the draft and the war as a chance to commit murder within the law.

So dark was the night now, people, cold cold was
the ground,
So dark was the night now, people, cold cold was
the ground,
Me and my buddies in two old foxholes, we had to
keep our heads on down.

Well machine gun and cannon roared, boys was
afraid to raise their head,
Well machine gun and cannon roared, boys was
afraid to raise their head,
You know I bet it cost a million dollars, boy, now
you know when the army land.

Be the first one there, salute the lieutenant
boy, get attention,
Be the first one there, salute the lieutenant
boy, get attention,
Son, they send your wife over without any.

Some say it'll be so bad, boys all come back
home again,
Some say it'll be so bad, boys all come back
home again,
Soldier ain't gonna be your friend.

Hon', the war's all over, ain't nothing but a
Hon', the war's all over, ain't nothing but a
Hon', the war's all over, just don't know what
it's all about.

I've got my questionnaire they need me in the war,
I've got my questionnaire they need me in the war,
Now if I feel like murder
won't have to break no county law.

All I want is a 32-30 made on a 45 frame,
All I want is a 32-30 made on a 45 frame,
Yes, and a red, white and blue flag
waving in my right hand.

Now if I go down with a red, white and blue flag
in my right hand.

Now if I go down with a red, white and blue flag
in my right hand,
Say, you can bet your life poor
Crudup sent many a man.

"Hero" is all I crave,
"Hero" is all I crave,
Now when I'm dead and gone, cry
"Hero" on my grave.

The text of this blues implies that feeling like "killing somebody" is not a rare feeling, but one that has been kept under control in civilian life. The hope for "heroic achievement" developed here was not uncommon; the experiences of Dorie Miller set a goal that many blacks strove for. And, encouraging that sentiment, the *Courier* constantly carried pictorial features showing black soldiers in training and being awarded or promoted.

In several songs the American participation in the war was seen as a personal battle between Hitler and Roosevelt. Their personalities and motivations were given serious attention, including the attempts of Hitler to draw blacks away. Buster Ezell calls the following song *Strange Things Happening in This Land or Roosevelt, Hitler and the War fight*, which is very similar musically to the other Ezell songs. The chorus uses the A-A-B-A pattern in its text, with slightly varied melodic lines. The verses use the same melodic pattern as the chorus, although the lyrics are not repeated in the same way.

There's strange things happening in this land
There's strange things happening in this land
A war is going on, cause many a heart to moan
There's strange things happening in this land

When Uncle Sam called the Negroes
They answered here are we
Can perform a soldier's duty
Where so never you may
They answered true and brave
Yes saints'll make up there
Strange things — happening in this land

Hitler called the Japanese
We could not help from crying
If you fight against that race
You're coming out behind
If you try to take their planes
You cannot help from dying

Hitler told his wife at the supper table
He dreamt a mighty dream
If I cut out these submarines
I'd save a many a man
but if I fight and if I win
I'll be cheered by many a man

Roosevelt told Hitler we try to live in peace
But ole Hitler he destroy every vessel he could see
He's treating us so mean
With a great big submarine

Some said Roosevelt was a coward
He said he would not fight
He kept on out of the way
Till he got things fixed up right
He made up in his mind
He got on the firing line

Hitler tried to fool Negroes by saying we ought
not to fight
Said you have no home in your country
No flag no equal rights

The greatness of God's power
You cannot understand
The whole world will tremble
From the viewing of his hand
It's beyond human rise
But all he do is wise.

In addition to trying to scare the soldiers, the *Courier* reporter interviewed a Negro soldier of the 92nd Unit after such a leafleting and got this response: *It would be foolhardy to completely discount the effect of these leaflets, although there is no evident change in the hard fighting qualities of the Negro infantrymen. But one wounded platoon leader (Negro) said: Damned good propaganda. All the men know it's true as hell and that sort of thing makes it tough, but there is not a man in the outfit who is damn fool enough to think those over there [Germans] love us either.*

On the home front economically the war industry was booming. In 1940, Dr. Rayford Logan was chairman of the committee for the participation of Negroes in the National Defense Program. Their efforts resulted in Roosevelt issuing an executive order for employment in the national defense industry in return for the abandonment of plans for blacks to march on Washington for jobs.

The May 2, 1942, *Courier* announced that the CIO and AFL unions had dropped their ban on blacks. Although the opening of the war industry meant jobs for blacks, Huddie Ledbetter's song *National Defense Blues* tells of a new and different kinds of problems arising because these new jobs were opened to men and women, too:

When I was out in California the boys told me,
'Ledbetter, the women are working on that defense
and they's making lots of money, just quitting their
husbands.' So a lot of the boys knowed I come from
Louisiana—I met a man out there says, 'Ledbetter,
you know one thing, I come out here with my wife
and you know she done quit me.' I say, 'Well.' He
say, 'Well, look, every payday come her check is



Jack Delano/FSA

The disruption of family life was real, whether caused by losing your man to the war, or losing your wife to higher pay and higher living standards.

big as mine.' I say, 'Well.' He says, 'Well, look, every Saturday she putting her money in the bank.' I say, 'What then?' He say, 'Well, look, can't you make up a song?' I say, 'Well, I don't know, I'll think it over.' And she was working on the defense, so here goes:

*I had a little woman, working on that national
defense
I had a little woman, working on that national
defense
That woman act just like she did not have no sense.*

*Just because she was working, making so much
dough
Just because she was working, making so much
dough
That woman got to say she did not love me
no more.*

*Every payday would come — her check was big as mine
Every payday would come — her check was big as mine
That woman thought that defense was gonna
last all the time.*

*That defense is gone, just listen to my song
That defense is gone, just listen to my song
Since that defense is gone that woman
done lose her home.*

*I will tell the truth and it's got to be a fact
I will tell the truth and it's got to be a fact
Since that defense is gone that woman
lose her Cadillac.*

The disruption of family life was very real, whether caused by losing your man to the war, or losing your wife to higher pay and higher living standards. But, the end of the war saw the end of many of these job opportunities as whites returned to fill them.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

During the war the efforts of black people, in uniform and out, were aimed clearly at propelling themselves forward, virtually carrying on two battles at the same time. Still, the songs depicted President Roosevelt as a hero. Only in the blues lyrics in reference to Uncle Sam was patriotism tempered with expected returns. Courier editor Robert L. Vann had avidly supported Roosevelt for the 1932 and 1936 elections and had placed great expectations in the New Deal programs. Roosevelt's silence on the continued lynching of Blacks and hesitancy in other areas of racial problems, however, were increasingly criticized by the Courier in the late thirties and early forties, culminating, ultimately, in support of the Republicans during the forties. The death of FDR,

however, sweetened his memory. The mourned event of April 1945 was the source of another ballad written by Otis Jackson entitled *Why I Like Roosevelt*. It was sung by the Soul Stirrers Gospel Quartet, utilizing a musical structure and style very similar to their *Pearl Harbor* song, though a different melody. The chorus is done in a call and response pattern.

*Year of 1945
President laid down and died
I knew how all of the poor people felt
They received a message, we've lost Roosevelt
In his life by all indications at Warm Springs,
Georgia, he received salvation
Listen boy don't you rush
Lady Painter she grabbed a brush
Tipped it in water and began to paint
She looked at the president and began to think
She never painted a picture for him at night
But she knew that the president didn't look right
The time of day was 12 o'clock
Tell me that Elizabeth had to stop
Great God Almighty she started too late
Had his call couldn't paint his portrait*

*During Hoover's administration Congress assemble
Great God Almighty — the poor world tremble
The rich would ride in the automobile
Depression made poor people noble and steal
Live next door to our*

*Wasn't getting anything for our hard labor
Great God Almighty moonshine stealing
Brought about a crime wave robbing and killing
The other president made us mourn
Roosevelt stepped in gave us a comfortable home.*

*During Roosevelt administration Congress
assemble
The first time in history for a Negro general
General Benjamin O. Davis I'm trying to relate
First Negro general of the United States
Racial prejudice they tried to disavow
By the Negro leaders into the White House
Advocated a fair practice of labor
To let the poor man know he was our emancipator
Made Madame Bethune the queen of the land
Gave part of his will to Mr. Prettyman
Endorsed inventions of Dr. Carver
This is why they say he's our earthly father
He took my feet out of the miry clay
I had to look back at the WPA*

The above verses of *Why I like Roosevelt* clearly linked FDR with the poor people of the world. And, at his death, the Courier, too, remembered Roosevelt's efforts toward relieving the depression-starved people of this country and implementing other progressive programs.

Roosevelt set up the Federal Employment

Practices Commission (FEPC) an agency with investigative powers into employment practices especially in war and war-related industries. Although the Commission had no enforcement power, pressure exerted by the black press, Urban League, NAACP and other groups resulted in new jobs for blacks. Roosevelt also had several blacks in his administration, most of whom, like Miss Bethune, served in advisory capacities with no real power to make or execute policy. Their presence did, however, have its impact on the black community. Further, blacks identified Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt as their friend and supporter. According to the *Courier*, she was credited with many of the liberal positions that Roosevelt took.

*I told you the history of Roosevelt's life
The world can say he had a sweet wife
Hadn't been so worried since she was a girl
After Roosevelt's death what would become
of the world*

*She notified her son across the sea
Don't you all get worried about poor me
But keep on fighting for victory
Your father is dead, but you are grown
I would worry about your father, but the
world's in mourn*

*Great God Almighty look what a time
English asked Churchill to resign
The fighter throughout the European
Put him out in the mighty hands of God
After his success asked to leave
Great God Almighty what history
Only two presidents we ever felt
Abraham Lincoln and Roosevelt
Wished Roosevelt could live to see
Old Glory flying over Germany
God Almighty knew just what was best
Knew that the president needed a rest
His battle done fought, victory done won
Our problems had just begun
When your burden get so heavy, you don't know
what to do
Call on Jesus, He's a president, too.*

This last verse lines up Roosevelt's death with Churchill's decline in England. The summation of these two events made for a terrible time. The same linking together of events in search of higher meaning occurred in the song *God's Mighty Hand*, where Reverend Smith saw the Depression and Hitler's rise as signs of displeasure from God. It also represents a world-wide consciousness on the part of the author. The depiction, here, of Lincoln and Roosevelt as the only two presidents who made an impact on the lives of blacks, corresponds to the general policy of the *Courier*: support and praise for those, regardless of party, who worked in the interest of black people for as long as they did that.

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Strike Meeting at Gastonia

Photo from Labor and Textile/Dunn

GASTONIA, 1929

Strike at the Loray Mill

edited by Dan McCurry and Carolyn Ashbaugh

Publisher's Note: The Gastonia textile strike was part of a larger phenomenon rising from the tensions of the industry's rapid and disruptive development throughout the South. After World War I, northern interests increasingly gained ownership of southern mills and relocated other shops to the region to take advantage of cheap labor. The number of spindles in Gaston County, N.C., grew from 3000 in 1848 to 1,200,000 in 1930 making it first in the state and the South, and third in the nation. The town of Gastonia swelled from 236 in 1877 to 30,000 in 1930, primarily from the influx of mountaineers exchanging their exhausted land for jobs in the new factories. Although blacks made up 15 per cent of the population of the county, few were allowed to work in the mills.

The Loray Mill, Gastonia's largest, was the first in the county to be owned and operated by Northerners seeking the benefits of a "poor white" labor pool. In 1926, a southern textile worker earned an average of \$15.81 for a 55-hour week compared to the \$21.49 for a 48-hour week earned by his or her New England counterpart. The Loray mill was also the first in the South to undergo new "scientific management" techniques designed to fully exploit this labor savings. The "stretch-out" (increasing the work-load per operator by speed-ups rather than technology) was introduced in the Loray Mill in 1927, and soon became as widespread as the northern ownership of southern mills. In early 1929, the anger and bitterness of thousands of textile workers exploded in mill towns throughout the region. Five thousand workers, mostly women, in Elizabethton, Tennessee, led the wave of walk-outs in March, 1929, that quickly spread to the Carolinas. The Gastonia strike at Loray Mills is the most famous of that movement.

For other materials written on the Gastonia strike, including six novels inspired by its drama, see the recent article by Theodore Draper, "Gastonia Revisited," in *Social Research*, Vol. 38 (Spring, 1971), pp. 3-29. The summary above is derived from the same source.

The following article was compiled from the unpublished autobiography and recent interviews of Vera Buch Weisbord, a major organizer of the Gastonia strike. The photographs of the period come from her personal collection. The editors' commentary is set in regular type, while portions from Vera's autobiography are in *italic type*, and the text from the interview is in smaller, regular type.

The Firestone Company's machines still grind away in the red brick building in Loray Village on Gastonia's west side. The small windows are covered by the same bar-like vents that enclosed them in 1929, and a ten-foot high chain-link fence topped with barbed wire has been added. The history of textile workers continues to be taught from the top down. When the sons and daughters of mill workers attending Rosary College inquire

about the Loray struggle of 1929, the local Chamber of Commerce brings in a former city policeman who was on the mill's security force during the strike. "Judge" Joe Separk's definitive *History of Gaston County* barely mentions the strike.

Today, of the 130 textile plants employing 28 to 30 thousand workers in Gaston County, only one small factory is organized. Fred Ratchford, executive secretary of the Chamber of Commerce and himself a longtime employee of Burlington Industries—the world's largest textile company—said of the 1929 strike in Loray, "One good thing about it is that there have been several efforts to organize here in the plants and not a one has been successful. Some of the old folks in the plants remember that earlier time."

"That earlier time" described here by Vera Buch has not changed much. Just over a decade ago, the longest strike in North Carolina history occurred at the Henderson cotton mills. This strike brought a violent reaction on the part of "law and order" forces—mill owners and state law enforcement personnel—who crushed the strike and imprisoned Textile Workers Union of America southern district director Boyd Payton for four years on a trumped-up conspiracy charge. (See *Scapegoat* by Boyd Payton, 1970.) Only in the final days of his administration did Governor Terry Sanford, the state's most liberal governor of the century, dare to pardon Payton. Even Sanford might not so easily have defied the textile interests if he had not had the public support of evangelist Billy Graham.

The viciousness of the mill owners' resistance to textile organizing since the late 1920's has discouraged workers' efforts in the Carolinas to the present. Now TWUA has mounted a sustained effort against the textile magnates, particularly the Burlington and Cone Mill families. Notable victories were made recently in the Oneita Knitting Mills in Andrews and Lane, South Carolina, and in several Greensboro, North Carolina plants. As workers and their children learn the history of earlier organizing efforts, they will gain strength for their continuing battle with the textile bosses. As a TWUA official in the Charlotte district office told us, "Half the importance in winning a strike is in the telling of its history so that we learn from it."

Several authors, among them Mary Heaton Vorse, Fred Beal and Tom Tippitt, have presented

Dan McCurry is from a North Carolina textile mill family and is now teaching farm/labor education at Loop College in Chicago. Carolyn Ashbaugh is a researcher in women's labor history at Newberry Library in Chicago.



The Loray Mill, Gastonia, 1973, operated by the Firestone Company.

the Gastonia strike from a point of view sympathetic to the Loray Mill workers. Vorse and Tippitt were journalists who covered the strike and trial. Beal was a principal organizer.

Now some forty-odd years after the strike, Vera Buch Weisbord is writing her memoirs, which include her recollections of those days as an organizer in Gastonia, of the perpetual poverty and disease in the Loray mill village, of the strengths and weaknesses of the strikers and organizers, and of the struggles within the Communist Party which made her role as an organizer exceedingly difficult.

Her early life, her work in the coalfields with the Save the Miners Union Committee, her struggles as a textile organizer, and her subsequent years as a writer and artist are part of a book now in progress. Vera is eager to correspond with others who shared her experiences at Gastonia and elsewhere and is seeking a publisher for the manuscript due to be completed in the next six months.

Born in Connecticut, Vera Buch moved with her family to New York City at the age of four, there to grow up in the city's tenements. She knew poverty as a child. Her father worked at seasonal jobs and often the family did not have enough to eat, and they paid rent when they could. After several years as an honor student at Hunter High School and College in New York City, Vera was stricken with tuberculosis and spent some time in a sanatorium. There she met a young woman Socialist Party member, and began to develop a political analysis of the causes for the poverty her

family and millions of other working people knew. When she recovered, she joined the Socialist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and later the Communist Party when it was formed in 1919. Due to her party membership and her work in the Passaic, New Jersey, textile strike of 1926, she became one of the National Textile Workers Union (NTWU) organizers of the Gastonia, North Carolina, textile strike of 1929, NTWU's major attempt to organize in the South. Gastonia and Gaston County still stand as a prime example of the vicious anti-unionism which has not been broken to this day.

The urgency of events in Gastonia of 1929 kept an organizer busy meeting the day-to-day crises of the Loray Mill strikers. The moments of high excitement and the days and weeks of patient working with the textile workers, building mutual confidence and establishing a working relationship, are recorded by Vera Buch with an artist's attention to detail and richness of expression. Though the events of the strike have been recorded before, Buch writes and talks with the intimacy of a leading participant.

The National Textile Workers' Union is Created

In the fall of 1928 we organized the National Textile Workers Union. There had been preparatory work. A lot of work was done in Passaic, New Jersey. The work was all done under the name of the United Front Committee of Textile Workers. We had a situation in which we had a few scattered unions of textile workers but only of the skilled. Some were in the A. F. of L.; some were not. But

in any case they had no interest in organizing the unskilled, who in most cases were foreign born. The A.F. of L. bureaucrats thought they were "just so many ignorant foreigners, why bother with them?" The dues they could pay would be very small. It is work, you know, to get off your ass in the office and get out and organize. Nobody wanted that work.

But there were a few people in New England who did want to do that work and got together and formed this United Front Committee of Textile Workers. My husband, Albert Weisbord, was the chief inspirer. Some preliminary work had been done in New York, in Brooklyn where there were some knit goods shops, in Philadelphia where there were carpet shops and hosiery shops, and in the anthracite regions with silk workers. They had a good gathering of delegates and formed this National Textile Workers Union.

Decision to Organize Loray Mill

Now Albert had been doing a lot of intensive research on the industry and found how much of it was located in the South. At one particular time, wage cuts were being given on wages that were already pitifully low and there was stretch-out, you know they call it speed-up in the North. Where already the speeding up of the work was very great, they increased that, giving them the double speed, you see. And it was just too much. The workers were walking out in spontaneous strikes. And Albert felt this Loray Mill in Gastonia had a bad reputation because they made no effort to build up a permanent work force by being decent, by being a little bit decent. And there was great discontent in the Loray Mill and in all the region as well. So the first convention of the National Textile Workers (fall of 1928) stated that it would begin some work in the South. In January Fred Beal went down to Charlotte and spent his evenings going out to the Loray village and knocking on doors and talking to the workers about the union and signing them up. Then they fired a couple of union people, so he called a mass meeting and had a big attendance. Over a thousand came out and signed up and the strike was decided on then and there.

On April 2, 1929, workers in the Loray Mill, owned by the Manville-Jenckes Company of Rhode Island, went out on strike. Within two days, the governor sent in the National Guard, and Vera Buch was on her way south by train to shore up the NTWU staff in Gaston County. Buch's first task, according to national secretary Weisbord, was to repair the damage done to union efforts among black workers. In nearby Bessemer City, George Pershing, a Young Communist League (YCL) organizer had bowed to white workers' demands and strung a rope between blacks and whites. The blacks did not return to future meetings.

Matchboxes on Stilts

Weary and rumped, huddled in the coach seat where I had spent the night, I was peering bleary-eyed at the Piedmont landscape speeding by in the gray pre-dawn. This was the 5th of April, 1929, and my destination was Gastonia, North Carolina. Already I had glimpsed an occasional mill village and now as the rising sun reached with long fingers across the low hills green with spring, sparkling with orchards in bloom, the landscape was dotted with such villages, for right here was the biggest yarn center in the South. "Matchboxes on stilts" came to my mind as I watched the mill cottages swiftly pass out of sight through the Piedmont: flimsy structures elevated on posts, some painted white, others dilapidated.

My heart was beating faster as I thought that here I would have to be the principal organizer, a leader. I would have to be right up on the platform making speeches to rouse the workers, there would be no more shrinking in the background. That I would be firm in my duty I knew, that I had native intelligence I knew, and I hoped now I had experience enough to be able to solve the numerous daily problems. When a big roadside sign sped by—"Gaston County, Combed Yarn Center of the South"—I was all excitement.

Welcome to the War

Ellen Dawson, whom I hadn't seen since Passaic, came running down the platform to greet me. She was a little sprite-like young woman of about 28, with black cropped hair, a Scotch accent, and merry, twinkling brown eyes. She was obviously glad to see me.

"They came yesterday," she said, indicating the state troopers, tents and numerous young men in uniform. Already we had reached the Loray village which was just outside Gastonia. There loomed the mill, dull red brick standing on a low hill, jail-like like any textile mill, about five stories high with narrow windows. In front of it were the commissary and the office building with a walk between them coming down from the front gate of the mill. Tents of the National Guard were set up to one side on the lawn. At the sight of the troopers I felt certain qualms, which I quickly suppressed, telling myself, "They'll be here, better get used to them." Down the main street, we passed a row of nondescript buildings to the right. "That'll be our relief store," Ellen said as we passed a brick building, somewhat better than the others. Now at last our headquarters: a tiny dilapidated unpainted shack at the end of the row and in the doorway Fred Beal, grinning broadly, waiting to greet us. I

met him for the first time; a stocky fellow of thirty-five with reddish blond hair, very blue eyes with pale lashes standing out against his sunburn. He looked naive and friendly; I could see he was a good man for the first contact with the workers. He presented me to some of the strikers who were standing about in the dim interior; then we three went into a tiny office partitioned off to the right of the doorway.

Again I had missed the beginning of the strike: the great outpouring of thousands of cheering joyful people released temporarily from slavery. The strike was, however, still young and that special exhilaration that accompanies the successful opening of a strike was still apparent here in Loray. It was in Ellen Dawson's smile, in her voice, her gestures; it was in Beal, too, was in the freshness of the morning and the vitalizing power of the hot sun, in the suggestion of danger of the troopers. Soon it was in me, too, making my step lighter, wiping out the fatigue of a night sitting up on the train, eliminating all remnants of self-doubt so that I could gladly assume my responsibilities.

One very pressing matter now was the organization of the relief. Workers as poor as these, always in debt at the commissary—and surely no credit would be extended to strikers—could not hold out many days without help. We were lucky to have been able to have rented this poor place as headquarters, and a really nice big store for the relief had been obtained yesterday.

We were very unpopular in these parts. Beal took from the desk a copy of the Gastonia Daily Gazette, on the front page of which in livid red and black was a cartoon depicting a devil with horns; this was the union invading this peaceful Southern community. "You'll die laughing," said Beal. "We can't wait to see these cartoons every day. They had one of me yesterday. We just laugh ourselves sick."

White Slavery

Buch had met the strike organizers; now it was time to meet the strikers. The stories of these workers, written in lines of suffering on their faces and here recorded by Vera Buch, are a vivid tale of human oppression and the determination to fight back.

There were also children there. Little child workers. They were supposed to be age 14, but there were some who could never have been 14; they looked more like 10. There was a little girl named Binney

Barnes. She was a little slip of a girl. Well, she had been working for two years already. She looked like 10, but, of course, they were undersized probably because they didn't get enough to eat and enough rest. And there were other child workers, too. And to think that they had to work the same long hours. Oh yes, they were out on strike. The little girls were out on strike.

TWO LITTLE STRIKERS

by Ella May Wiggins

Tune: Two Little Children, A Boy and A Girl
Sat by the Open Church Door.

Two little strikers, a boy and a girl,
Sit by the Union Hall door.
The little girl's hand was brown as the curls
That played on the dress that she wore.

The little boy's head was hatless,
And tears in each little eye,
"Why don't you go home to your mama," I said
And this was the striker's reply:

"Our mama's in jail, they locked her up;
Left Jim and me alone,
So we've come here to sleep in the tents tonight,
For we have no mother, no home.

"Our papa got hurt in the shooting Friday night,
We waited all night for him,
For he was a Union Guard you know,
But he never came home any more."

Some of the women had come directly from mountain homes to Loray; others had been mill workers out of work in South Carolina and even Georgia. It was the policy of Manville-Jenckes not to develop a permanent well-trained work force but to range far and wide in the poorest sections of the South to recruit helpless people whom they could get to work for the lowest wages. Those who were mountain-born retained some of the pride, vigor and independence of those people, but a generation or two as mill-hands, low-paid, sick, degraded and ignorant, reduced them to a sense of inborn inferiority.

Now the young girls. There was a group of girls of 16 to 18 years; there was something pathetic about them. One of them, I think her name was Violet, stood out as a staunch striker. Something I noticed about those people. Those who had been away from the mountains for a while, who had been in the mills for a time lost that independence, that proud spirit. This was very striking in many of them. And it was in those young girls.

They told how every unmarried woman or girl who wanted to get a job in the mill had to sleep with the bossman first.

That's another aspect of slavery, because that's the idea that the black woman was available to anybody. Now they were not black, but they were helpless and poor and they needed that job. So they were just taken advantage of.

Gladys Wallace stood out. She was a very sturdy type. She was a little stouter, a little fatter than most of the mill workers who were quite thin and gaunt. She was kind of easygoing. She was on the picket line, on the strike committee. She was always on hand at the meetings and everything.

Ella May Wiggins

Ella May Wiggins was one of the strongest of the strikers. She worked in the mill in nearby Bessemer City and contributed her will and her organizational abilities and ultimately her life to the cause of the strikers.

Little by little Ella May's personal history came out. She had grown up and had married Wiggins "back in the hills" like so many others of these people. She had borne him nine children in ten years. Then with the last birth "Pappy done tuk off." Ella May left then with her brood, coming to Bessemer City to work in the American Mill. The older children had to stay at home to care for the babies: "they couldn't get no schoolin'!" Then came that dreadful time when the children were all down with croup. She had asked the bossman's permission to stay home to care for them; this had been denied her. Four of them had died. Now with Cousin Charley's help she was raising the remaining five.

Ella May was a buxom, vigorous woman of about thirty, with clear gray eyes and smooth light brown hair. She had the deep-toned chesty voice you often hear in Slavic women, not the rather thin high-pitched one generally heard in the South. There was something in her features and in Charley's too that recalled a girl in the Sanatorium in New York, a native of Galicia [a part of Poland]. I asked Ella May about her origin; sure enough, that was it. This was exceptional here where everyone was of English or Scotch-Irish extraction.

Ella May Wiggins has become a legendary figure in the history of labor struggles, and her songs have found a place in the legacy of fighting textile songs.



ELLA MAY WIGGINS

THE MILL MOTHERS' SONG

by Ella May Wiggins

Tune: Little Mary Feigan

(This song was sung at the funeral of Ella May by one of the women strikers.)

We leave our home in the morning,
We kiss our children good bye,
While we slave for the bosses,
Our children scream and cry.

And when we draw our money,
Our grocery bills to pay,
Not a cent to spend for clothing,
Not a cent to lay away.

And on that very evening,
Our little son will say,
"I need some shoes, dear mother,
And so does sister May."

How it grieves the heart of a mother,
You every one must know,
But we can't buy for our children,
Our wages are too low.

A Scab is Just a Hungry Worker

After a while, the bosses looked around and brought in some strike breakers. I hesitate to call them strikebreakers in such a situation. They are not told, "There is a strike there, and we want you to go in and work." No! "We've got a job for you. You can earn fine money up there. Good steady work." So then, of course, he comes, he gets the job, then he learns there is a strike, but he needs the money. He is far from home, and he may not feel that he has the possibility of walking out.

Troopers Charge Picketline

On the 4th of April they brought in troops supposedly to protect property—whose property soon

SONGS of the CLASS STRUGGLE

In Memory of
ELLA MAY WIGGINS
and
STEVE KATOVIS

Issued by the Department of Cultural
Activities of the Workers' Inter-
national Relief, National Office
949 Broadway, Room 511,
New York City.

Price 10c

became apparent! After the troops came in the strikers had a picket line, and immediately the picket line was beset by those state troopers who chased them—running in all directions. One woman was stuck in the arm with a bayonet.

The breaking up of the line aroused excitement and resentment. The men wanted to fight, but with guns. Beal reiterated patiently that they couldn't carry guns; it wasn't a battle. This was something new to me. I thought we'd have to thrash it out privately among the organizers, so I confined myself to some general remarks on the necessity of picketing as the chief reliance of a militant strike to keep the scabs out of the mill and show the boss we mean business. Ellen Dawson took the floor to tell how the picket lines in Passaic carried on determinedly despite beatings and police terror. There

was no response except, "Just let us have our guns." Those people were reserved, tight-lipped. We didn't seem to get through to them. I felt a barrier as I looked at their blank faces, their dubious, unresponsive eyes. The strike meeting concluded.

Privately, Amy [Amy Schechter, the representative for International Workers' Aid], Ellen and I agreed that if Beal himself would say: "Boys, come out on the line with me," they'd go, but this Beal with equal stubbornness refused to do. He was the strike leader, it was not his job to picket, so he maintained.

Beal's refusal to picket and the men's refusal to go without arms left the picket line—which bore the brunt of militia and police attacks prior to June 7—to women and children. The small number who actually picketed indicated that men frequently kept the rest of their families away from the line over the arms issue. In fact, there was no picket line between May 16 and June 7; during that time, it was abandoned in favor of talking individually to workers who were still going into the mill.

While the setting up of the relief office had greatly increased the mill workers' confidence, still on this question of picketing we made no dent. So to strengthen our position, Tom Jimison, the lawyer from Charlotte, was called in to speak to the strike meeting. Once more the question was thrashed out, Jimison presenting the same reasons, but in the language spoken by the people. We had hoped the encouragement of a southerner might help, but no, the men remained obdurate. This controversy was to continue throughout this strike.

Yankee Organizers

One thing I had noticed from the beginning was that the number of strikers was nowhere near what it must have been at the start. Beal had reported 1,000 people in attendance at the protest meeting called when the union members had been fired. On April 2nd when the mill was struck, close to 2,000 people had walked out, marching in a triumphant parade through the streets of Gastonia. Where were they all now? It was clear there were no 2,000 people here; there were no thousand people, a few hundred at best. What had happened?

Another mystery was the constitution of the strikers' committee, this important body which met every morning at 9 o'clock. We would look over the faces, familiar now; sometimes some would be missing. Had those members gone in to scab? For us, the organizers, there was insecurity in this

apparently shifting nature of our committee; we seemed to be walking on ground that gave way under our feet. Days would pass; then after a week or longer, when we had given them up, they would reappear cheerful and unconcerned. "Where were you? Did you go into the mill?" "No'm, I wasn't scabbin'. I just went back to the hills to see my folks for a spell. Git me some home cookin'." Or, "I done went in to work for a week, just to git me a bit of folding money." Never for one moment did it occur to them to notify us of these departures. They were complete individualists, these hill people turned mill workers. The union was all right if it could win their strike, but of union discipline, of responsibility in the sense of asking permission to take such a vacation, they had no conception.

At least from those who had gone in to work we could get reports as to what was going on inside. It appeared the noise of activity, the lights, were largely bluff—some departments were completely empty, the machinery ran for nothing.

As for the missing hundreds, it was becoming clear that they had simply drifted on either to stay with relatives in the hills or had gone on to work in a mill elsewhere. They were not scabbing.

Only Women and Children

So our picket lines during April and May consisted of women and children. But we didn't have very many because of this obstacle, this constant arguing with them about their guns. When a rumor went around that the mill was going to open up, we had to have a picket line. I led that picket line. With great effort we mobilized a small group of women and children. With Amy beside me, I headed the line marching down the broken sidewalk towards the mill which loomed up ahead to our right. We hadn't gone far when we were met by Chief Aderholt of Gastonia and four or five troopers with drawn bayonets in a row behind him blocking the sidewalk. John Aderholt was a very tall, very lean and lanky man with the hard-bitten look of the South. He always wore a black suit and a big ten-gallon Texas hat. A short dialogue ensued between himself and me:

Chief: "Now where d' yuh think y'all's goin'?"

Vera: "We are carrying on a peaceful picket line."

Chief: "This town has passed an ordinance against paradin'."

Vera: "We are not a parade. We simply want to picket, to walk quietly up and down as we have a legal right to do."

Chief: "Break it up, boys," jerking an elbow.

Getting Acquainted in Jail

Our pickets scattered, the troopers after them. Amy and I stepped down to the roughly paved roadway and started towards the other side. The scene was a confused one as the women and children ran quickly

back towards the headquarters, the troopers after them. A number of arrests were made, including Amy and myself. We were all herded into a waiting paddy wagon, driven into town and taken into what we learned later was Gaston County Jail. We went upstairs and were pushed all together into one large cell. The cell contained two cots with bare mattresses; behind a partition in back were a toilet and wash basin. There were perhaps eight or ten of us altogether. Gladys Wallace was one of them, and Violet the girl striker, and Mrs. McGinnis, and other women who had been coming every day to the mass meeting since the beginning.

Some I knew by name, others not. We were held there all night, without supper. We remained excited and actually stayed up all night. Once in a while if one felt tired she would stretch out on a cot for a while; otherwise we squatted on the floor or perched on the edges of the cots. We sang a lot: "Solidarity Forever", that Passaic battle hymn, the words of which we told them had been adapted by our own union leader, Albert Weisbord, the "Red Flag" and some Wobbly songs.

SOLIDARITY FOREVER

lyrics: Albert Weisbord

The workers learned their lesson now
As everyone can see.
The workers know their bosses are
Their greatest enemy.
We'll fight and fight until we win
Our final victory.
For One Big Solid Union.

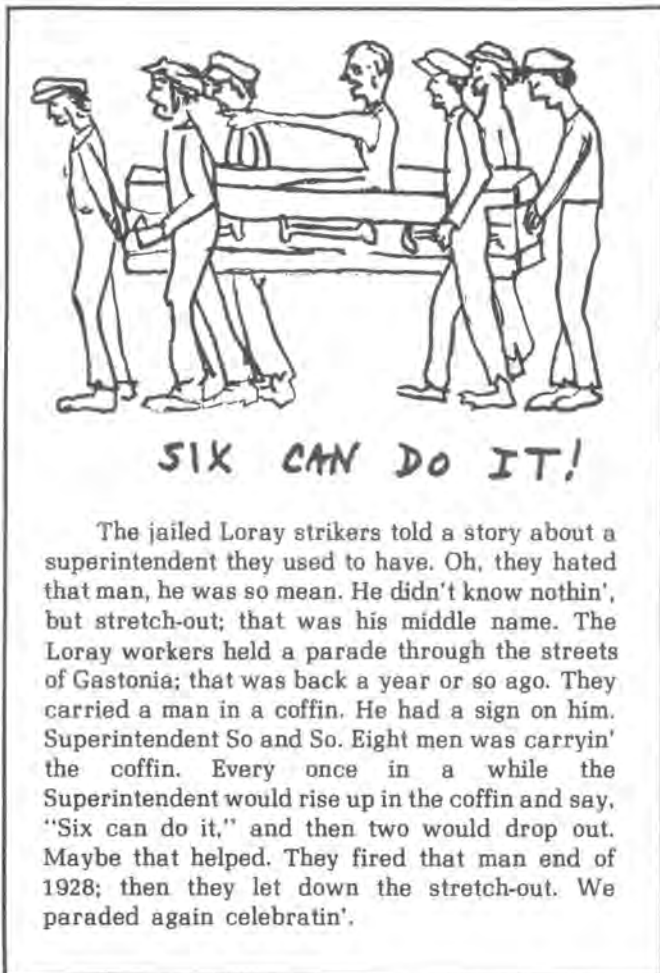
Solidarity forever,
Solidarity forever,
Solidarity forever,
For the Union makes us strong.

The men all stick together
And the boys are fighting fine
The women and the girls are all right
On the picket line.
No scabs, no threats can stop us
As we all march out on time
Through One Big Solid Union.

The strikers sang their own beautiful plaintive ballads, Barbry Allen and many more. It was a time too for unburdening a lot of grievances, personal histories and confessions, all very revelatory and important for Amy and myself. I wish I could remember all that was told, for we became much closer to the Loray strikers during that long night.

The women talked about the stretch-out, how you needed roller-skates to run from one side to another, you couldn't cover so many. They talked about how their children would get sick and it was so hard to give them any care. They preferred the night shift, though it was twelve hours, but only five nights; that left you two days to catch up on the housework, the washin' and a little

cleanin' maybe. That way you could give the kids a bit of care during the day. And when do you sleep? "Well, you try to ketch a little sleep durin' the afternoon."



Vigilantes Attack

On April 18th, I was away in Lexington, N.C., organizing. It was already quite late when a man came bringing a telephoned message. There had been a raid on our headquarters in Loray; a mob had come and had torn it down completely. I wanted to rush back immediately but the others convinced me it was not feasible. I was given a bed in one of the worker's homes.

Returning next morning I found a good sized crowd at the spot where our little shack had stood. All were unharmed including the two unarmed guards who slept in the place. They had been simply overpowered and arrested. At the very last minute some of the troopers came down and arrested—who do you think? the marauders? No, the two guards who were being held there. They were let go in the afternoon and reported to us.

Some 15 to 20 masked men had come, the electricity in the village having been cut off first. With hatchets, pick axes and steel bars they had torn the house down. Our guards thought they had recognized some "laws" among them, also some Loray bossmen.

But this was not all. They had also raided the store which was our relief station. They had smashed one of the front windows to get in and had torn down our big union sign. This was more serious: we had some stocks of food there which they completely ruined; flour, rice and beans were strewn over the floor, some even in the street. Kerosene had been poured over the food. With dismay I saw this ruin. It was all a complete loss.

This shocking situation required some adjustments. There was nothing to salvage from the wrecked headquarters. They had set fire evidently to destroy what papers and union cards we had there. Chairs, benches, tables—all had been smashed. Luckily we had the other place, the store, which would now serve for all purposes. A lot of people piled in there and there was a great hubbub as they viewed the mess of our ruined food.

Beal reported he had sent a wire to New York advising the national office of this event. The ruined food would be replaced at once (luckily we had money in the bank for relief). The mess in this hall and in the street would be left for the time being to be photographed. A press release would be drawn up by Amy Schechter and Beal to be sent out immediately.

A salient feature of this outrage was that the National Guard troops which had been called in ostensibly to "protect property," who had been in their tents beside the Loray mill, half a block away from our shack, had made no effort whatever to interfere though the racket must surely have awakened them.

The Raid Turned to Advantage

In the long run, as it often happens, this excess brutality in the employers' attacks rebounded to our interest. The spectacular nature of the raid resulted in publicity throughout the country, something which had been lacking before. Relief contributions began to increase. There was strong reaction among southern liberals. The *Raleigh News and Observer*, through its columnist Nell Battle Lewis, came out forcefully denouncing the raid. So, too, did the *Greensboro Daily News* and other important southern papers.

Even in Gastonia and in our immediate surroundings where except for the mill workers, the hostility had always been great, came some sign of improvement. A couple named Lodge who owned a big house between Loray Village and Gastonia came around offering help. Lodge was a union carpenter. His presence did not mean his union had changed its position of opposition, but he personally declared his sympathy for our cause. His wife Helen also proved most cooperative. They offered the use of their home for accomodating members of our staff. They also let us use a room for our staff meetings. Helen Lodge used to cook us a Sunday dinner which we paid for, but such a dinner as was unobtainable anywhere around then.

Another real godsend was that the owner of the little restaurant where we used to eat on Loray's "main street" made us a generous offer: if we didn't have the money to pay, any member of our staff could come in and eat without paying. This we sometimes took advantage of, though we always paid when we had the wherewithal.

Desertion in Battle

The two Young Communist League (YCL) members—Bill Siroka and George Pershing—who were organizing in Bessemer City and in Pineville managed to obtain authorization from New York City to leave their posts at a critical point—when the mills were about to reopen—and to return to New York for the YCL convention.

Pershing and Siroka took the evening train and were seen among us no more. I was assigned to take over both posts, since we were now only three organizers—Beal, Ellen and myself. I left that afternoon for Charlotte to meet with Greer (a textile worker who'd become acquainted with Beal) who took me out to Pineville the next morning. The mill was operating full blast. Left out and blacklisted were a handful of activists. Owing to our small forces, I had to tell them we could only continue their relief for a while, we could offer no other help. Then as soon as possible we went to Bessemer City to find the same situation. Here, however, the excluded group was larger—ten or a dozen, chiefly women. Among them a few real stalwarts: Ella May Wiggins, who was as good as an organizer or better; her cousin Charley; and a short, middle-aged man named Williams. So from then on I went down to Bessemer City every morning, holding picket lines, trying to encourage the strikers in organizing committees to keep in touch with those inside.

After a few turns around on the picket line, the women would complain of "bein' all tah'd out." I would ask them, "Didn't you stand twelve hours every night in the mill?" But I couldn't push them. Probably they were feeling the futility of the march, though here they were not entirely right. The sight of the excluded ones picketing was still a link with those inside which we needed to maintain.

This whole incident of Siroka and Pershing rankled with me. It was not simply that I was the fall guy taking over their very difficult situation. It was not merely that the two young men had deserted their post of duty. More than anything else I resented that they had authorization to do so by their leaders of the YCL.

Strikes Spread

The Loray Mill was not the only mill in Gaston

County which NTWU sought to organize. Others were located in Pineville and in Bessemer City where Pershing had strung the rope between blacks and whites. Later, in Bessemer City, Ella May Wiggins made further attempts at black organizing. In addition, the organizers made a trip to Elizabethton, Tennessee, where a United Textile Workers Union (U.T.W.—A.F. of L.) strike had just failed.

One aspect of this Pineville situation was of great interest to me. It seems that in some past period the employers had experimented with Negro help. They had laid off the white workers, putting blacks in their places. Apparently after some time they concluded it didn't work for they had fired the blacks and again all the help was white. This was all I could learn about the situation. Among the grievances of the strikers besides wage cuts and stretch-out was their being compelled to live in "nigger" cabins.

Meanwhile some independent organization work was being carried on by Ella May Wiggins. There had been and were a few Negro employees in the American Mill, not working on machinery but on heavy unskilled labor, cleaning, toting bales, etc. Ella May got around among them; she knew where they lived, for she lived there, too.

"I know the colored don't like us," she said once. "But if they see you're poor and humble like themselves, they'll listen to you."

Now in Bessemer City there was a small factory, a waste mill, located near the American Mill. I used to see a few black women sitting in the doorway sorting over the heaps of rags. The pay for such a job must have been infinitesimal, perhaps three dollars a week. I stopped to speak to them once. It was strange talking to people who wouldn't look at me. Not one looked up from her work or gave any sign she knew someone was talking to her about a union that was for all the workers regardless of skin color, that might help her get more money.

Ella May thought she had enough cards signed among the blacks to call a meeting. I had to see a black barber man to get some information. He, too, wouldn't look at me; with his eyes on the ceiling he said something like this:

"No'm. I didn't get to see that man Miz Ella May done tole me about. But we's gon' have a meetin', shoh enuf."

When Albert Weisbord, national secretary of the National Textile Workers came down again, Ella Mae arranged a meeting with blacks in a place known as Stumptown.

Albert and I went down there in the early evening, walking out from Bessemer City along the railroad tracks for about a mile. The tracks ran between woods. The heat of the sun was tempered. It was good for us to be alone and once more to be engaged in work together. The place for the meeting was Stumptown, where the black folks lived. There was the railroad station, a little store and a number of cabins, all unpainted, some dilapidated, but hardly one that didn't have flowers planted around it. Near the station house stood two black men by a wooden box. There was a group of at least fifteen standing at a distance, perhaps thirty feet away, eyeing us. Albert got up on the box and in his strong ringing voice urged them to come closer. And come closer they did, but not at once. Just gradually as he spoke, they edged nearer. Then by the time my turn came, they were around us in a circle. We shook hands when I got down. Now they were smiling, as we welcomed them to our union. It was something memorable for us. I can speak for myself; what I felt was the joy of reunion with members of a family long separated.

Crisis Follows Crisis

Now a couple of weeks later on the 6th of May came the bosses' next blow. On that day they evicted a large number of strikers from their company-owned houses, 85 families in all. The sheriff of Gaston County came with some sworn-in deputies and without the slightest regard for crying babies, sick people, or resisting women, they set all the possessions in a heap outside and padlocked the doors. It was a scene of great confusion and distress. And for us a most serious problem. We didn't have money to do much. Of course Beal immediately called the national secretary in New York and Albert said he would contact the relief organization whose province this was. Meanwhile, we tried desperately to find shelter for whomever we could and to get some tarpaulins or oilcloth to cover at least the beds. Some of the people managed to get back into the houses for the night, others crawled under the houses, set up about four feet on stilts, to lie on dry ground, but for most it was a time of hardship which they faced bravely. Many people came around to look—reporters and photographers. All we could do was to give encouragement that the relief man from New York would be here soon to take care of them.

Sure enough, on the next morning train came Alfred Wagenknecht, whom I had known in Passaic—vigorous, competent and cheerful as always, accompanied by his secretary Caroline Drew and national secretary Albert Weisbord. Our strike committee, staff and International Workers Aid

head, and the National Secretary, got together for a very practical discussion. It was very clear that there was no possibility of placing the evicted families in houses since none were available. The only possibility was tents. Where could we rent a piece of land to place some tents? The strikers explained: Manville-Jenckes owned the land up to this street where we were. But this side of the street where our store stood, up to the railroad tracks and beyond where there were few streets and cottages, was called "free land."

A committee was selected which left at once to scout for land. There was a flat field of good size at the edge of Loray Village where the woods began. Beyond the field ran a wooded gully with a little stream. This spot would do for the tents where the strikers could live. Then the idea arose that since we had this field for a small rent, we could build ourselves a new headquarters. There were plenty of men with building skills, and soon the welcome sound of hammers and saws rang out. The tents were pitched on the slope of the gully, out of sight from the field, a quiet private place where the families were moved in. Some kerosene stoves had to be bought for cooking, a pit dug and an outhouse erected downstream since they had to use the water. The cabin was neatly built, had a good smell of fresh-sawn lumber and was commodious enough. A small space was partitioned off in one corner for an office.

Now the question of defense became uppermost. We weren't going to have this place destroyed like the other one. The strikers took great pride in this building erected by their own hands. They made a fine big union sign which we put up outside. The National Secretary made a public announcement that we would defend our new headquarters. Accordingly a letter was sent to Governor Gardner: "The strike committee took the matter up today and decided that it is useless to expect the one-sided Manville-Jenckes Law to protect the life and property of the many striking textile workers of Gastonia. Every striker is determined to defend the new union headquarters, at all costs."

June 7

Receiving commitments that some workers would walk out if a strong picket line were established, Vera led other women and children in another attempt lawfully to picket the mill. The police attacked and dispersed this picket line at sundown and then assaulted union headquarters. No search warrant was obtained, for the intent was not to search but to destroy.

We were to organize committees to work on these people in the mill, to get them out in a rolling wave of strikes. This was Albert's policy which would have been good if we could have carried it out. That is to say, to let them work for a while, then to come out on strike for a while in layers, some going back to work to earn a few dollars then coming out again. That is what we tried to do, to bring this second layer of workers out on strike.

All our hopes now were centered on the people working in the Loray Mill—that fortress that loomed always grim, dark red and jail-like as the backdrop of our drama, its machinery thudding night and day. The second strike, the new wave, pulling out those working inside whom I always hesitated to call scabs. Many had been brought from a distance, unaware of the strike. Even those who went back did so only under great pressure. Our committees reported many sympathizers for the union inside. Many had signed cards. Finally we set a definite date, a Friday evening, when pledges had been given to come out to join us if we would send a picket line to the gate to meet them.

I left the boarding house after supper that day, the seventh of June, to stroll down the unpaved street lined with a few little cottages, towards the headquarters. The mill was to my right, clattering away as usual. With the sun already set, the heat was tempered. The air was sweet with summer odors. Somewhere a radio sent out a sentimental tune of the day—"Carolina moon keep shining, shining on the one who waits for me."

A couple of days before, Mary Vorse had taken me aside to warn me very seriously of some trouble she was sure was brewing. "Somethin's going to happen, Vera," she said, "and perhaps soon. I've been in so many of these situations, I can smell it. I smell danger here." I probably told her it had always been dangerous here, we had been threatened from the beginning. She insisted this was something special, a real threat. Perhaps she had really heard something, but I didn't feel disturbed, nor did I worry. But Mary Vorse was gone the next morning. She had left without saying goodbye. This was my last meeting. I would never see Loray again after that evening.

The crowd was as usual filling the field beside the headquarters, reaching up to the woods where the tree-tops beyond encircled the gully in which the tent colony was located. As I was on the platform urging the people to picket, a disturbance broke out in that farthest corner of the field near the gully. There were shouts, people milling about. Mary Vorse's warning came back. I thought, "This is it! They're trying to break up our meeting!" Some missiles were thrown. They didn't hit me, but I heard them plop-plopping against the building be-



Vera Buch, Ellen Dawson, Albert Weisbord
(Person on the extreme right is not known.)

hind me. Some men moved through the crowd to the back. The disturbance quieted down. Now we rounded up our pickets.

I had hoped for this important occasion the men also might come forward. But no, it was as usual. I doubted whether such a small line would be effective. Still, we had to go on with it. Gladys Wallace was there, Mrs. McGinnis, Mrs. Tompkinson and her fourteen-year-old son, Earl, and some dozen or so others besides our staff women. In the beginning twilight I started out in the direction of the mill, Amy beside me, over the pebbly, bumpy dirt road between the woods and the last of the cottages. We hadn't gone far when three "laws" appeared coming towards us. And I thought, "It'll be the same old thing. They'll break up the line. We'll be arrested again." But no, this was not the same old thing. It was quite different this time. One of the cops, a large, burly man, advanced towards me, cursing me. His eyes were bulging, his face was red, he was glaring at me as though in hatred as he uttered those obscene words. Then he raised his arm and with his huge hand grabbed me by the throat, squeezed and shook me.

If there is anything more than another that can make a person helpless, it is having one's wind cut off. You can't scream, can't make a sound, nor can you think of anything but getting your breath back. I wondered, did he want to kill me then and there? How long this lasted I can't say; it seemed long. When he let go, Amy was beside me. The cops had gone after the others, distributing blows with their sticks as they ran, chasing women and children in all directions. Gladys Wallace came up saying, "That was Bill Whitlow that done that to you, Miss Vera."

We started back toward the headquarters. A car passed us loaded with cops. They were standing on the running board, guns in hand. Inside

I saw Chief Aderholt's black hat. I expected the car to be waiting when we reached the building, but it was not in sight. Edith Miller, Caroline Drew and Sophie Melvin, who had been on the picket line, joined us.

We went into the office. Beal was there with a couple of strikers. It was already dark and the light in the office was on. I sat down at the typewriter and started to dash off a story for the Daily Worker about the breaking up of the picket line. I had written only a few lines when shots began to ring out outside. Someone said, "Put out the light." Another voice said, "Get down on the floor!" They were all crawling under the table. Beal last, his backside sticking out, I got down and crouched as the explosions continued. During those long moments, just seconds probably, I had a strange, unexpected sensation. I was acutely conscious of my skin all over my body. Perhaps it was the same reaction as that of the animal whose back hairs are erected in the presence of danger. The shots stopped. There were a few moments of silence. We didn't dare move. Then the sound of a car driving off. Silence again.

At last we got up and groped about, not venturing to put on the light, still holding our breath. We went into the big room, empty now. Beal and I looked out one of the windows. It looked as though the field was completely empty. Then in the far corner we saw an arm in a white shirt sleeve raised, heard a faint cry. Beal went out with one of the strikers. Between them they brought back Joe Harrison, white-faced and shaken, his shirt sleeve bloody. Buckshot had hit his arm and thigh.

They got him into a car. Edith and I got in too, the striker driving. Joe didn't feel like talking, but he managed to tell us that he thought the Chief had been hit, a couple of cops too. It was only a short run to the hospital. We stood by while a nurse got Joe onto a table and dressed his arm. Then she said, "You'll have to leave now; I've got to take his pants off." As we went out, through an open door opposite we saw a big man under a sheet. White-faced, he appeared unconscious though he was groaning. The striker with us was nervous and visibly shaking. "I'll take y'all where y'all want to go, but make it quick."

Arrested

I felt completely disoriented for an instant. We seemed to have come to the end of everything and in that first instant I could think of no place where we could go. Then the Lodge's house came to mind: it had often seemed a refuge. The man drove in a zig-zag, dropped us like hot potatoes and took off at top speed. It was quite dark now. We found the

front door open, a dim light in the back hall. The big house appeared to be empty. I hung my coat on a peg under the stairs. We didn't know what to do. Then another woman came in; it may have been Caroline Drew. We began to hear steps outside, there were voices and flashlights. It seemed the building was surrounded. Obeying some instinct of the pursued to hide, we stepped into the little butler's pantry, closing both doors. Then after a minute or so I said, "We'll have to be taken. We shouldn't be found hiding." So we went out into the back hall just as three "laws" came in, one of them holding a paper. He read out my name. I admitted being Vera Buch. Then he said, "You're under arrest."

"I just want to get my coat."

"Y'all won't need no coat where you're goin'."

I got the coat nevertheless. They motioned to Edith and Caroline, "Y'all come along, too."

Only Going to Jail

We got into a car with one of them and started off. I thought: This is it now, it's what we always expected. We'll be driven out of town, and then we'll . . . I was bracing myself for some unknown fate, when a few minutes later, I saw we were stopping at the city jail. So we were just being arrested after all! My relief was great and actually the walls of the jail looked good to me that night. We were at the beginning of a long night, a night unparalleled in my experience, in which more than once I was grateful for the protection of the jail walls.

They kept bringing in women singly or by two's and three's. Beyond the wall in the men's cell, we heard footsteps and the clanging of doors. Voices, shouts were heard from the courtyard outside. We pictured a crowd swarming out there in the night. The women told us of a real manhunt and womanhunt going on in Loray. The people in the tents had taken refuge in the woods, anyone who had a car had gotten out the minute they heard shots. It was a reign of terror outside: cops and deputies everywhere arresting anyone they could lay their hands on. One woman came in weeping. They had taken her husband also, leaving three little ones crying at home.

Outside men were standing on each other's shoulders to look in the window at us—to get a look at those devils, those snakes, those Bolsheviks they had been reading about for two months in the Gastonia Daily Gazette. I was glad I had my coat. I tied one sleeve to a bar and with someone holding the coat up it served to give some privacy when one of us had to use the toilet. At one point we heard

These photos of the Gastonia organizers appeared in the newspapers the day before the trial. Vera Buch, Amy Schechter, and Sophie Melvin are at the top; Fred Beal at the bottom.

Face Court Fred Irwin Beal (in lower picture) and the three women pictured at top are among those scheduled to go on trial tomorrow in Gastonia in connection with the killing on June 7 of Police Chief Aderholt. In the top picture (left to right) are Vera Bush, Amy Schechter and Sophie Melvin.



screams and thudding sounds from behind the wall. They're beating up the men, we thought. They kept bringing in women. Our cell was full now, and they began filling up the other cell. Some were sitting on the bench, some were squatting on the floor, others standing. The rumble of voices, the scuffling of feet from outside was getting louder.

From outside I heard a loud voice saying: "You take this thing in your hand like this, and you go into the union hall or any other place and you go like this." There was a swoosh, a click inside the corridor, a slight explosion, then our eyes began to smart and tear, our noses to run. My throat, still sore from the policeman's squeezing, felt raw, and the burning went down into my chest. We had been tear-gassed! The shouts outside grew louder.

We all kept talking, commiserating with each other, wondering what had really happened outside, for we each knew only what we had experienced individually. At long last, in the early morning hours, they ceased to bring in people. Both cells were jammed full. The mob outside had finally dispersed. We realized we were weary, needing rest if not sleep. We gave the bench to a pregnant woman among us, while the rest of us curled up as best we could on the limited floor space. It wasn't possible to stretch out. We remained quiet, sleeping brokenly.

The next morning as we got up unrefreshed from the cement floor, the cop came in with two

buckets of water, shoved one into each cell with a dipper. Later the cop brought bags of sandwiches, one apiece. Our discomforts were great; some were nursing bruises from cops' clubs, all of us still had sore eyes and mucous membranes from the tear gas. The woman whose babies were left behind fretted.

The next morning, Sunday, we heard a long, long tolling of the church bells. Later the word leaked in that Chief Aderholt had died the previous night. We staff members knew we were in for something serious. And why was there no word, no sign from outside? Surely the news of this shooting must have been in the papers. Surely the International Labor Defense [ILD] must have gone into action.

We passed the heavy, weary, uncomfortable and interminable days with talk and with ballad singing. All of the local women knew any number of ballads, most of them with rather mournful overtones—or was it the misery, the uncertainty, the tension of our circumstances which made them seem so?

Vera recalls other jail songs, such as "Birmingham Jail" and a popular mill tune, "All Around the Water Tank," to which Ella May Wiggins added the following lyrics describing her friends' long stay in prison.

ALL AROUND THE JAIL HOUSE
by Ella May Wiggins
Tune: All Around the Water Tank,
Waiting for a Train.

All around the jail house
Waiting for a trial,
One mile away from the union hall
Sleeping in the jail.

I walked up to the policeman
To show him I didn't have any fear,
He said if you've got money
I'll see that you don't stay here.

I haven't got a nickel,
Not a penny can I show.
Lock her back up in the cell, he said,
As he slammed the jailhouse door.

He let me out in July
The month I dearly love,
The wide open spaces all around me,
The moon and the stars up above.

Everybody seems to want me,
Everyone but the scabs.
I'm on my way from the jail house
I'm going back to the Union Hall.

Though my tent now is empty,
My heart is full of joy.

I'm a mile away from the Union Hall,
Just a'waiting for a strike.

We were avoiding demoralization, though we sometimes felt like a pack of dirty, smelly, helpless and forgotten animals. We had completely lost track of the days. At long last, the cop opened the door saying, "Y'all kin get out now. You and you [designating the staff members] can come with me. The rest of you kin go home." He led us down the hall to a washroom where we could wash our

hands and faces and smooth our hair. Then outside to be crowded with a large group of the men prisoners into a police van. Edith Miller was allowed to go—why and where she went we hardly had time to think of.

Edith's husband, Clarence Miller, a leader of the Young Communist League, had come down from New York to rescue his wife. And having this higher official handy, the Gastonia officials simply swapped him for his wife and indicted Clarence while freeing Edith.

Relief that the ordeal of the cage was over was paramount. The van jolted off. Needless to say, no inkling was given us as to where we were going. We surmised it was to some other prison. We were all smiling to be together and out, but we were a sorry looking lot, pale, haggard, hollow-eyed, our clothing mussed, all of us definitely thinner. Joe Harrison was not there. I assumed he was still in the hospital. Beal said, with his old sheepish grin, "Jimison thought I was in danger of being lynched. He told me to get out of here as fast as I could. So we headed south. We were near Greenville when they caught up with us.

"I got Bill Hall out. Can you imagine a Negro organizer in this situation? I got some of the fellows to get him from his room. We told them, take him someplace North. Jimison gave me the money and they put him on a train for New York."

Bill McGinnis' shirt had dark dried stains; McGloughlin too had bloodstains. "They done cracked down on me good that first night," McGinnis said.

"Did you hear the Chief died?" Fred whispered to me in an aside as we got out of the wagon. "Where does that leave us?"

We were being taken to a preliminary hearing in Charlotte. That we were questioned, that there were reporters and photographers present is about all I can recall of this event. Back into the paddy-wagon and to Gastonia, this time to the county jail.

We inspected our new premises. The excitement of the morning and the novelty of a new location buoyed us for a while. There had to come a let-down, when, seated on our cots in the quiet of that wing, surrounded by those heavy bars, we became aware of our isolation. In all the days since the shooting, no word, no token had reached us from the outside. We avoided speaking of what was most important—the death of Chief Aderholt.

"Salted Away"

After a few weeks in the cell, the jailer came in holding a document, and taking a stance in the

middle of the floor, he proceeded to read aloud. It was nothing less than our indictment. Sixteen people were listed as having "willfully, wrongfully, unlawfully murdered and conspired to murder the Chief of Police of Gastonia, John Aderholt," First-degree murder and conspiracy was the charge. Strange and unexpected was our reaction to this rather lengthy document. It seemed awfully funny. We laughed as we sat listening on our cots, and so did the jailer. The language of the indictment, quaint and archaic, was funny in itself. Then, the sheer incongruity of the thing. We had been inside the building, the shooting had taken place outside. Two of our group had never held a gun, much less fired one. I had made one single attempt to learn to shoot. The gun, an old musket, had knocked me painfully in the shoulder; where the shot had gone could not be discovered. Picturing myself as a conspirator, with motives of killing someone, was so completely unlikely as to appear ludicrous.

Our most pressing and immediate worry of those first weeks was the failure to receive any work or token whatever from the outside. I told the girls then what I hadn't mentioned before, Albert's confidential description of his position in the party. He might have been ousted from his post in the union by that time. But what of the ILD and the International Workers' Aid (IWA)? That no strikers tried to contact us we could well understand; they would only risk themselves. Nevertheless, as the days piled up into weeks, the feeling of isolation and abandonment grew and grew. In the other cage, miserable though it had been, there was a certain sustenance in being surrounded by so many other people. That we were leaders of the strike meant a certain responsibility; we had to think constantly of keeping up their spirits, and thereby helped our own. Here in this big cell, enclosed by thick walls and bars of heavy steel, the one door locked on the outside, seeing only the Trusty Charley, the jailer, and occasionally his wife, we three sat alone, abandoned it seemed by the whole world.

It was at night in the wakeful silence with the moon outside casting the stark shadow of the bars across cots and floor that the stern realities of our situation pressed most. Sophie, nineteen years old, slept well. She did have a habit of grinding and gnashing her teeth in her sleep, an eerie sound in those surroundings. One night from Amy's cot I heard a quiet sobbing. Should I get up, try to comfort her? I decided not to. Were it I, out of pride I'd rather not be found weeping. And couldn't we all weep? Hadn't we all loved ones far away?

During the period of isolation when time hung heavy on our hands, talking was our chief

resource. Our talks ranged far and wide, so that sometimes we could even forget for a moment where we were, coming back with a jolt to the grim reality. We became thoroughly acquainted with one another, as far as is humanly possible. Sophie, aged nineteen, was stockily built with a cherubic, pretty face. She had a rosy complexion, curly brown hair and big blue eyes. To conceive of this girl as a murderer would always make us laugh. We thought she would be an asset facing a jury. Her parents were foreign-born; she herself may have been born in Russia, coming here as a baby. She had got into the movement early, into the Pioneers, from there moving up to the Young Communist League.

Amy Schechter, age about thirty-seven, had been born in England, her father an Oxford professor. Her childhood had been refined, cultured, a rather prim environment. She told of the fluffy white dresses with blue ribbon sashes she and her sister used to wear on Sundays. From her English days she had a stock of songs which she would sing with a Cockney accent: "Oh girls, oh girls, take warning, and never let it be. Never let a sailor go higher than your knee." How she had got into the movement was not accounted for. We were all such disciplined dyed-in-the-wool comrades that it hardly seemed necessary to explain.

At last after what seemed an interminable period, we had visitors, Juliet Poyntz representing the ILD, accompanied by lawyer Jimison. Poyntz was her usual self, buoyant, lively, optimistic. Their story was that the New York Times had carried a small item on the shooting. The Party had alerted the ILD, sending down to Charlotte a small group consisting of herself, Albert Weisbord, and Jack Johnstone. Gastonia had been in a state of siege, guarded by hundreds of troopers as well as by police and deputy sheriffs. To get into the city was not merely not feasible, it was impossible. So the ILD had been mobilized, defense was being prepared, publicity put out. We didn't need to worry, we would be taken care of now. She was evasive as to what had become of Albert, saying only that he had gone back to New York. Despite the relief that our isolation was at last broken, I had now the new worry as to what had become of my husband.

We could now have papers and reading material, letters and an occasional caller. From time to time I received letters from Ella May Wiggins simply enclosing a new poem she had written. These I dispatched to the Daily Worker. Then came a letter from my mother. I had written to her from Loray and to my father too, emphasizing the dreadful conditions of the Loray workers in order to win some sympathy for the strike. Papa had an-

swered me, his letter ending with this statement: "I appreciate what you are doing, but get out of Gastonia." Mother's letter began, "I never thought I would have to write to my daughter in a jail." Still she remained loyal; my parents did not abandon me.

When I wrote Mother, I asked her to send materials and findings for a dress. In time came a piece of blue linen and one of green silk, a pattern, sewing thread, needles and scissors. With these I could while away some hours sewing and made myself two new dresses. Via the trustee we kept in touch with the men prisoners; sometimes at sundown we thought we could see them. Their part of the jail was the sort of cage in which all cells are opened at once, and the men were let out in the morning into a sort of corridor. One day Beal sent word by Charley his pants were worn out; they had holes in them. What should he do? I sent back word, don't worry, Fred, I'll make you a pair of pants. So from scraps of material left from my blue linen dress, I cut and sewed up a pair of pants of a size for a doll. I stretched this task out for a week, sending news of it every day. Then I made a big package stuffed with newspaper and conveyed the "pants" to Beal. With such innocent parlor tricks did the alleged murderers while away their leisure hours.

Others Decide Our Defense

One important visitor was attorney Leon Josephson of Trenton, New Jersey, a Party member and one of the defense lawyers. Mr. Josephson interrogated us in great detail about the events of June 7th. He had to determine a line of defense. He intimated there was some controversy going on in New York as to the line of defense, especially as to whether or not to admit and defend the Communist background of the strike. We whose lives were at stake had nothing whatever to say on this important matter. Nor were we even informed except what we could divine from the Daily Worker.

Finally, in July, came a letter from my husband dated some place in Connecticut stating merely that he had been working on a farm in Connecticut. In a couple of weeks he would come down to see me. So at last we had a reunion in the cell sitting side by side on my cot.

Albert was thinner and looked strained with all his joy at our meeting. Even though in his last visit he had given some intimation of the deplorable conditions in the Party, it was still shocking to learn what had really happened. It was he who had first seen the notice of the shooting in the New York Times. It was he who had alerted the Party. In Charlotte, Albert had wanted to try to get into Gas-

tonia, but was overruled. Then had come a telegram from the Central Committee; he was to return at once to New York under pain of expulsion. "What could I do, Vera?" he asked. "This was the hardest thing I ever did in my life, to leave then. But alone in Charlotte, I could have done nothing."

This was not all. He had been driven out, literally and physically driven out of the office of the National Textile Workers Union. "Just think, the union I founded and built. Four people came in, Fosterites* I suppose, and literally pushed me out. I couldn't call the police against party members. The Party is on the verge of splits following involvement with the Russian factions. All the leaders are in Moscow fighting for their political lives."

In the earlier period of isolation, Amy, Sophie and I had never squarely faced our situation. Now we began to discuss the indictment more realistically. Was there any possibility of acquittal? To all of us it seemed unlikely. We knew all too well what sort of territory we were in, how all the latent prejudice against unions, against Reds, against outsiders of any sort had been daily inflamed and built up by the Gastonia Daily Gazette. I felt the prosecution had overreached itself in indicting sixteen people. Two or three, yes, they might have got away with it. But sixteen? They had thought we were just a bunch of poor bums. They were now beginning to learn, since our defense was building up, that these bums had broad support.

The conspiracy charge against us was a palpable frame-up. But there was no getting away from the fact that Aderholt had been shot on our premises and that he had died of his wounds. We women had been inside of the building. So had Beal, but most of the defendants had been outside during the shooting. Inexperienced and ignorant as we were in legal matters, we thought then simply in terms of either convictions or acquittal for all sixteen. There were times when awake at night I shudderingly tried to face the threat of my own unwilling and violent exit from this world.

When once in a while a Daily Worker would drift our way we would look for news of the Party situation. The editor was now one Bill Dunne from Minneapolis, a Fosterite. There were, however, occasional mentions of our case, some of them rather sensational. In one piece, we were referred to as the "Gastonia martyrs." This we resented. Were not martyrs people who have died for a cause? Did they consider us as good as dead? Other references were to the danger of lynching for the Gastonia prisoners. This was too much like the Gastonia Daily Gazette. It had never occurred to us, except on that first night, to fear mob action. We felt safe enough in our cell. Still, when a couple of days later we heard sounds in the street like people marching

from a distance, shouts, then the thud of footsteps coming closer, we began to feel uneasy. We asked ourselves what could we possibly do if a mob came. Outside the door to the right was an unused staircase leading upwards. If we could rush up that staircase. . . . but could we possibly do that while the mob was opening the door? We were joking, but our hearts were beating faster and we had a brief moment of fear. Then suddenly a band began to play some patriotic tune. We learned later the day was July 4th and the mob was a parade.

"God Save the State and this Hon'able Co't"

Finally, the date of the trial was set. Our days were exciting, taken up not merely by visitors, but by a turmoil of emotion, anxiety underlying relief and anticipation of a change, no matter what it might be.

The great day came. We were escorted by the jailer across the courtyard. How glaring the sunlight was; how weak my legs! And what was this strange sensation of walking on eggs over the stone pavement?

Inside the courtroom we were turned over to an usher who led us to our places in a long row of seats up front. The seats for visitors were filled, front rows taken up by reporters from across the nation. Batteries of lawyers for the prosecution and the defense were at their separate tables. The scene was a colorful one—women in their light summer dresses, the southern lawyers togged out in whitelinen suits with a flower in each buttonhole. A policeman led in the row of men prisoners, among them Clarence Miller and Joe Harrison, limping slightly. Judge Barnhill came in taking his place and the usher opened court with the statement we were to hear so often thereafter: "The co't of the State of No'th Ca'lina is now in session! God save the state and this hon'able co't." First came the roll call of the sixteen defendants. Having given my response, I could relax enough to enjoy the spectacle of this crowded room with myself and my comrades as the center of attention. Having every expectation of returning to our cell, the session over, I made an effort to overcome the feeling of unreality and really to live fully this moment of freedom.

This first trial of "the Gastonia Case," as it came to be known, was a short one. The defense moved for a change of venue. Testimony was given proving the hostility existing in that city towards the defendants. I was called upon to testify how, in the crowded cell on the night of June 7th, with the mob outside, I had heard from behind the partition sounds of scuffling, blows and a scream. The

change of venue to Charlotte was granted.

Then came an unexpected move of the prosecution. Mr. Carpenter got up to say the state was not asking for the death penalty for the three women. Was it to southern chivalry we owed this sudden magnanimity? In any case, the welcome result was that we three were now admitted to bail. It didn't take long before we were on our way to New York.

The Defense Tour

The few weeks before the reconvening of the trial in Charlotte were spent in a speaking tour taking me as far as Chicago. Noteworthy was the New York meeting—a large hall well filled with an enthusiastic audience. I was the principal speaker. I had chosen to speak on what was then called in the Party the "Third Period," a period in which supposedly the masses were surging forward against capitalism. Probably I wanted to show I was a political person, no mere trade-unionist. But what really meant a great deal to me was that as my eyes ranged over the audience, down there whom should I see sitting in the ranks but my own father. Of course, I ran down there to greet him when the meeting was over. That he had come was heart-warming; I believe he felt some pride in his daughter.

Gastonia in Retrospect

At the end of the hearing in Gastonia, the three women had been admitted to bail. Their experience in the Gaston County jail was over, but the memories were to remain long after. Those long weeks in jail had been a profound period for reflection on the strike and the relationship of the Communist Party to the strike.

You see, we had been on the receiving end. We were out there in a difficult position, in a way a helpless position, because we were so isolated. Far from any center, where we could only appeal to Albert. We knew that he would do his best but he was in difficulties because he had opposed this leadership and they didn't care anything about the workers. They knew little and cared less. Textile workers working sixty hours a week. Starvation wages! They knew but did not care. A complete indifference. The leaders of the party had been in Moscow. Their political lives were at stake. That is what they were interested in. They could not have given one god-damn about textile workers, or strikes, or anything.

In perspective, I see our strike in Gastonia, taken together with the Passaic strike of 1926 as the opening blow of a campaign to organize the unorganized which culminated in 1935 with the organization of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. In the South, hampered as

we were, we felt that had we only more funds and organizers to extend the strike, including other mills and other companies, we might possibly win a victory. This today I must question. Our limitations were part of the historical picture which included the opposition of the A.F.L. and the incompetence of the Communist Party and the treachery of its leaders as well as the opposition of the employers and of the government. In any case, a lost strike is not really lost; if conducted militantly, honestly and effectively, it lays the basis for future battles. If no resistance is attempted against such ferocious exploitation as these textile masters enforced and still do, only hopeless slavery can result. I feel we contributed our bit to the long struggle for freedom.

In a way, I had come into my own there in Loray. I had overcome my old self-doubt. Here there was no one any better than I. We had no well-known leaders, no powerful mass speakers. The Gastonia Gazette once referred to me as "the most important of the organizers," and I suppose I was that. I was on the road to becoming a good public speaker. My voice was clear, though never strong, but I knew how to project it. I was learning not to be afraid, to think on my feet, and what is most important, to establish a rapport with the audience.

I am impressed now with the lack of perspective on that thing. From the beginning, we had known that there was a possibility that we would be driven out or that something would be done, but we had made no plans. We never once sat down and planned, if something bad happens what will we do. We never considered that, never. And I somehow, I just lived from one moment to another without any perspective.

Epilogue

The NTW organizers were not alone in their failure to comprehend the reign of terror which textile bosses of Gaston and Mecklenberg counties would mount against the union. A "Committee of 100," armed and deputized, and headed by Major Bulwinkle, former Congressman and attorney for the Loray Mill, ranged through the two-county area hunting down, beating, and destroying homes of union organizers and supporters.

When the murder trial of the sixteen began in Charlotte on August 26th, the State openly joined forces with the textile rulers of the area. The battery of prosecuting attorneys included Major Bulwinkle, other textile corporation lawyers, and Governor Gardner's brother-in-law, Clyde Hoey, later governor and senator. The attempts of these prosecutors to obtain a conviction extended to hauling into court an effigy of the dead police chief dressed in his blood spattered clothing. Pressure on

the jury was so great that the sight of the effigy drove one juror immediately insane and forced Judge Burnhill to call a mistrial. Five of the jurors announced that the state's case was so weak that they would have voted for acquittal of all the defendants.

This fiasco served only to arouse the Committee of 100 to a new series of search and destroy raids against the offices of the International Labor Defense, the NTW Charlotte offices and other strike organizers. When the union attempted to hold a rally on September 14th, striker and songwriter Ella May Wiggins was singled out and shot through the heart as she rode on a truck with other strikers to the meeting. Her murderers were identified but never brought to justice. A grand jury refused to indict the suspects on the first round. Due to national pressure, a second jury was called and indictments were obtained. The state, of course, presented its weakest possible case, and the fourteen defendants were acquitted within two weeks.

By the beginning of the second trial in September, nationwide protests against "Gastonia-style justice" had reached such a point that charges against Vera Buch, Sophie Melvin and Amy Schechter and six of the thirteen men were dropped. However, Judge Barnhill then allowed the political and religious beliefs of the remaining defendants to be introduced as evidence, thus opening the way for a heresy trial which brought the conviction of seven organizers and strikers: Fred Beal, Clarence Miller, Joseph Harrison, George Carter, W. M. McGinnis, Louis McLaughlin, and K. Y. Hendrix. When the North Carolina Supreme Court refused to hear their appeal, the seven forfeited bond and fled. Beal found temporary refuge in the Soviet Union.

By 1930, both Albert Weisbord and Vera Buch had left the Communist Party.

The Loray Mill continued to operate for several years, although the losses it suffered due to the strike finally closed its doors. Firestone, a major purchaser from Manville-Jenckes, reopened the plant under its own name, and the former Loray Mill is today a major producer of tire yarns. The plant remains unorganized.



Radical Education in the Thirties

By Sue Thrasher

Black Mountain, An Exploration in Community by Martin Duberman. E. P. Dutton and Co., 1972. 527 pp., paper \$4.95.

Educational Commune, The Story of Commonwealth College by Raymond and Charlotte Koch. Schocken Books, 1972. 211 pp., \$6.95.

Unearthing Seeds of Fire, The Idea of Highlander by Frank Adams with Myles Horton. John F. Blair, Publisher. Forthcoming, Spring, 1974.

I believe once more that history is of educative value in so far as it presents phases of social life and growth. It must be controlled by reference to social life. When taken simply as history it is thrown into the distant past and becomes dead and inert. Taken as the record of man's social life and progress, it becomes full of meaning.

—John Dewey

I once had a friend describe Black Mountain College to me as a radical college that Paul Goodman had started in the North Carolina mountains. Goodman was, in fact, at the school for only one summer term, but managed to collect as many apocryphal stories around his person as did the college. I vaguely remember occasional references to Commonwealth, but remember less of the specifics than the fact that the information itself was veiled and in hush-hush tones—implying that the school was either radical or communist, or thought to be communist because it was radical. Fortunately, my memories of Highlander are less dependent on rumor and popularized notions of history. I have sat through many of its workshops, known and worked with its staff, have felt and been grateful for its warmth and presence in my life.

Organizations—not institutions—characterized the political movements of the 60's. Those of us whose political roots are in that decade are familiar with the myriad of organizational structures that we created—and sometimes destroyed. We were not as successful at building institutional structures to sustain us or our movement.

Commonwealth College, Black Mountain College and Highlander Folk School were institutions spawned by the political and social climate of the 30's. Vastly

different, and yet very similar, their individual and collective histories reflect a significant chunk of the energy and creativity of their times. Commonwealth (which actually had its beginnings in the mid-twenties) thought the revolution was at hand, and sought to train its leaders. Highlander unobtrusively began training people—common folk—to take control and power over their own lives. On the surface, Black Mountain seemed more concerned with the revolution in the arts and education than in the streets. Yet, while the college/community never pretended to the social activism that characterized the other two, it was inescapably a political institution. Politics invariably entered into its internal squabbles, and certainly its neighbors viewed it as a radical enclave in the North Carolina hills.

All three institutions shared two major concerns: innovative education and a desire to establish communities of shared purpose. Predictably almost, their outward success was more in the former than the latter. And yet their finest moments are reflected, not in their educational philosophy, but in their stubborn insistence on creating in the present a semblance of the society they envisioned for the future.

Duberman's book on Black Mountain is by far the most impressive of the three—a study of the college/community that is nothing short of remarkable in its thoroughness and tenacity to interpret and sort out the details of a "place created and destroyed by controversy." The book was five years in the making; its research included 100,000 documents in the Raleigh state archives, and numerous taped interviews, letters, and written memoirs.

Duberman makes it clear in the beginning that what follows is his interpretation of Black Mountain: "it is not the last word or the whole word, but my word." He is downright obstinate in his insistence that a historian must make himself known: "his feelings, fantasies, and needs as well as his skills at information retrieval, organization and analysis." He then proceeds to take sides in the college's power struggles (being careful to let us know precisely why he chooses a certain side of an issue, or likes a certain person), inserts himself into faculty discussions on the philosophy of education (making them only slightly less boring), includes notes from his own journal, and references to his own teaching experience at Princeton.

It is a fine performance. Akin, I think, in its impact

to some of the performances he writes about at Black Mountain: Merce Cunningham dancing in the aisles, John Cage playing the prepared piano, or Bucky Fuller performing one of his magic shows. It is intricate in detail, flawless in scholarship, and poignantly sensitive in its portrayal of the extraordinary people who shaped the history of Black Mountain.

Black Mountain was born in dissent in 1932 when John Andrew Rice was fired from Rollins College in Florida. The charges against him ranged from wearing a jockstrap on the beach to alienating a co-ed from her sorority. More to the point, Rice threatened the authority of the Rollins president and forced the issue of academic freedom and faculty rights.

Rice and his entourage of fellow faculty—some fired and some resigning—and their student followers gathered sufficient support over the summer to open their own school the following fall. They had a scanty notion of precisely what kind of institution they wanted to create, and a slightly more pronounced notion of the kind of institution they did not want to create. Definition was to come through process.

Their college/community lasted for 23 years, surviving a depression, a world war, numerous faculty squabbles, and lurking financial doom. Associated with it were some of the most famous names in the arts: Buckminster Fuller, Walter Gropius, John Cage, Merce

Cunningham, Robert Rauschenberg, and later, Robert Creeley, Charles Olson, and Robert Duncan. Many of the famous names came only for short stays, usually the summer institutes; but during the regular school year, Black Mountain was a testing ground for community living and educational innovation. The school folded in 1956 after a rather spectacular period of literary publishing accompanied by—depending on your analysis—internal decline or outward implosion.

The Rollins dissidents had no intention of founding a conventional school. They were reluctant to establish formal rules and guidelines for either governance or lifestyle, feeling that such definitions should come about through the process of living and working together. They wanted values to shape the institution and not vice-versa. Rice was particularly scornful of the progressive education advocates of the day, feeling that Robert Hutchins' "educated man" reflected a conclusion rather than a process: "to arrive at a conclusion was not to arrive at a conclusion, it was to arrive at a pause. And you would look at the pause, you would look at the plateau, and then you would see another thing to climb."

Thus educational philosophy at Black Mountain, like its standards of governance and behavior, was never firmly clarified. There were no required courses, no



Marion Post Wolcott/FSA

A view from the steps of Black Mountain College, 1939.

system of examinations, and no formal gradings. Students were encouraged to shop around, to try out different classes, sample possibilities, and then decide their own schedules. Classes were small, sometimes numbering one student per class, and the format tended more toward group discussions than lectures. Faculty members often attended classes given by other teachers. Decisions about which students would be allowed to return were made in faculty meetings at the end of the year with student officers in attendance. The most generalized standard of evaluation was not classroom performance but "willingness to participate." Given that there were no written rules of conduct, evaluation was often difficult, and when reprimands did come, they were often traumatic;

Although the faculty judged students by wider criteria than those ordinarily used in academia, that meant, as a corollary that a negative judgment was more devastating than ordinarily, for presumably it was based on an assessment of the whole person rather than on some narrow aspect of performance, like grade average. To be disapproved of at Black Mountain. . . was the equivalent of being labeled an unworthy human being—not merely a poor student. . . . The fullness of that indictment made it hard to bear; its vagueness made it terrifying.

Throughout its history, Black Mountain was characterized by schisms and splits. Power plays and suspected takeovers became commonplace among the faculty. As in other struggles the personality conflicts and philosophical differences became so virtually entwined that it was hard to separate the two. The deeper issue, however, almost always had to do with more profound differences. The specifics of each confrontation varied according to historical circumstances (e.g., integration now or later, art vs. social science), but the major contradiction flowing throughout the faculty disputes—indeed the existence of the college—was individual growth and freedom as opposed to a community of shared purpose. Prudence and order as opposed to action and chaos usually won in these disputes, which leads Duberman to point out another dynamic: "the naive, optimistic American played off against the cynical, worldly European."

John Andrew Rice was the first to go, leaving in the aftermath of one power struggle in which he had been the victor, only to lose the second round through an indiscreet love affair with a student. His leaving symbolized the end of the beginning. For seven years he had been the dominant figure, and in his person symbolized much of the community's ambivalence. He was the strong man in the democracy—needed, and yet despised. Duberman's summary is succinct and to the point: *In short, Rice was sometimes put in the double bind which almost all democratic collectives place their leaders: to be one among equals, yet to be graced with superior insights and self-control; to be merely a man, but better than a man.* His parting advice to the

college was no less than prophecy for the years to come: "You have to watch yourselves there . . . that you don't cut off the heads of the best people, and the heads of the worst people in order to make the place comfortable for the mediocre."

By 1949, all of the original founders of the college were gone except Nell Rice, whose role had always been peripheral. The college entered a new era. The financial situation began to worsen. Part of the campus was closed off and then rented as a church camp for boys. Enrollment became smaller and smaller, and the community more internalized. Throughout its last days it was dominated by Charles Olson, later to become known as the father of the Black Mountain poets. Finally in 1956, with nothing else to do really, the school whimpered out of existence. "People simply got in their cars and—usually after a farewell drink with Olson—scattered to their various destinations. It was that simple, that agonizingly simple."

I have few quarrels with Duberman's exploration of the college/community of Black Mountain. I was terribly excited by it on first reading, slightly more restrained on the second and third, yet still totally immersed—in the people, their community, and their historian. The "risks" taken by Duberman made me involuntarily trust the rest of his "intersection with the data," for it is through his own personal absorption and commitment to the subject that he makes the people and the place come alive in a way that few historical narratives are able to do. At least one reviewer has noted that the same technique in the hands of a less engaging writer/person would have been at least boring, and perhaps disastrous. Possibly. But I vote in favor of the gamble.

My only lingering frustration was with the community itself, and a rather foolish, perhaps naive wish that they could have done better. Women, for instance. In Duberman's account—and I suspect any other would be a distortion—women are usually seen within the sphere of a particular man. Fran de Graaf must have been a right-on woman, but she does not escape the shadow of Eric Bentley. Mary Caroline Richards, Anni Albers and Molly Gregory were never principals in a struggle; they merely took sides. At one point during the war, Black Mountain had one male student—and *he* was elected student moderator!

Then there's the question of privilege. How could they, I kept thinking in injured tones, remove themselves to an idyllic mountain setting, and not be the least apologetic. Likewise, how could they have been so damn snotty about the culture they had voluntarily placed themselves in. Annie Albers dismissed the local weaving as "utilitarian," and I can't recall that any of the pottery workshops included or even acknowledged any of the fine old North Carolina potters.

The school was on southern turf by accident; likewise its brushes with the region's people and culture.



Lucien Koch leading contingent from Commonwealth to aid striking miners in Harlan County.

Photo from Educational Commune/Koch

*Their goal was to establish
"an institution . . . that will mark
an epoch in the history of
education for workers."*

Charlotte and Raymond Koch's book on Commonwealth College is a personal remembrance—a recalling of events, relationships, feelings, physical surroundings, and a more intangible quality that essentially amounts to "school spirit." Its subject matter is compelling: a radical labor college in the South that actively supported people's struggles and saw its function to "recruit and train leaders for unconventional roles in a new and radically different society—one in which workers would have power and would need responsible leadership."

The college was established in 1923 by William Edward Zeuch and Frank and Kate Richards O'Hare as a part of the Llano Cooperative Colony in Louisiana. In 1925, the college and other colony dissidents left Llano and moved to Ink, Arkansas. Finally, after still another split, the college moved on to Mena to locate their school. Their goal was to establish "an institution . . . that will mark an epoch in the history of education for workers. . . directed toward the enlightenment of the masses and the reconstruction of society."

Fifteen years later their educational commune was closed by the state of Arkansas for disseminating "propaganda with the intent to encourage and advocate the overthrow of the present form of government of the state of Arkansas and the United States by violence and other unlawful means." The school's property and assets were confiscated and auctioned off for a mere pittance. Commonwealth remains on the infamous Attorney General's list to this day. Its faculty and students have long since scattered—many of them disavowing their association with the school.

Even its history is a casualty of the McCarthy era. Few names are used in the Koch's book. Faculty members and staff who figured prominently in the school are identified by initials only, and the faces on the photographs are carefully covered by large black squares to hide their identity.

As welcome as the Koch's book is, it is still insufficient for its subject. Its overall impact is a rather glib accounting of a romantic time and place. It succeeds quite well in conveying a "feel" for Commonwealth, its physical surroundings, daily work and study routines, and even the school's administration. Unanswered, however, are several important questions. For instance, how did a radical labor college like Commonwealth relate to its rural environment? The Arkansas neighbors are presented as generally friendly folks who liked to square dance and occasionally nip at corn liquor. Yet the state was able to close down the school, apparently with the support and encouragement of at least some of Mena's residents.

There are at least two incidents of embarrassing cultural elitism. At one point, Commonwealth students attended a local fundamentalist church and pretended to get religion. On another occasion a Commoner, upset about the metaphysical beliefs of the Arkansas neighbors, stood outside a church service and lectured the people as they came out on the fallacy of their religious beliefs.

Equally important in its absence is the authors' failure to deal in more concrete and in-depth fashion with the factionalism and sectarianism that characterized the political times, and certainly Common-

wealth. Commonwealth's work with the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU) is presented as one of the college's major accomplishments. Yet other sources indicate that Commonwealth's involvement was peripheral, as well as disputed, and that it had more to do with the national policies of the Communist and Socialist parties than the objective conditions of the sharecroppers.

Again and again the brashness of the Commoners grates. Nevertheless, they remain kindred souls. Their "field work" included such projects as working with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers in Corinth, Mississippi, and the destitute miners of Oklahoma and Mississippi. Some of them joined the Lincoln Brigade in Spain. In 1934, a workers museum was established at the college that sought to show the sharp contrasts of a decaying society. Ezra Pound, H.L. Mencken, and Albert Einstein were among those who sent items. Mencken, who was apparently delighted with the idea wrote:

You may trust me to assemble suitable materials. . . . You have hit upon a capital idea, and it is the duty of every Christian patriot to help you further it. . . . I am trying to get you a plush collection bag with a gilt pole. They are hard to come by, but I have opened negotiations with the colored sexton of a High Church Episcopalian basilica, and he promises to be amenable.

Commonwealth did not boast many Southerners, but the ones it had were exceptional. Claude Williams came to Commonwealth as director of the school in 1937, a time of transition and change for the school itself. As a Presbyterian minister in Paris, Arkansas, he had been active with both the striking coal miners and with the STFU. Finally—and to his credit, only after a long struggle—the church elders were able to dislodge him from his church. His stay at Commonwealth was brief; he soon moved on to begin the Institute of Applied Religion, first in Evansville, Indiana, and later in Detroit.

Orval Faubus was Commonwealth's best known Southerner. He was president of the student body during the spring term of 1935. Faubus's father, Sam, was apparently a staunch Socialist up until his death, and continued to distribute socialist literature in Northeast Arkansas while his son was still serving his term as governor at the school house door. Orval, himself, tried to deny his ties with Commonwealth and with socialism, yet father Sam wrote to a Commonwealth student in 1932:

Dear Comrade: My son Orval and I have arranged to debate with two teachers at St. Paul on October 21. The question will be stated as follows. Resolved—that socialism would be better for a majority of the people than the present capitalist system. I want you to send all the information on this subject that you can. . . .

Other notables came and went from the Commonwealth campus. Sis Cunningham and Lee Hays of the Almanac Singers both spent time at the school. Hays, a native Arkansan, wrote and produced several plays

while he was there, and later helped form The Weavers. Kenneth Patchen was a one-time student, and Kate Richards O'Hare continued to come and go from the campus. Oscar Ameringer left his editing duties in Oklahoma City with the *American Guardian* "to spend some time with my kids."

Like Black Mountain there is lingering frustration; in this case as much with the book as with the people. The Koches never acknowledge the chauvinism—both political and cultural—that was so pervasive at Commonwealth. The Commoners approached Arkansas with something akin to missionary zeal, and their stay in the Ozarks reflected that attitude.

Perhaps the most touching aspect of the book is the authors' ability to recapture the Commoners shared sense of purpose and absolute belief in what they were about. Melancholia sets in when the final product of that confidence of being on the revolution's edge is reduced to anonymity. Who are these people whose faces we are not allowed to see? What happened to them after they left Commonwealth? What would they say now about that time in their lives? Obviously, for all too brief a time they were part of something very special. I wish they could share more of it—and themselves—with us.

In 1932 Myles Horton and Don West hitchhiked into middle Tennessee, settled into an old stone house on top of Monteagle Mountain and began classes in adult education. On the surface, Highlander Folk School had even less direction and purpose than Black Mountain. Although Horton had dreamed of opening a mountain school for the previous five years, his guidelines were sparse: "Get a simple place, move in, you're there, the situation is there. . . you start with this and let it grow. . . it will build its own structure and its own form. . . ."

The idea for Highlander began in 1927 when Horton, then a student at Cumberland University, spent a summer working in the small community of Ozone, Tennessee. During the community meetings that he organized, he began to explore the idea that people do not have to be taught (i.e., told) about their problems. Rather, given an opportunity, they could articulate their own needs and search for the answers.

After finishing his last year at Cumberland, Horton went to Union Theological Seminary in New York where Reinhold Niebuhr became an early mentor and subsequently a lifelong friend of the school. During his time at Union, Horton read all he could on the early utopian communities and was heavily influenced by John Dewey. Adams notes that one of the early descriptions of Highlander is a thinly veiled crib from Dewey: *It is the aim . . . of education to take part in correcting unfair privilege and unfair deprivation, not to perpetuate them. . . it must take account of the needs of the existing community life; it must select with the*



Photo courtesy of State Historical Society of Wisconsin

Early Highlander staff: Tom Ludwig, Myles Horton, Catherine Winston, and Zilphia Horton.

intention of improving the life we live in common.

Later came a year of study at the University of Chicago and time spent at Hull House with Jane Addams. Finally, then, a year in Denmark to study the Danish Folk Schools.

Highlander's place and situation furnished sufficient guidelines for the type of school that Horton and West envisioned. Grundy County was one of the poorest counties in the country; over 50% of its population was on relief. (By 1938, the figure had climbed to 80%.) Six years after its inauspicious beginning, the school staff had helped organize ten union locals in the county, a union for WPA workers, and a cooperative community nursery. Regular classes were held each week in psychology, cultural geography, labor history, revolutionary literature, and social and economic problems. In his Christmas letter that first year Horton noted that a special two week course for boarding students was being planned, and that "some of the students would come from the strike area around Wilder, Tennessee."

Highlander worked closely with the CIO in its early days, and by 1936 had developed a three-phase educational program consisting of residence courses, extension work, and community activities. Residence courses ran for six weeks at a time and consisted usually of participants selected by their local unions or college students interested in education. The extension program was operated in conjunction with the unions and a few farm organizations. Study groups were often set up by extension workers, sometimes at picket lines. Strike support and manpower for organizing drives were also a part of a student's homework.

Another concept of teaching that Highlander learned early was "peer" teaching. Formally educated

staff members were never as effective in teaching as the people themselves, once they were able to articulate their needs and the urgency of them to others.

Although its program was different, its problems were similar to those of Black Mountain and Commonwealth. While Highlander attempted to mesh the social and physical setting to make the school a way of life, it was no utopia. The staff was young, constantly changing, and usually in desperate want of money; thus the pressures and the tensions were severe. Petty annoyances often became major sources of friction. . . . On the whole, however, the staff tried to live in a way which would demonstrate for the students the sort of new social order they envisioned, one built on brotherhood, democracy, and cooperation.

Despite its efforts—and to a degree its impressive success—to build understanding and support within its immediate community, Highlander came under early attack. Preachers and millowners were the most vocal. At one point they were joined by the state administrator of the WPA who proclaimed: "A communist organization has for months been feeding muscovite hopes to relief clients in Grundy County. . . ." The WPA union responded:

A man died a few days ago of starvation. . . . We are desperate forgotten men in these mountains, for weeks we have attempted by every peaceful means to show the WPA district administrator that conditions imposed on us are intolerable. We are trying to deal with this situation without violence, but it is more difficult to restrain hungry men when they see WPA funds squandered illegally by officials.

Perhaps it was easier then for Highlander to fight off repression. Union support and massive unrest among the under- and unemployed made for different times. However by 1949, the end of an era was ap-

proaching. The CIO, in the process of expelling the Communists, was miffed at the school's refusal to sever its working relationship with the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers. Under the circumstances, Highlander's principled statement of purpose did not deter the CIO from sending out a directive telling locals to stop using the school. The school held to its position:

The purpose of the Highlander Folk School is to assist in creating leadership for democracy. Our services are available to labor, farm, community, religious and civic organizations working toward a democratic goal. The nature of the specific educational program will be determined by the needs of the students. Use of the services of the school by individual organizations will be in accordance with their own policies so long as those policies do not conflict with the purpose of the school.

Throughout the 1950's, Highlander's participation in the movement for black equality increased. Citizenship education classes were begun on John's Island, under the able direction of Mrs. Septima Clark, and as that quiet decade drew to a close, several meetings were held at Highlander of young black college students who were later to become the nucleus of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

This time around, integration meant communism, and the school came under heavy attack. Its charter was revoked, and the school's property and assets auctioned off by the state for \$53,700. The school received no compensation.

Unlike Commonwealth, the Highlander idea was far from dead. A new charter was applied for under the name Highlander Research and Education Center and the Center shortly reopened in Knoxville. It continued active involvement with the civil rights movement throughout the 60's. In the mid-sixties as the roving picket movement was gaining momentum in the coalfields of Kentucky, Highlander became active once again with the Appalachian movement. The Center is

currently located on a farm near Knoxville and carries on an active program of educational workshops and support organizing.

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In the beginning of Mississippi Summer, 1964, a group of us who were to work solely with the white community in Mississippi that summer went to Highlander for our second week of "orientation training." The old stone house overlooking the river seemed a welcome respite from the chaotic nature of the orientation at Oxford University in Ohio. For days we sat around in the frumpy old meeting rooms discussing in confused and muddled fashion our battle plan. Some talked romantically about the possibilities for organizing poor whites and blacks into a working coalition. Others thought we would be lucky to find a few timid souls who might want to tell us in secret that they were in favor of our goals. Looking back now, I don't think it really mattered, for it wasn't until we had a "place" and a "situation" that we began to comprehend the depth of the racism and the fear of white Mississippians that summer.

Toward the end of the week, we packed a picnic lunch and headed for the mountains. That afternoon as we were driving in the magnificent beauty of the Smokies, we heard the news on the car radio about the deaths of Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner. I remember only the silence.

Halfway down the mountain, we stopped for a prearranged visit with Florence and Sam Reece. Somehow or other as we sat around their living room that night, and listened to Florence sing "Which Side Are You On" and tell us how she came to write it, and about the times she and Sam had helping to organize the miners in "Bloody Harlan," the iciness began to slip away. Before we left that evening, Florence and Sam had "rooted" us in our history, had helped us see ourselves as neither the beginning nor the end, but simply a part of the process.



Front of main building of Highlander at Monteagle

Photo courtesy of State Historical Society of Wisconsin

the Constancy of Change

By Neill Herring

The Mind of the South by W. J. Cash. Alfred A. Knopf, 1941. Vintage Paperback, 440 pp., \$2.45.

Recently reading W.J. Cash's monumental *Mind of the South* for the first time, I experienced what could only be called awe at a written work. Having grown up a white southerner, I knew full well the body of common experience I shared with my fellows, but had always been content in the notion that such stuff was basically attitudinal and inexpressible. Cash's work came like light to a darkened room in which I had stumbled and felt and known but never seen.

Since the sweep of the book is surpassed only by the pretensions of its title I would like to deal with the limitations in scope initially so as to avoid a posture which might be construed as carping in conclusion. When Cash speaks of the southern mind he is speaking very pointedly of the white, male, and generally upper-class mind. To a tremendous extent he is speaking of his own mind. Although in such a frame he is obviously ill-suited to deal with the black or female mind, he unfortunately attempts to anyway. Even though I would hesitate to disparage all of his efforts in such directions, the net effect is to mar the remainder of the work with an embarrassing unevenness. At his worst Cash is capable of a racism which is quite venal:

The plantation however, involved even more than these things. As we know, it had fetched in the Negro. But the Negro is notoriously one of the world's greatest hedonists. I am well aware that, when it is a question of adapting himself to necessity, he is sometimes capable of a remarkable realism. But in the main he is a creature of grandiloquent imagination, of facile emotion, and, above everything else under heaven, of enjoyment.

Even so, a kind of balance is met by the relentless verity of his very powerful analyses of

white racism:

As we know, race feeling had nothing to do directly with the tendency to mob action in the Old South. So long as the Negro had been property, worth from five hundred dollars up, he had been taboo—safer from rope and faggot than any common white man, and perhaps even safer than his master himself. But with the abolition of legal slavery his immunity vanished. The economic interest of his former protectors, the master class, now stood the other way about—required that he should be promptly disabused of any illusion that his liberty was real, and confirmed in his ancient docility. And so the road stood all but wide open to the ignoble hate and cruel itch to take him in hand which for so long had been festering impotently in the poor whites.

Further:

In other words, the old scale of values, so far from being overturned by the new conditions, would be once more strengthened and confirmed. Economic and social considerations remained, as ever, subordinate to those of race—and country. And such being the case, why, now, as always in the past, it was ultimately quite impossible for the common white to do anything effective about his economic and social plight; and so, of course, quite useless for him to develop class awareness.

As for the mind of the female south, Cash's flaws are of the traditional nature—the subject passes all but unmentioned. What Cash does do, and likewise with a deadly accuracy, is analyze the relationship of rape to lynching. While he traces lynching to the antebellum period, portraying it as the swift justice meted out in a society which had little use for governmental courts, he shows its transformation after the war into an individualistic, swash-buckling institution in protection of "white southern womanhood." In the face of the Negro's entrance into politics, the white southerner idealized his desire to dominate the Negro into a stance of protecting southern "ideals," epitomized in the myth of a pedestaled



Arthur Rothstein/FSA

white southern woman. Since the southerner has an apparent compulsion to reduce the political to the personal, Negro participation in the political life of the region was seen as an attack on the "purity" of the white race. Thus a sexist mythostructure was utilized to transform lynching from a simple, yet cruel, expression of an individualistic, violence-ridden culture into a political tool for the suppression of black political strength. Only when we reach the 1930's does Cash reveal any aspect of women's own reactions to all of this with notice of the Association of Southern Women For the Prevention of Lynching, a mention which includes no examination of the roots of the movement.

The kind of limitation imposed by the class bias is much more subtle and is perhaps entirely unavoidable. In dealing with the southern mind, Cash is more often than not speaking in ideological terms—that is in terms of the socially constructed reality of the region. Since that reality is both forged and tempered by the worldview of the ruling elements in the society those factors are at once the

clearest and most dominant. While this notion is never stated in these terms, it becomes apparent in his analysis of various myths in southern life as they reflect different levels in the class and caste structure of the society.

The most fascinating limitation in the work is also the source of one of its strengths: Cash's passionate involvement with his theme which gives rise to, and is mirrored by, his splendid style. In discussing the arid intellectual life of the south from antebellum through post-reconstruction, over and over again he bemoans the lack of criticism and accompanying detachment. Yet Cash continues to delight with capitalized references to Yankees and Yankeedom. The period of Reconstruction is throughout referred to with the Radical adjective: "Thorough Reconstruction." He writes almost disparagingly of the southern love of rhetoric, while describing it in language so rich as to drive the reader to the dictionary almost with the turning of the page. It is precisely this contradictory presentation which imparts the power of his wholly dialectical analysis.

Even though Cash seems to have a rather low opinion of what has passed for Marxism in American thought, his entire work is suffused with a sense of order springing from a loving analysis of the contradictory forces shaping the southern mind. The complex interaction of these social forces, each containing its own historical dialectic, is the substance of *The Mind of the South*. The reflecting aspect of style is faithful even to the tempo of the various periods examined, as the ponderosity of the Old South meets the fever pitch of war followed by the enervated stagnation of the Reconstruction era. As Populism and industrialism rise simultaneously, the pitch increases until a kind of culmination is achieved in the 1920's and '30's, a period described in a contemporaneity of language which contrasts severely with earlier sections. Cash orchestrates the development of events and ideas with a firm grip on the onward march maintaining a fine eye for detail. Every nuance, each isolated subtlety is woven into the broad sweep, the thread of lineage forever bared.

Cash shows southern culture growing on its economic bases, developing social peculiarities which forever respond to changes in the mode of production but always in terms of the tradition from which it has sprung. The bulk of the narrative is characterized in terms of what Cash chose to term Frontiers, beginning with the actual frontier settlements in the wilderness which remained unaltered in the mountain and hill country up until the present century. He then explores the cotton frontier created by the advance of cotton (and tobacco) agriculture as the old lands were exhausted and more and more came under the plantation system of labor intensive cultivation. From these two frontiers the unique social and economic classes of the south emerge: the plantation spawning the planter ruling class upon the back of the black slave class and the up-country giving rise to Cash's beloved white yeomanry, and also the poor white. While the contradictory elements within each of these subsections work to create their history, it is the interaction between them that continues as a motor force in the region throughout the work.

While the planter class, culturally rooted in the coastal settlements of the eighteenth century, built an ideology of aristocracy, the uplanders held to a Jeffersonian Democracy, a concept of social egalitarianism entirely foreign to the feudal posturings of their planter cousins. Spreading through the entire region at the same moment, however, is a common agrarian culture, a unifying perspective composed of an array of subjective elements which tend, in Cash's view, to build a common southern mind. Each of these subjective

factors is not seen as immutable, for all are portrayed as being composed of contradictory parts, each part depending on its opposites for definition and meaning. All of these are rooted in the basic simplicity of the culture, a simplicity Cash attributes to the completely agrarian economy and the marvelously mild climate of the region. Survival, while a burning issue during the initial clearing of land, tended to recede as the years accumulated, and a native romanticism appeared in an environment no longer hostile and demanding of practicality. But the romanticism is invariably a mythic mask for the expedient. What better way could be sought to rationalize the moral odiousness of slavery than to cloak the motives of the slaveholders in aristocratic paternalism? And the paternalism of the planter is also put to immediate use in relating to his cousins in the hills, creating the deferential attitude in them necessary to maintain hegemony, cemented with the carcinoma of white supremacy. The poorer whites are far from the innocent bystanders in the process. Even though deprived of access to the more arable land, and therefore, full participation in the cash crop economy, they are at least self-sufficient, and more importantly, freed from the yoke of rural wage slavery by the existence of the slave class. Their ideology and cultural life seem to reflect an awareness of this privilege which flies in the face of the essentially democratic aspects of the frontier heritage.

Other cultural aspects explored are the intellectual life and the religion of the south. In the world of thought, Cash sees the southerner forever a tyro, romantically incapable of self-criticism and examination. He is essentially anti-intellectual, but possessive of a deep and ignorant respect for classical learning. While acknowledging some exceptions Cash disparages the overall culture:

In general, the intellectual and aesthetic culture of the Old South was a superficial and jejune thing, borrowed from without and worn as a political armor and badge of rank; and hence [I call the authority of old Matthew Arnold to bear me witness] not a true culture at all.

Of religion and morality, contradictory elements once again rear their heads, a rigid doctrinal puritanism coexisting and feeding on hedonism. A hedonism utterly dependent on moral circumscription is posited. The delight in the *verboden* occurs primarily because it is *verboden*. Such a moral life easily gives over to the precipitous violence and craven venality which have been the hallmarks of those dark aspects of the southern character which so often attract the attentions of detractors.

Cash sees as the single unifying strain in all of

southern culture an individualism, born of the frontier and weaned through myth, constantly imposing itself on reality, rewarding its faithful with a lack of understanding, demanding outlets that naturally reinforced it. It is this individualism, common throughout the white culture, which Cash sees as reinforcing the romantic's inability to develop anything remotely resembling class consciousness. The ideology existed in both the planter and yeoman classes and had its base in the fact that, in the agrarian economy of the region, individual advancement was not only possible but did occur often enough to maintain the fictions about thrift, hard work, and initiative. Cash sees the "best elements of the non-ruling white classes—the elements in those classes who would make up the leadership if they were to move politically—constantly moving upward in individual status, thus robbing the classes of their spokesmen by removing their initiative to political, that is, class, action. From the yeomanry could well spring the newly wealthy planter, and many a planter could find himself likewise reduced by circumstance. With these cross currents working themselves out in a social milieu in which kinship was a vital component, class consciousness becomes a sticky question indeed. Add the Calvinist notions of election and rewards in this life and a concrete basis for paternalism and individualism clearly emerges.

As the Agrarian South moved inexorably toward conflict with the industrializing north, southern culture and mind evolved into patterns which would be condemned to near permanence by the historical forces at play in the nation. Cash proposes the idea of a new frontier emerging in the south with the end of the Civil War and the coming of Reconstruction. This frontier was that of a defeated nation and people, attempting to deal with a new reality far more hostile and nakedly aggressive than any which they previously confronted. And the pitiful and unresilient culture upon which they had to build was woefully weak in the face of such a harsh environment. The period which Cash calls "Thorough Reconstruction" is seen as a bleak time, drawing forth the worst, but apparently strongest aspects of the southern mind. The Negro's admission to the body politic with the simultaneous exclusion of most of the antebellum ruling class was simply more than the southerner could accept. With his faulty but heartfelt ideology rendered a shambles by force of arms, and the economic base of that ideology entirely shattered, Cash sees the South retreating ever more rigidly into the repressive dark abyss of hatred, suspicion, and above all, chauvinism. His defeat was a divine test of faith, an assurance of the moral triumph to

come. Against the adversity of the Yankee, the southerner saw an almost Hegelian progression to the Idea of the South, a romantic-cloud cuckoo-land of half truths and complete myths.

This new frontier, then, was a period of stagnation and actual regression, a fertile soil for change, a change which would be wrought by the exigencies of life in a nation rushing headlong into world capitalist leadership. Two currents began to emerge late in the nineteenth century: Populism and Progress. Populism was a political expression of agrarian discontent mixed with a religious fervor and a conspiratorial analysis of American capitalism. Doomed to failure by an innate inability to cope with the irreversible triumph of Capital, it spent itself in the south by contributing demagoguery to a political system already steeped in personality politics. While it briefly raised the hope of interracial political cooperation in the face of common oppression, its ultimate failure was to seal the fate of such for generations.

The other force, which Cash calls Progress, arose at the same time as Populism, but embodied a much more potent idea: capitalism. While the ideologues had decried capital as the lifeblood of Yankeeism, younger and more practical minds had realized that the only way the South could ever recover its economic life was through industrial development. By presenting Progress as the vehicle by which redemption could be met they were able to rattle both the Confederate sabre and the tills of the counting houses. But capital didn't come cheap.

The advent of industrial capital in the South was to wring changes in the social fabric which even the 1970's have yet to see the end of. For the first time, the old individualism was bent to the yoke of wage labor on a significant scale; class consciousness, long deferred by race, kinship, paternalism, and chauvinism, would finally begin its infant stirrings. While Progress initially preserved, and to some extent strengthened existing patterns (such as white supremacy by denying access to industrial work to black people), the ultimate social and political changes caused by industrial capitalism was the death knell for the old system of rule by a universally acknowledged elite. The new order brought rule by purchase, ultimately even admitting the hated Yankee to political power within the region.

It was this social environment, a capitalist economy erected under an old culture, a culture fraught with contradiction, which was the south of the 1930's. After the national frenzy of the 1920's in which vast portions of the south participated, a genuine working class with class attitudes and institutions had emerged. But paralleling this development, there simultaneously were to be

found vestiges of every other period of the region's development. These vestiges often found their way into the character of the new working class as well as existing separately across the south.

The old feudalism still existed, crumbling in the system of cotton tenancy, yet many of those latter day serfs would find their way into industrial production. Likewise the old religious moralism continued, but in ever more orgiastic frenzy as if the end were getting nearer. The old paternal politics were (and are) still very much in evidence, but the demagogues styled as populists now set the tone in a frantic, desperate racism. And the 1930's saw the Negro, the pariah central to the culture and economy of the south, entering the political life of the region for the first time since Reconstruction had ended.

With the coming of capital, public education had finally commenced in the South; a new

intellectual life began to stir in the literature, in the colleges, and even to a limited extent, in the political arena. For the first time in the history of the region a criticism emerged, a criticism in which *The Mind of the South* is a mighty milestone.

But if the 1930's were a time of ferment and change in the region, as can be easily seen by reading the other articles in this issue of *Southern Exposure*, what then did the succeeding decades bring? W.J. Cash committed suicide in 1941, after *The Mind of the South* was published. At that time a new force was at play which would alter the shape of the South and the entire nation. Following almost a decade of economic depression, America turned to the tried-and-true method of ending economic stagnation: war production. As the growth of capital accumulation throughout the present century had at first slowly but more and



Marion Post Wolcott/FSA

more rapidly integrated the southern economy with that of the nation, it remained for that mighty explosion of industrial production during the war years to complete the process.

The southern working class grew apace, but this growth came in an era in which the processes of capitalism and the processes of the state were merging to become one. With the effective suppression of the Left in American society, the transformation of the labor movement into a highly rationalized bargaining machinery, and the overall militarization of the economy, the American working class seemed to join in what C. Wright Mills has called the "American Celebration." Practically uninterrupted expansion of the economy and employment made for a new intensity of industrializing forces in the South. The relative freedom from the boom and bust cycle traditional to capital's history seemed to not only blunt radical theory but also to sap any real political initiative along class lines. But in the South another, parallel development seemed to work even more effectively to strap class politics: the abolition of legal segregation.

Segregation had been constructed in the southern legal system with a real vengeance in the period from 1890 to 1920 in an effort to hamstring any effort uniting the black and white working class in a populist-type alliance. While the forces leading up to segregation's demise are too complex to comprehend in an essay of this sort, the net effect of the civil rights movement upon the class consciousness of the white South was almost wholly negative initially. Once again class, already muted by arsenal-state prosperity, was submerged before the issue of race. Union growth in the South, a traditional, if not wholly accurate, barometer of class sentiment, was all but non-existent. Yet the forces of reaction seemed to multiply as racist governors continued to sit in the region's statehouses, and a political movement called "massive resistance" proliferated through Citizens Councils, the rejuvenated Klan, and violent demonstrations at any attempt on the part of black people to exercise basic human rights.

These forces did not grow in a vacuum, however, for the power of the black movement grew even more dynamically than that of reaction. This movement carried within it the force of history, a power that would commence the destruction of the foundation stone of white racism, that would bring the possibility of class politics to the South for the first time in the region's long, oppressive heritage.

For with political initiative in the hands of black people, a people overwhelmingly working class in composition, a class consciousness would

inevitably emerge as victories in the purely "social" sphere proved increasingly hollow in face of the realities of working class life in America. As the national economy and, subsequently, the regional economy entered into the war-wrought stagnation of the 1960's and 1970's, new possibilities seemed to emerge. The present period in our economy most closely resembles that of the 1920's with a frantic speculation pacing an economy centered on the contradiction of inflation and unemployment.

As the crisis deepens, we can see emerging the possible outlines of a class-based politics. What is not so clear is the specific forms which will prove necessary to give substance to that movement. In this regard the lessons of Cash may prove quite valuable in answering questions which must be raised. What political form is most suited to the region's heritage? What is necessary to deal with the fact that the South has supported but one political organization (or lack thereof) for all its history? What relationship exists between the undeniable individualism of the culture and socialism's long promised "free development of personality?" Will the white working class, long suffering for a lack of anything other than racist leadership turn to the leading forces in the black working class, or will the black leadership be siphoned off into the capitalist ruling class? The answers to these and similar questions will be apparent as time passes; but Cash's South is surely the predecessor of today's, and many of the same factors, plus some new ones, will find a place in the region's history. Multiplicity of causation is probably the most significant notion in Cash's perspective, and those multiple causes of events will continue to confute any analysis which tries to circumvent them with grander designs. Even though it is true that the working class is reaching maturity in the industrialized portions of the region, it is no less true that that same segment of the population most readily traces its roots back to agrarian parentage. While industrialization makes its traditional waste of the nuclear family, we see extended kinship relationships strengthened.

From Cash we learn the constancy of change and the contradictory relationships in society which foster the dialectic process. We should never rest content with our work, for each discovery should force into view another, and only from relentless pursuit of the facts will we ever develop an analysis worthy of the name. Theory which lends itself too readily to slogan is our Nemesis, for destiny provides us with quite enough pitfalls to warrant an avoidance of traps of our own making.

other books

On Dark and Bloody Ground: An Oral History of the U.M.W.A. in Central Appalachia, 1920-35. A National Endowment for the Humanities Youth-grant Report, 1973.

Dark and Bloody Ground is "an oral history of the U.M.W.A. in Central Appalachia 1920-1935." It also includes an interview with Joe Ozanic, a leader of the Progressive Mine Workers from Illinois, who was a leader against John L. Lewis' autocratic seizure of the Illinois district in the 1920's. Those portions of the book dealing with the Central Appalachian field are the bulk of the work and consist of a goodly number of "interviews" with folks involved in mining and union work from West Virginia (concentrating on the Blair Mountain war), Kentucky and Virginia. While it is hard to fault the lengthy accounts of some of the interviewees about their personal involvement in the various struggles around the organizational efforts of the United Mine Workers, the same can't be said of the interviewers.

The interviews are preceded by subjective descriptions of the persons being interviewed, the environment in which the taping took place, etc. Unfortunately, many of the "interviews" are limited to just this description with only a line or two of actual text. This arrangement is unfortunate, not only due to the limited descriptive skills of some of the interviewers, but because the interviewees are slighted in favor of sophomoric efforts. If the material wasn't that informative, why not just leave it out altogether? In addition, the tone of many of the descriptions is quite condescending, a peculiarly irritating trait in view of the youth and apparent inexperience of the interviewers.

None of which is to slight the value of the work as a whole, for much valuable information is found in the book. The accounts of the battle of Blair Mountain reveal the

coal operators' complicity on both sides of the violence, with company commissaries providing arms on credit, both for and against the union. Another interesting aspect of the interviews is the revelation that the relationships in which the people and the coal operators found themselves were due to a variety of factors apart from the simple question of class. Familial relations and geography are seen by the participants as important determinants in the choices made by individuals in the question of unionism and coal. This view of multiple causation in the events of the Appalachian field in the '20's and '30's is a healthy antidote to the often "loaded" left wing versions of the struggles, in which class-conscious workers are pitted against merciless bosses in a death struggle with universal implications. Any attempt to convert history into morality drama through factual distortion serves neither history nor the cause for which it is intended. Human beings and their activities are marvelously complex and contradictory; to oversimplify them is to shrink from analysis and to fall into dogma, a course which has borne little but bitter fruit in the past. As a leftist, I believe that truth is "on our side" in history, we should deal with it as we find it, not as we would like it to be.

The power of oral history is in its revelation of essential truths as seen by the participants, and even though that is no guarantee against distortion, at least more than one side of the story is revealed when several accounts are taken. The reader has much more control over interpretation than is normally afforded by the rarefied accounts of academic axe-grinders.

Neill Herring
Atlanta

The people of Southern Appalachia have been faced with some of the most grievous problems saddling anyone in the US. Not only is their land itself being ravaged by the horror of strip-mining, but the two major industrial employers in the region, the coal mining and textile companies, have spawned the most dreadful of occupational diseases: black lung (caused by accumulated inhalation of coal dust) and brown lung (caused by particles of fiber in the lungs). In addition, the economic depression of the area has led to the migration of many mountain families to the cities of Ohio and elsewhere in pursuit of a livable income.

Kathy Kahn's *Hillbilly Women* is a collection of statements by a spectrum of mountain women from Southern Appalachia. Each woman's chapter is primarily autobiographical and between them they cover a broad range of concerns and emphasize the primary role that women have had in the struggles of the region: efforts to organize mine and mill workers, the recent struggle to end strip-mining and the attempt to come to terms with the welfare system that embarrasses and degrades those it "serves;" all these efforts have depended largely on the skills and strength of women.

Like the people whose autobiographical sketches of the Great Depression appeared in Studs Terkel's *Hard Times*, the women in Kahn's book have not had it easy. Florence Reece, whose song "Which Side Are You On?" was passed on to a different generation of struggle in the '60s, worked in the union movement in Harlan County, Kentucky in the '30s:

I've seen little children, their little legs would be so tiny and their stomachs would be so big from eating green apples, anything they could get. And I've seen grown men staggering they was so hungry. One of the company bosses said he hoped the children'd have to gnaw the bark off the trees.

The ones that don't want the poor to win, that wants to keep us down in slavery, they'll hire these gun thugs, like they did over in Harlan County, to beat the workers down.

And all in the world we people wanted was enough to feed and clothe and house our children. We didn't want what the coal operators had at all, just a decent living.

Times have been hard for Wyoming Wilson, whose husband died of injuries suffered in a mining accident. She was the daughter of a Harlan County organizer and was never compensated for her husband's death. She took her six children to Cincinnati and has spent her life there working in restaurants and factories:

After living in the country, living in an apartment house seemed like living in a jail till I got used to it. Even now I get restless, get out and take walks whenever I can, just to get outside. . . . I would live in Kentucky if they just had some factories for people to work in.

Times ahead continue to look hard for many folks. Nancy Kincaid and her family of nine in West Virginia lost their home to a strip-mining operation in 1967. The tiny settlement they finally won from the company paid the down-payment on a new house which is now threatened by yet another strip-mine.

We would ask the company to keep the water off us. They would say it wasn't their fault, that it was an "act of God." My father-in-law said to them, "Is it an act of God that told you to go up there and tear the mountains up and let the water come down on us?"

There are women here who have found a measure of success in the struggle: Granny Hager, widow of a black lung victim, finally managed to receive the benefits enacted by Congress in 1969 and is organizing others to do so. Bernice Ratcliff and Lorine Miller, who participated in the 1966 wildcat strike of Levi's in North Georgia to improve working conditions, establish seniority and create reasonable production quotas, now own and operate McCaysville Industries, evolved after the fourteen-month strike was broken by the combined efforts of Levi's management and ILGWU complicity.

Kahn has brought together these and other moving statements and encouraged her readers to join the struggles of these women by appending a list of some of the

organizations and publications in the region that are working for people's rights. The book is too short, of course; it isn't possible for nineteen different women to say much in just two hundred pages; each chapter could have been a book. But it has been done well. Kahn's introduction and statements accompanying each chapter help to place in perspective each woman's life and draw together the parts into a whole that makes it "possible for others to understand the strength, the courage, and the humility" of these Appalachian women.

Karen Lane
Atlanta

A Long View From the Left: Memories of an American Revolutionary. Al Richmond. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973. 447 pp. \$8.95.

For those of us who grew up in post-war America as radicals, the fifties destroyed our past; McCarthyism shattered the continuity that would otherwise have existed between generations of socialists. Ultimately the new left was innovative and powerful in part because of that break: cast adrift from prior tradition, it also was forced to deal with contemporary American reality without the political categories formed in a different age, in a different kind of world. But the new left was simultaneously impoverished in many ways by its lack of historical consciousness: most young radicals were ignorant of the great struggles of the '30s; few were familiar with the theoretical legacy of the socialist tradition, a legacy that provides powerful tools of analysis, even if it also suffers from dogmatism; and finally, the new left was unfamiliar with the painstakingly acquired tactical and strategic insights of past generations of activists, and lacking such knowledge, found it impossible to build and sustain a long range movement for socialism.

Al Richmond's book is important because it illuminates the old left heritage, the experiences of the Communist Party in America, with consistent clarity and with moments of eloquence. It reflects and depicts the best aspects of that tradition: a

keen internationalism, a concern with theoretical questions, deep feeling for those who suffer physical hardship and poverty. Reading it one feels what it was like to organize on the waterfronts, or what it felt like to face the terror of McCarthyism.

Throughout the book there runs a deep thread of international consciousness. Richmond describes the comradeship he felt with the far-flung revolutionary community:

As the Red Star shone for the Irish poet over the slums of Dublin so it shone for me in Sparrows Point or the ghettos of Philadelphia; so I knew it shone over London's East End where I was born, and over all the cities I had traversed, Yokohama, Warsaw, Berlin, Paris, and many more I had never seen. . . . The star was the symbol of the nascent world brotherhood. . . . It made you one with the peoples you read about on the onionskin pages of International Press Correspondence. . . . the more remote they were from you in space and sociological time the greater the thrill of the sense of kinship with them. A mutiny aboard a Dutch cruiser in waters off the Dutch East Indies, a strike of diamond miners in South Africa, peasant uprisings in French Indochina—you come upon such events not as a distant observer but as allied combatant. . . .

Moreover, in contrast with the easy new left assumptions about the bankruptcy of Communist theory, Richmond demonstrates an agile and penetrating mind throughout his work; his examination of the Party's strategy in the Popular Front period of the thirties shows originality and depth; his discussion of the American left's historical failure to develop an authentically "American" language and strategy—a failure which both antedated and postdated the Communist Party's hegemony on the left—is a helpful antidote to the tendency to blame the left's mistakes solely on the Russian connection.

Finally, his book is both dramatic and moving. It is the story of a man who remained true to a humane and compassionate vision for decades, who consistently tried to act with integrity through difficult and tortuous times, and who showed great courage and resistance in the face of McCarthyism and the breakup of the left.

The new left suffered much from its failure to understand and appreciate the experiences, courage and wisdom of revolutionaries like Richmond.

The weaknesses in the book also stem from the old left tradition which Richmond illuminates: the touchstone of socialist politics in the present is the question of feminism; Richmond's failure to deal at all with women's struggles in Communist Party history and in his discussion of the new left symptomizes the broad weaknesses in his book. His work (though not his vision) gives only the most cursory attention to questions of social and personal struggle, to the qualitative questions that have moved millions of people to anger and rage against the system. Reading his book one gets a deep sense of his sensitivity to material hardship; but one gets only glimpses of insight into the social and personal barrenness people experience in contemporary capitalism. (Indeed, he at one point derides such questions as little more than the bromide that "money can't buy happiness.")

But despite its flaws, it is a book which helps unearth a tradition we must reclaim; the work before us is to learn from and synthesize both the traditions to which we are heir—the old left and the new, to recognize their limitations, and to create a revolutionary politics and a humane, democratic socialist movement that can speak to the contemporary American reality.

Harry Boyte
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

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Thirty Years of Treason: Excerpts from Hearings Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-1968. Eric Bentley, editor. Viking Compass Press, 1971. 991 pp. \$5.50.

The American Inquisition, 1945-1960. Cedric Belfrage. Bobbs Merrill, 1973. 316 pp. \$8.95.

It is difficult to recommend that a reader embark upon a pair of books totaling almost 1300 pages of small type, but these are truly exceptional works deserving of the attention. Bentley's book, almost 1,000 pages, is excerpted testimony from the House

Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-1968. Alternately fascinating, boring, humorous, but invariably informative, excerpting more than just congressional hearings, it illustrates the death of a political movement by *auto da fe* and the tactics of inquisition.

Cedric Belfrage was one of the founders of the *National Guardian*, an Englishman who found in the United States a congenial atmosphere, suited to his closely reasoned convictions and skillful writing. The fact that he was deported during the early 1950's for refusing to answer certain questions posed by a Bureau of Immigration panel lends an immediacy to his accounting of the political purges of the 1940's and '50's.

The fascination that this period holds may be seen as morbid, but with the deplorable political life of the American left being what it is, it seems at least logical to want to probe for the reasons behind today's reality. These two books are quite complementary in that Belfrage provides a view of the inner logic of repression, while Bentley lays bare the process. What one learns in the reading is as disappointing and fearsome as only the truth can be.

Coming out of World War II, the United States found itself facing an economic slowdown which threatened to plunge it back into the depression which only the war's intervention had ended. With a world leadership peopled largely by new faces and new nations, the xenophobia which has always had a happy home here rose in rebirth, aided by a profit-inspired drive to militarize the economy and executed by a moss-backed reaction in a Republican Congress. Truman's administration, pushed by the Henry Wallace forces on the left and Southern reaction on the right, opted for profit instead of peace, and set about provoking the most likely enemy on earth, the Soviet Union. The American left, long dominated by the Communist Party which far too often seemed to draw its marching orders straight from Moscow, decided to support Wallace and the left-wing of the Democratic

Party. This political alliance sought to find its mass base in the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

Developments in the C.I.O., however, were not conducive to this plan. As the C.I.O. unions had prospered during wartime under the War Labor Board, an entrenched bureaucracy began to make its interests felt over the ebbing strength of the worker militancy which had accompanied its founding in the 1930's. Those unions and union leaders who were known as "left-wing," were seen by the lean and hungry eyes of the opportunistic bureaucrats as plums which might be plucked by playing astute politics. The Wallace third party movement provided the necessary arena for the union leaders to act. With the campaign thoroughly tagged as "Communist dominated," those C.I.O. leaders who had remained loyal to the Democrats now moved swiftly to take the spoils. Eleven unions were thrown out of the C.I.O. and "leftist" leaders in other unions were forced to either recant or remove themselves from union office.

Meanwhile, back in the Congress, the House Committee on Un-American Activities, with a Republican majority featuring hot-shot Dick Nixon of California began a series of investigations of the Communist Party and an alleged "Soviet spy apparatus." As evidence of the evil nature of the "conspiracy" they sought, HUAC paraded a series of witnesses, all former leftists or FBI spies, who exhibited a remarkable ability to reel off lists of names of "contacts" who may have "conspired to advocate the overthrow" of the Government. Little "HUAC's" were formed in many states to augment the effort and not incidentally to provide publicity for their members.

Not content with political operatives and "spies," HUAC also decided to exorcise pernicious influences in the American culture, starting in Hollywood and moving throughout the entertainment and arts fields. Bentley's book concentrates on these investigations, featuring the testimony of writers such as Dalton Trumbo, Ring Lardner, Jr., Bertolt

Brecht and others. It also has the investigations of matinee idols such as John Garfield, Sterling Hayden, and Gary Cooper. Even singers like Pete Seeger and Zero Mostel were not exempted. Relying on the protections provided by the First Amendment ten writers found themselves packed off to jail in short order, and mass recanting to salvage threatened careers commenced. In reading the transcript excerpts, one is struck by the crudity and carnival-like atmosphere of the proceedings. A form was established for witnesses who were hostile: The witness would ask to read a prepared statement, permission would be denied. The witness would then be questioned and if uncooperative the questioner would then ask what was actually referred to as the "\$64 question": "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party or its affiliates?" If the answer were yes, then the next question sought to reveal the names of associates in the organization. If no answer was given to this question then the witness was guilty of "contempt of Congress" and packed off to jail on the excuse that answering prior questions had constituted a waiver of Constitutional protection. If the answer to the "\$64 question" was no, then a witness could usually be produced to swear that the witness was indeed a Communist and the charge would be perjury. If the witness refused to answer the question on grounds of Constitutional protection against self-incrimination, then the media could be relied on to whip up a smear on the "Fifth Amendment Communist" theme. In any case, to be called before the Committee and to refuse to recant and name names resulted in professional suicide. The aptness of Belfrage's labeling the process "inquisitorial" is apparent.

The principal guise which enabled these proceedings to trample the Constitution was the presence of an external "threat" to our way of life: Soviet Communism. This same threat could be made to serve a second purpose in providing impetus for a vast expansion of the already immense Defense Establishment. In

fact, a war was whipped up for the occasion. Even though it traveled under the sobriquet of "police action" in the garments of the United Nations, Korea was strictly an American Enterprise, with U.S. client states adding an international flavor to imperial aggression.

In the midst of the orchestrated hysteria there arose a figure whose name was ultimately to grace the entire period, Joseph McCarthy, the junior Senator from Wisconsin. McCarthy relied on deceit, trickery, and the service of snakes-in-the-grass like Roy Cohn, to use the national mood to his own dubious advantage. While his affection for the cheap shot and the liquor bottle were ultimately his undoing, he rode high in the saddle for four years, overshadowing the no less nefarious but less colorful efforts of Senator McCarran's spy-chasing Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, and the long-running HUAC roadshow. In McCarthy, the anti-communist hysteria reached its quintessence, the logical culmination of the emotional and deceitful "movement" which was built on destroying the same institutions it sought to protect.

An aspect of reading these books which will chill the reader is the possibility that the whole thing can start back up anytime the moulders of public opinion can stir the frenzy in which it is based. While this was not possible during the 1960's youth movement, there is no reason to assume that it can't happen again. The awesome power of the media has most recently been exhibited in the thoroughgoing assault upon Richard Nixon, and regardless of one's opinion of the victim, the process is still clear.

One factor that would alter the situation in the near future is the absence of a single unified left-wing force in this country; but the presence of the unstable personalities and neurotics who seem drawn to movements for social change is an element in the equation which is unchanged. The government witnesses (Belfrage refers to them by the old inquisitorial term "familiaris") were almost all drawn from these

types on the left.

My only complaints with the books are brief. Neither, by oversight or design has much material about the labor movement, an area in which the left had done the bulk of its work in the '30's and '40's. Bentley's editing is skillful but testimony is still testimony, pretty dry. Belfrage's habit of referring to people by their last names without other reference is annoying, particularly if the last name is either that of a relative "unknown" or is shared by someone else. Apart from these minor flaws, the two books are splendid studies of one of America's darkest periods and are well deserving of the time they consume in reading and thought.

Neill Herring
Atlanta

The Political Status of the Negro in the Age of FDR. Ralph Bunche. University of Chicago Press, 1973. \$17.50.

One of the most important questions being debated in progressive sectors of the left community is the national question in relation to Blacks in American society. Some issues in this debate are: changes in the national question and consequent political tasks arising out of these changes; stages of development in the Black nation; the modern Black Liberation Struggle; etc. These issues and others regarding the nature and character of the national question can only be resolved through an examination of several periods in the history of Black people in this country. The delineation of these periods are: 1) The plantation-slave system; 2) Reconstruction; 3) Defeat of Reconstruction; 4) World War I to World War II; 5) Post World War II; 6) Civil Rights movement in the South; and 7) Movement of Black workers. It is only after we have looked deep into the historical lessons provided from these eras that we can come to any understanding of the impact that the question of the Black nation occupies on the agenda of any progressive social and political movement.

In this light, Ralph J. Bunche's *The Political Status of the Negro in*

the *Age of FDR* provides us with graphic and meaningful insights into the material reality of Blacks during the decade of the 30s. The book was completed in 1940 and formed the report that was used by Gunnar Myrdal to draw various conclusions about the Black political experience. Rich in descriptive material (it draws heavily upon the personal interview and first hand accounts), it is divided into two major parts: one, a commentary by Bunche on the political status of Blacks, and two, the political status of Blacks as detailed through interviews and reports.

In 1940, Ralph Bunche was 36 years old and his vocabulary and his analysis showed some tendency of a Marxian analysis, e.g., his analysis of the reason underlying the Civil War:

A combination of many factors brought on the Civil War, but its central cause was the fundamental antagonism between the interests of the North and South resulting from the essential differences in their economies. The war would not have been fought merely for the sake of freeing the slaves. That the Civil War freed the slaves was only an incident in the violent clash of the interests between the industrial North and agricultural South . . .

At other points in the narrative Bunche uses phrases such as: "ruling classes"; "working-class consciousness"; "proletarian consciousness". But again, this was 1940 and he had not yet become entwined in the tentacles of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner of the CIA, and the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff.

At any rate, Bunche, the intellectual, has many sharp and correct observations to make about the state of Black affairs after the decade of the thirties, and also of the historical period of the Black presence in this country. Some historians and intellectuals had stated earlier that the period of Reconstruction represented a dictatorship of the Black proletariat. Bunche refutes this and correctly poses the consciousness of Blacks after emancipation as that of the serf. This is an important consideration because it is the Black people's transformation through the various

stages of slavery, serfdom, peasantry, and proletariat that teaches the task of the Black Liberation Struggle. The task of the slave is abolition of slavery; that of the serf/peasant stage is agrarian reform bourgeois democratic revolution; the task of the proletariat is socialist revolution. Blacks in American society have passed through all of the stages mentioned and the predominant character of the Black people in American society at this point in history is overwhelmingly proletarian in nature.

However, the character of Black people during the time of Bunche's book was peasant for the most part and the book itself will bear this out. According to the 1940 census, 10,000,000 of the country's 13,000,000 Blacks (77 percent) lived in the South. Two-thirds of these (6,400,000) lived in the rural areas. It can be posited that of these 6,400,000 nearly all of them were tied to the land in such a way that they depended upon it for their livelihood. The political task of Black people during this era was agrarian reform. A mass movement to accomplish this task never ripened because of the dialectic of the Black Nation, meaning that the Black people were in a vigorous state of movement. The demand for Black labor in the North and other urban and industrial areas and the mechanization of agriculture in the South was transforming the largely peasant character of Black people into a proletarian one. Even though, at this point, the majority of Blacks still reside in the South (52 percent), most of them reside in the urban centers of the South. There are more Blacks in Metropolitan Atlanta than there are in the rest of the state of Georgia.

Bunche also has some very clear observations of the role that the Northern industrialists were at the time exerting on the politics and economics of the South. It is stated that Northern control of the politics of the South was exerted by such concerns as the Georgia Power Company and the Tennessee Coal and Iron, a subsidiary of US Steel. This control expressed itself in methods of keeping the races divided and

vigorous anti-union activity. It was not unusual and in many instances it was standard behavior for companies to exercise control over the vote of its employees.

In 1940 it could be foretold that increased industrialization in the South would be a reality in the not distant future. Bunche could see this as his commentary bears out. He could also see the resulting class consciousness that such an industrialization would cause but he could only see the break-up of the "one party system" as the result of such working-class consciousness. Not only was there the spectre of increased industrialization in the South but there was also the factor of the mass migration of Black people out of the South into the industrial centers of the country. These migrations began in 1915 and it is estimated that between 1915 and 1918, no less than 50,000 Blacks migrated North. According to Bunche, some 1,500,000 Blacks migrated to these industrial centers during the decade of the 20s. This migration would continue unabated for four more decades and it would accomplish much more than the abolition of the "one party system" in the South and the nation.

As stated, the second section of the book deals with personal interviews and first-hand accounts of the political and economic situation that Blacks were confronted with. There are some interesting sections that deal with the effect of the poll tax (that relic) on white and Black peasants; a profile of Atlanta during the thirties; machinations of the ruling class to deny democratic rights to Blacks and the effect of the New Deal programs on Blacks. Along with a two-part bibliography, this section is rich in material for anyone who wishes to acquaint themselves with the realities of a bygone era.

In 1940, the modern Black Liberation Struggle was 16 years away, from being initiated by the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Martin Luther King, Jr. Today, in 1973, the modern Black Liberation Struggle has been going on for 17 years. One could be tempted to look down the corridors of those decades and say:

"Look how far we've come." But a deeper perusal and more penetrating examination of the position that Blacks now occupy (irrespective of the elective positions and advance of the Black bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie) show that we have been, in reality, standing still. Economic and political repression is an everyday reality; police can kill unarmed Blacks at will with impunity; people still starve to death in this advanced capitalist society; and fascism for everyone is not that many steps away.

At least Ralph Bunche was much clearer on the question of the vote and its meaning than are many of today's Black intellectuals and members of the petty bourgeoisie. He said: *The Black vote will never be influential enough to initiate any radical changes in the economy. The ballot without bread would be a tragic jest for the Negro.* However, things have moved. Blacks now occupy a strategic position in relation to this nation's economy that it has never previously occupied. We were peasant but now we are proletarian. And it is our historic mission arising out of this reality that will insure future generations both the ballot and bread.

Donald P. Stone
Atlanta

In This Proud Land. Roy Emerson Stryker and Nancy Wood. New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1973. 191 pp. \$15.00.

Portrait of a Decade. F. Jack Hurley. Louisiana State University Press, 1972. 196 pp. \$12.95.

The face of the United States, 1935-1943, is the subject of the remarkable pictures displayed in these two books. These are some of the 200,000 photographs taken for the Farm Security Administration by such photographers as Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Carl Mydans, Marion Post Wolcott, Ben Shahn, Arthur Rothstein, Jack Delano and Russell Lee, under the constant direction of Roy Emerson Stryker.

Viewed one by one, the pictures are testimonies to the individual photographer's skill, artistry and integrity. Taken as a whole, the photographs are truly definitive of a decade and a people. The pictures are ours, they are our history.

In This Proud Land is the more impressive of the two books, being of larger format and superior print quality, with the printed word rightfully proscribed in the front. It has the added feature of being Roy Emerson Stryker's personal choices out of the project he directed. This is truly a photo album, to be looked at and looked at and looked at.

A more scholarly and "historical" look at the period and the Roy Stryker phenomenon is provided by F. Jack Hurley in his *Portrait of a Decade*. The photographs do not "stand alone" as in *In This Proud Land*, but are used as illustrations of the theme, "Roy Stryker and the Development of Documentary Photography in the Thirties." The book suffers some from print quality, but is a valuable piece of scholarship on a fascinating time and a fascinating group of people—both photographers and subjects.

Tom Coffin
Atlanta, Georgia

Rank and File: Personal Histories by Working-Class Organizers. Alice and Staughton Lynd, editors. Beacon Press, 1973. 296 pp. \$12.95.

Rank and File is composed of interviews with men and women, black and white, with extensive experience in working class organizing, reporting on their lives and their works. The organizers interviewed span the years from the union organizing drives of the 1930's to those currently involved in rank-and-file movements. The book is an example of the new interest in using oral history not only to understand history when there are few written records, but to help workers recover their history for themselves. Alice and Staughton Lynd, with their long and continuing involvement in working class and other progressive movements, are particularly qualified to be the editors of such a volume.

At \$12.95 for a 296 page book, hardbound, the price is somewhat stiff. Hopefully, a much cheaper paperback version will be published soon, for this is an important book.

David Schlissel
Atlanta, Georgia

Postwar America: 1945-1971. Howard Zinn. Bobbs Merrill Company, 1973. \$2.95.

This is a series of six related essays on post World War II America, written by one of the country's leading activist-historians. The essays deal with the dropping of the atomic bomb and other unsavory aspects of American policy in World War II; American interventions into the Third World since World War II; the American system of justice, with its divergent treatment of rich and poor and its ready violation of the rights and liberties of dissidents; and the history of the various movements to restructure the American political and social system that picked up steam after 1960, such as the civil rights and anti-war movements.

The central themes connecting the essays concern the failure of the "modern liberal system" to deal with the basic problems of American society, the responsibility of the system for many of these problems, and the inadequacy of traditional liberal political reform to bring about the necessary changes. The essays are written in Zinn's customary lucid style and are very readable, far more so than most historical writing.

The essays on domestic matters—democracy, the racial crisis, and the justice system—are especially good. But it is the final chapter which is most outstanding. Zinn's discussion of the social movements of recent years. Here Zinn presents an eloquent and moving account that convincingly emphasizes the important successes of these movements. This account brings back to life events that are beginning to recede into history and be forgotten; it is a welcome piece of writing, particularly at a time when too many persons have begun to look back upon the movements of the sixties as having basically been a failure.

Howard Zinn has long been one of those Americans most able to articulate to non-radicals a radical view of America, and this latest book is no exception. The book is largely free of rhetoric and ideological language and is a solid introduction to a radical perspective, especially for persons of genuine liberal sympathies who have grown increasingly disillusioned with the political system in this Year of Watergate.

This book, with its basically optimistic outlook, is also recommended for tired veterans of the movements of the sixties and for those in the current generation of college students who feel that no change is possible in a stagnant and moribund America. Zinn believes that never before in American history have so many Americans come to feel that traditional liberal reform is inadequate and that fundamental revisions in the underlying political and economic structure must be made. Zinn acknowledges that the number of Americans with this viewpoint is still relatively small. But with the rapid growth of this number in recent years he sees some strong hope for the future.

Bob Greenstein
Washington, D.C.

●
James Weldon Johnson: Black Leader, Black Voice. Eugene Levy. University of Chicago Press, 1973. 380 pp.

One cannot disagree that it is important for biographies of Black personalities to be written. One,

however, must raise the question as to who is best able to compile all significant material.

Eugene Levy attempts to search Johnson's personality by utilizing available sources but is apparently hampered by his failure to obtain personal letters and documents that reveal the personality of Johnson as opposed to the formal presentation of Johnson as expounded in the Booker T. Washington Papers, NAACP Papers and Johnson's own writings.

Levy, as do perhaps others, maintains that Johnson was able to "resist the psychic inroads made by racial prejudice," unlike, at that time, W.E.B. DuBois and others. True, Johnson, through his dealings and positions prior to his NAACP appointment, conveniently escaped many confrontations with outward prejudice. His work as a lawyer, Broadway songwriter, journalist, diplomat, Republican Party advocate, professor, placed him in positions to be removed from feeling oppressed. Certainly, his youth, even though raised in Jacksonville, Florida, was void of many racial confrontations for Jacksonville was regarded as a "good town for Negroes."

One must seriously question whether Johnson or any Black person is able to "resist the psychic inroads made by racial prejudice." Certainly, it deserves extensive query and also a greater realization of Johnson's situation on the part of Levy. Because of Johnson's earlier detachment from the masses of Black people, and his obvious zeal for upward mobility within the confines of white America,

one cannot be convinced that racial prejudice did not in fact affect him, mold him and cause conflict within. His desire to see Black people "... fit ourselves, the other to prove to the great and powerful majority that we are fit," was not materializing and set him apart from other contemporary notable Blacks such as Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. DuBois and other personalities, one of whom described him as being "conservative, cautious and courteous."

Johnson, known to Black people mainly for his "Creation" and poem "Lift Every Voice and Sing" is an important figure to study and understand. His work with the NAACP fighting for legislation affecting Black people is worthy and does deserve recognition. Levy adequately deals with his achievements.

The author admits he has tried, above all, to understand Johnson, "on his own terms and in the context of his own time." He attempts to put Johnson's attitudes and activities into some perspective and this is done particularly in the last chapter entitled, "My Inner Life Is Mine." Levy, however, is compelled to urge one to read Johnson's autobiography, "Along This Way" in order to enhance one's own understanding. For this he is honest. His writing does encourage one to go forth searching for additional information and does enlighten the reader to Johnson's stages of development. Nevertheless, one is left with the impression that even Levy is not totally satisfied nor comfortable with his understanding of James Weldon Johnson.

photos from the Farm Security Administration

4	Marion Post Wolcott	Day laborers being hired for cotton picking, Memphis, Tennessee, October, 1939
5	Dorothea Lange	Cotton hoers bound for Wilson Plantation in Arkansas, Memphis, Tennessee, June, 1937
11	Russell Lee	Cotton pickers being paid off, Lake Dick, Phillips County, Arkansas, September, 1938
144	Jack Delano	Convicts and guard, Oglethorpe County, Georgia, 1941
154		White superintendent and chain gang building road, Pitt County, North Carolina, 1910
156	Ben Shahn	Group at coal mines, Jenkins County, Kentucky, October, 1935
179	Arthur Rothstein	41st Engineers on parade ground, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, March, 1942
182	Jack Delano	The funeral of a 19 year old sawmill worker, Heard County, Georgia, May, 1941
205	Marion Post Wolcott	A view from the steps of Black Mountain College, North Carolina, September, 1939
212	Arthur Rothstein	Winslow, Arkansas, 1935 (From <i>In This Proud Land</i>)
215	Marion Post Wolcott	Baptismal Service, Morehead, Kentucky, 1940 (From <i>In This Proud Land</i>)

resources

There are numerous oral history projects throughout the South. The most up-to-date listing that we know of can be obtained from the *Oral History Association* which publishes a directory of projects, a newsletter, and a bibliography. Dr. Charles W. Crawford of the Oral History Research Office at Memphis State University is the new President of the Association. Information regarding any of the Association's publications may be obtained from Dr. Samuel Hand, Department of History, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vt. 05401. Queries concerning membership in the Association should be addressed to Dr. Knox Mellon, Department of History, Immaculate Heart College, Los Angeles, Calif.

Ken Lawrence of the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF) has recently published a *Study Guide on the History of Working People in the South*. Copies of the Guide as well as a transcript of a speech delivered at a labor history workshop sponsored by SCEF are available by writing him at P. O. Box 5174, Jackson, Miss. 39216.

A few alternative history books have begun to appear. One of the first we know about was published by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1965 called *Negroes in American History: A Freedom Primer* by Bobbi and Frank Ciecioraka. Unfortunately it is now out of print and very hard to find. *The Appalachian Peoples History Book* published by SCEF was written to "correct the imbalance of history always being told by the mine owners and operators." The book is still available from SCEF, 3210 West Broadway, Louisville, Ky. 40211. Contributions of \$5 are requested to help cover cost of free distribution in the mountains.

Radical America is one of the few publications that has consistently published good articles on people's history. Vol 7, No. 3, May-June, 1973 was devoted entirely to a comic book history of America called *Underhanded History of the USA* by Nick Thorkelson and James O'Brien. An earlier issue (Vol. 6, No. 6) was devoted to Workers' Struggles in the 1930's. Subscriptions are \$5 per year from *Radical America*, 5 Upland Road, Cambridge, Mass. 02140.

Sing Out has published several articles on music relating to union organizing. The latest issue, Vol. 22, No. 3, features a cover story on Aunt Molly Jackson from Harlan County, Kentucky. Published bi-monthly, subscriptions are \$6 per year, 595 Broadway, New York, 10012.

Student and Teacher Programs for a People's Bicentennial which includes history study guides for high schools and colleges is available from the People's Bicentennial Commission, 1346 Conn. Avenue, NW, Washington, D. C. 20036.

The following bibliography of oral history materials was prepared by Betsy Buford and Jacquelyn Hall of the Southern Oral History Program, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.

Varieties of Oral History

A. The Slave Narratives.

The earliest and most important systematic collection of oral source materials are the Slave Narratives collected during the 1920's and 1930's, and described by Ken Lawrence's "Oral History of Slavery," which appears elsewhere in this issue. In addition to the major works listed there, the following also make use of, or discuss the slave narratives:

Botkin, Benjamin A. "The Slave as His Own Interpreter." *Library of Congress Quarterly Journal*. Vol. 2 (1944), pp. 37-45.

Botkin, Benjamin A. "We Called It Living Lore." *New York Folklore Quarterly*. Vol. 14 (1968), pp. 189-201.

Mangione, Jerre. *The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers Project, 1935-1943*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1972. Puts the Slave Narrative Collection in the context of the history of the Federal Writers' Project and the intellectual climate of the 1930's.

Nichols, Charles. *Many Thousands Gone: The Ex-Slaves' Account of Their Bondage and Freedom*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963.

Nichols, Charles. "Who Read the Slave Narratives." *Phylon*. Vol. 20 (1959), pp. 149-162.

Nichols, William W. "Slave Narratives: Dismissed Evidence in the Writing of Southern History." *Phylon*. Winter, 1971, pp. 403-409.

Yetman, Norman K. "The Background of the Slave Narrative Collection." *American Quarterly*. Vol. 19 (1967), pp. 534-553.

Yetman, Norman K. *Voices from Slavery*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.

B. Folk Traditions.

Boatright, Mody C., editor. "Folklore and History" in *Singers and Storytellers*. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1961.

Dorson, Richard M. "Oral Tradition and Written History: The Case for the United States." *Journal of the Folklore Institute*. Vol. 1, No. 3 (Dec. 1964), pp. 220-234.

Finnegan, Ruth. "A Note on Oral Tradition and Historical Evidence." *History and Theory*. Vol. 9 (1970), pp. 195-201.

Haley, Alex. "My Furthest-Back Person: 'The African.'" *New York Times Magazine*, July 16, 1972, pp. 13ff. Haley's work is in a class by itself: a combination of black oral tradition and manuscript research used to trace his own family history back to its African roots. His book entitled *Roots*, will be published in 1974.

Hodge, Carleton T., ed. *Papers on the Manding*. Indiana University Publications: African Series, Vol. 3, 1971.

Jones, G. I. "Oral Tradition and History," *African Notes*. Vol. 2, No. 2 (Jan., 1965), pp. 7-11.

Jordan, Philip D. "The Folklorist as Social Historian," *Western Folklore*. Vol. 12, No. 3 (July 1953), pp. 194-201.

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